

# **Submission to The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

## **Topic A**

Victims need several things that they often do not receive.

1. To be believed. It is quite rare for children to lie about sexual abuse, and yet quite often they are not believed. We need community education programs to let people know that a child's allegations of sexual abuse must always be taken very seriously.
2. To not be retraumatised in the telling. They need to be given a great deal of love and support as they tell their story, and be allowed to tell it at their own pace.
3. To be offered therapy/counselling ONLY by practitioners who are trained in trauma therapy. This is no task for someone without appropriate training.
4. To have others understand that sexual abuse is hugely damaging. It usually leaves lifelong emotional damage, even with good therapy. It is not usually something you ever totally 'get over' or 'move on from'.

Major barriers to victims receiving what they need are

1. Cultural attitudes (disbelief and 'blame the victim' mentality)
2. The very real fear for children being abused within their family (the most frequent situation) that speaking up will break up the family, which is always a huge fear for children.
3. Children not recognising abuse for what it is
3. The lack of trained therapists/counsellors.

To remedy this we urgently need

1. To include abuse awareness in all school sex ed programs.
2. Community education.
3. Much greater legal and financial support for women who become sole parents when they leave the abuser of their children.
4. Mandatory training in trauma therapy for ALL therapists, psychologists and counsellors.

## **Topic C**

By far the most practical way to provide services to victims living remotely is via the Internet.

There is now software that operates much like Skype, but is designed for therapists and offers complete confidentiality via encryption. One such is app is VSee.

There needs to be full government funding and support for this way of providing help.

I am a psychologist who works online and specialises in trauma therapy with adults who were abused as children.

I find that my remote clients make progress that is comparable to those I see in person.

This personal finding is backed up by many studies that show that online therapy is just as effective as face-to-face therapy, and in some cases more so.

## **Topic E**

I would like to recommend Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS therapy). Some studies have been done in establishing an evidence base for IFS, and more are in the pipeline.

What makes IFS especially suitable for victims of abuse is that it is very caring and respectful, and it is almost impossible to retraumatise the client when following the IFS protocol. It also gives clients tools to continue their own healing once therapy is over.

As a psychologist I use IFS almost exclusively with my abuse survivor clients simply because it is the best method I have ever found to help them recover. I am a survivor of sexual abuse myself, and have found that IFS has given me personally more help in my recovery process than any other method.