



Discussion Guide

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Sexual Abuse: Sequoia's Story

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My friend Sequoia Banfield is a survivor of sexual abuse. Sequoia, who's 19 and lives in New Jersey, agreed to share her story with me. "I don't mind talking about what happened to me now, especially if it helps another person," she says.

It all started around July 1996, when I was 13. My mother, who is deaf and a single mother of three, worked full time. On days off, she tried to spend time with her kids, but socialize, too. So, she'd take us to the Saturday deaf festivals at Six Flags Great Adventure. It was a great place for my mother to relax ... but it eventually turned into the gates of hell for me.

One Saturday, my mother recognized an old high-school friend, Sara, and they talked. Sara told my mother that she and her husband, Anthony, lived nearby and that she was looking for work. At that time, my mother needed a baby-sitter for me and my sister, who was 12.

A week later, Sara, who was 38, and Anthony, who was 39, came to visit us. When they walked in the door, my sister and I thought they were a very affectionate couple and *Wow, he's big!*

Before they left, Sara and Anthony gave us a hug. Anthony held me so tight, and I thought that was weird, because he had just met me. But I let it go, thinking that he was just an affectionate person.

Sara and Anthony started visiting every week, and we felt more and more comfortable with them. Soon my mother trusted them. She trusted them so much that she asked Sara to baby-sit us after school and on some weekends, at her home, when my mom was working.

A Secret

On one weekend visit, Sara left us in the house with Anthony, so she could run to the store. I was in the guest bedroom, on the computer, and my sister was in the living room, watching TV.

Anthony came into the bedroom and shut the door behind him. He stood behind me and started to rub my neckline. It made me feel very uncomfortable, because he was rubbing my neck hard and breathing hard. I asked him, "Could you stop? Because it hurts me," and he said, "OK."

Then he sat on the bed next to my chair and stared at me. I ignored him, hoping he'd just leave. Then he asked me to sit next to him on the bed. I didn't want to, but I did, because I obeyed my elders.

As I sat next to him, I felt really weird. He smiled at me and took my left hand and placed it over his pants and on his genitals. I tried to pull my hand away, but he pulled it back and placed it on the same spot.

Maybe the typical person would've jumped up and run, but I was too scared. I didn't know what to do. When he placed my hand on his genitals again, I looked in the opposite direction and held my hand in a tight fist. I tried to resist. The incident lasted about four minutes.

At the end, Anthony said, "You have to keep this a secret, just between me and you."

I just looked at him with an expression of confusion and disgust.

Not a Word

That night I went home filled with anger. At first, I was extra quiet, so quiet that my mother kept asking me what was wrong. I was usually a chatterbox, so something had to be wrong if I wasn't talking. After she asked me for the fourth time, I blew up at her. I told her to leave me alone. I was so upset that I didn't even realize my little sister was acting differently, too.

We were scheduled to sleep over at Sara and Anthony's the next Saturday. I really wanted to do something before then.

Finally late that night, I woke up my sister and told her what happened. She broke down, cried, and blurted out that he did almost the same thing to her—except that he touched her. The feeling I had was indescribable—I wanted to hurt him. But we decided to keep quiet; we just thought that no one would believe us.

The Saturday that I never wanted to come, came. But Anthony didn't do anything. I was so relieved. I thought: It's over! I can finally move on!

A Threat

But I guess Anthony just wanted to take a break, because the week after that, he went back to what he did. This time it was worse.

My mother was out of town. Sara and Anthony were baby-sitters for the evening. My sister and I slept together in the guest room, hoping he'd be too scared to try something with the both of us there.

At two in the morning, I awoke to the feeling of warm skin pressed against my thighs. I sat up and there was Anthony, with his pants down and both of his hands on my thighs.

All at once, I looked to see where my sister was, if the door to the bedroom was open, and if I had a chance to escape. My sister was there, but asleep; the door was closed; and Anthony was practically on top of me.

I started to cry, and he put his hands over my mouth. Then he fondled my vagina and fondled himself in front of me.

The next morning, his exact words were, "You have to keep this between you and me. If I find out that you or your sister told anyone, I will call DYFS [Division of Youth and Family Services] and tell them your mother is neglecting you, and then they will give you to me."

At first I thought he'd never get away with it, because my mother took great care of us. But then I thought about how convincing he was; I felt like he could manipulate the system.

Silence Broken

Anthony sexually abused my sister and me for eight more months. We were badly affected by it. We lost our appetites; our grades took a downward plunge. We detached ourselves from friends, and our emotions went haywire. Then one day, we couldn't hold it in anymore.

My sister and I told my mother and her boyfriend. At first, she was in shock. But when she saw us cry, trying to blurt out how we felt, she started to cry.

"Oh, my babies," she said. "I'm so sorry; I'm so sorry ... did he hurt you? What did he do? How long did he do it? My god, why didn't you tell me?!"

My mother's boyfriend just hugged us and said, "It's going to be OK."

Two Survivors

After confronting Anthony at his house, my mother filed a complaint with the police, and he was arrested. Then we went through two years of court hearings.

We found out that my sister and I weren't the only victims. And he went to jail for what he did to us.

Telling was definitely worth it. We didn't deserve to be hurt; what we deserved was our childhood. Today I live with the fact that I was sexually abused. But I never let what happened hold me back from my happiness, my priorities, and my life.

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