

Sirs,

Alleged false allegation of childhood sexual abuse – a response.

I read with interest two articles that referred to alleged false allegations of historic child abuse in last month's Inside Time next to our advert for compensation for the survivors of childhood abuse. Whilst the positioning of the articles was obviously a co-incidence, it might have evoked angry or dispirited feelings in those genuine victims of abuse.

Child abuse is by its nature a highly secretive activity occurring in closed surroundings between a trusted adult and a vulnerable child, which usually remains hidden for many years, because of the fear surrounding disclosure. The victim often feels they will not be believed, or is too ashamed of what happened, or is scared of their family's reaction to have the courage to come forward. Usually those who do have the courage to reveal what happened to them spend many agonising months summoning up the courage to even write to us.

We are often the first person in many years that they have revealed their painful secret to. Disclosure is just the start of the healing process, which can take years to achieve. Support from some excellent counselling services for victims who are now in prison can also assist.

Whilst comments regarding false allegations obviously have a very important place in any publication, throw away remarks in the article by Peter Byard such as "If you and a friend want to make a few thousand in compensation, just make an accusation of abuse against one of your old schoolteachers from twenty-five years ago. How can they actually prove it didn't happen?" only serve to either insult the very genuine victim of abuse and discourage them from disclosing, or encourage the dishonest person to hatch ideas.

There are many checks and balances in both the criminal and civil systems to ensure that false allegations are identified. We have been specialising in this type of work for many years. We witness on a regular basis the very genuine reactions to disclosure of abuse (when the victim lowers their head when hurting inside, cries openly, or simply cannot continue, so painful are the memories). The allegations have to match the records, and the client has to be examined by a highly experienced psychologist or psychiatrist, who carry out psychometric tests that contain validity assessment techniques.

So to suggest that making false allegations is now commonplace or easy is a myth, which can only frustrate the genuine victim from speaking their truth, and starting the healing process.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Garsden
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