

# Clinical Considerations In Working With Gay Male Sexual Abuse Survivors

*Gay men have much in common with male sexual abuse survivors. There are a number of factors that most gay men experience, whether or not they are sexual abuse survivors. There are also a number of factors that most male sexual abuse survivors experience, no matter what their sexual orientation. Ironically, many of these factors are the same for survivors as they are for gay men. Survivors who are gay, therefore, may often struggle with a "double layered" impact of these factors. Many of these factors & their influence may be somewhat culture-based, so the specific impact of these factors is not inherently universal in nature.*

	Sexual Abuse Survivor	Gay Male
Isolation	Abusers are masterful in enrolling their child victim in a web of secrecy, which often leads the child to isolate himself from critical members of his support system	It is common for a gay man to separate himself from the dominant heterosexual culture & to construct a lifestyle that is dominated by secrecy & isolation
Secrecy	The abused child learns that secrecy is linked to loyalty & that violating the groundrules of secrecy may result in abandonment	The cultural norm of homophobia creates a context in which a gay man who is open & non-secretive is frequently judged as "flaunting" his sexual orientation; therefore, many gay men chose secrecy rather than risking judgment or rejection
Disclosure	The victim of abuse frequently becomes the target of blame or is ostracized in response to his accidental or intentional disclosure	Accidental or intentional disclosure of homosexuality may precipitate a "big explosion" &/or result in negative repercussions in one or more aspects of a gay man's life
Hypervigilance	For the abused child, it is normal to be intensely hyper-vigilant about behavioral & mood changes in other people, always watchful for potential abusers.	A gay man often relies upon a finely-tuned "gaydar" to guide him in his search for friends and foes as he negotiates the realities of life in a homophobic world
Control	Many survivors feel insecure or fearful in situations in which they do not exercise control.	In response to feeling powerless to effect the larger world in which he lives, a gay man often seeks to control the people & situations within his inner circle of relationships
Shame	Most survivors feel shame for being victimized; shame is devastating to self-esteem & results in a highly negative self-image for most survivors	A gay man often learn to hate homosexuality before discovering his own membership in this sexual minority; self-hatred creates a fertile breeding ground for feelings of shame
Vulnerability	Children are inherently dependent upon adult guardians to provide for their safety & protection. Innocence & dependency sometimes create the circumstances in which children become the vulnerable prey of adult sexual offenders	Because homophobia is generally accepted as the normal & acceptable social order, a gay man usually normalizes his vulnerability to a myriad of consequences that accompany life in a homophobic world
Intimacy	For many survivors, intimacy may trigger responses that are defensive in nature or that undermine relationship; closeness may be perceived as a dangerous precursor for abuse	Gay men learn to form relationships under the cover of secrecy; a lack of familial or community support often creates stressors that interfere with a gay man's efforts to achieve intimacy in his primary relationship
Dissociation	"Tuning out," "numbing out," or "diverting one's attention away from reality," the victim of abuse is able to tolerate what might otherwise be intolerable life circumstances	Dissociation is a predictable survival strategy for any gay man who consciously acknowledges the reality that he lives within the context of a dominant culture that is unapologetically heterosexist
Sexuality	Many abuse survivors struggle to disentangle which sexual feelings & behaviors are natural to their core personality & which feelings & behaviors are learned or conditioned responses resulting from the abuse	Heterosexuality is the cultural norm for "healthy" sexuality; a gay man frequently struggles to gain an acceptance of his own feelings of sexuality, without the filter of heterosexual judgments