

Quotable comments from Merle Yost, LMFT on Sexual Abuse of Boys

Journalists: *With child sexual abuse in the news all too often, I offer my expert comments on this and related topics. Please contact me at (510) 627-0090 or merle@myost.com. If you do not reach me, you may use the comments below provided you attribute them to Merle Yost, LMFT; omit no words from sentences; and leave me a voicemail or email with your name, publication name and how I may contact you.*

NOTE: The sexual abuse of all children regardless of gender is appalling and shameful. I have worked with both men and women who were sexually assaulted in adulthood and/or in childhood. The vast majority of my experience is in working with men who were sexually assaulted and the information on this site is a result of that experience and my professional training. There are many resources concerning sexual abuse of girls; very few concern sexual abuse of boys. This page is meant to shed light on a population too often overlooked, and I hope it is helpful to all.

ABUSE OF BOYS:

“As a society, we are slowly beginning to acknowledge and discuss the sexual abuse of boys. Many men are dysfunctional because as boys they were used as sexual objects, are too ashamed to admit it, and have never been able to understand why it hurt and confused them so much.”

“A child is always harmed any time that an adult uses them for sex.”

“Since boys are socialized that to be men, they cannot be victims, they have a tendency to either minimize abuse or deny it altogether. Hazing, sexual initiation, and punishment are often used as rationalizations for abusing boys.”

“Boys are not small men. They are undeveloped emotionally, physically and psycho-sexually, and they are unable to protect themselves. Treating boys as adults causes them harm and prevents them from growing into healthy men.”

“A child is never responsible for seducing an adult. It is the adult’s job to maintain the boundary and protect the emotional and physical health of a child.”

“It is the job of every teacher, coach, babysitter, minister, parent -- anyone who is responsible for the training and care of boys -- to be aware of the symptoms of sexual abuse.” (*See list of symptoms below.*)

ON COPING:

“Children do what they must to survive. Many feel that their survival depends upon hiding their experience of abuse at all costs. Left untreated, the wounds follow boys into adulthood and impact relationships with everyone. Confronting the pain is difficult, but the reward is a life free from the pain of the abuse. Grown men can and do heal from childhood sexual abuse.”

“Childhood experiences can set the tone for a life time. A man who was victimized as a child will often live the life of a victim, unless he is treated. He will unconsciously set himself up to be the victim time and time again. In relationships, he will pick partners who victimize him, or if the partner does not cooperate, he will manipulate the partner to abuse him. It is the lens through which he sees the world, and until the abuse is addressed, it will not change or get better.”

“Because the child's body has been assaulted, the body is often used to discourage further attacks. Weight gain, anorexia and even body-building are methods of making the body unattractive, trying to make it either disappear or be so intimidating that no one would dare to attack. A body-builder may look better than someone who is overweight, but the built body can be just as much of a defense against intimacy as obesity or emaciation.”

EFFECT ON RELATIONSHIPS:

“A heterosexual boy who has been sexually abused by a woman will believe that women are only interested in his body, that he is an object of their satisfaction. This leads to distrusting women in personal and in professional settings. He both loves and hates women. He wants to be intimate, yet is terrified to do so.”

“A boy that is molested by a male will likely avoid friendships, working relationships and other relationships with men. Men are seen as potential abusers. ‘All men want is sex.’ ‘Men cannot be trusted.’ These are beliefs that a boy abused by another male can have about men while growing up.”

ON GAY MEN

“Much of the homophobia that exists today is based on confusing pedophilia with homosexuality. The vast majority of pedophiles identify as heterosexual. Mom, Dad, and relatives are the most common perpetrators. Unfortunately, we have tried to scare children with the belief that the ‘strange man on the corner’ is going to hurt them. This unjustly vilifies a whole class of people, and it masks the real problem.”

“Sexual abuse is particularly difficult for gay boys who are molested by men, as it can drastically affect their acceptance of their sexual orientation. Many grow up believing that the only reason they have sexual feelings for men is because they were molested by one or more men as children.”

“I have worked with many gay and bisexual men married to women. In at least 80% of these cases, the men were sexually abused by older males while children and believe that their sexual feelings for men are due only to their molestation. They marry, hoping the feelings will go away. When they finally come to terms with their sexuality, it often ends in destroyed relationships with spouses, children and other family members.”

WOMEN AS PERPETRATORS:

“We have only recently begun to acknowledge that women are often perpetrators, too. They were thought to be the rare event, the exception to the rule. As the cloak of secrecy has been peeled back, we are discovering that female perpetrators are not uncommon.”

“Straight boys sexually abused by women have the most difficult time recovering from the abuse, because boys are taught from an early age that sexual contact with women is good. There is no permission for them to not enjoy the experience or to be shamed by it.”

“If a 15-year-old girl has sex with a 32-year-old man, we call that rape or abuse. Reverse the gender and suddenly the boy is ‘lucky to be initiated.’ It is sometimes viewed as a rite of passage that makes him a man. In reality, there is no better way to cripple a boy emotionally. It is easier for many to identify abuse if the boy is very young.”

“The most overlooked sexual abuse is mother/son emotional incest. Mothers who turn their sons into surrogate spouses damage their sons, preventing them from being emotionally and possibly sexually available in adult relationships.”

ON RECENT Boy Scouts of America CHILD SEX-ABUSE COVER-UP:

“The Boy Scouts of America has joined the Catholic Church and Penn State in revelations that it put the reputation of the organization and protecting the men who were supposed to be Scout leaders over the welfare of the boys they were charged to protect and help guide into adulthood. They have stolen childhoods and innocence and, like the Church, have attempted to deflect the blame to gay men rather than take responsibility and model adult behavior for the thousands of boys in their care.”

“Hopefully, this will begin a real change in the Boy Scouts of America organization and a real self-assessment that will lead to better evaluations of troop leaders and keeping boys everywhere safe.”