



GREAT SEX

A MAN'S GUIDE TO
THE SECRET PRINCIPLES OF TOTAL-BODY SEX



BY MICHAEL CASTLEMAN

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This book is intended as a reference volume only, not as a medical manual. The information given here is designed to help you make informed decisions about your health. It is not intended as a substitute for any treatment that may have been prescribed by your doctor. If you suspect that you have a medical problem, we urge you to seek competent medical help.

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We believe that an active and healthy sex life, based on mutual consent and respect between partners, is an important component of physical and mental well-being. We also respect that sex is a private matter and that each person has a different opinion of what sexual practices or levels of discourse are appropriate. Rodale is committed to offering responsible, practical advice about sexual matters, supported by accredited professionals and legitimate scientific research. Our goal—for sex and all other topics—is to publish information that empowers people's lives.

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10 SEXUAL TRAUMA

WHAT EVERY MAN MUST KNOW

Fifteen. According to the University of California survey discussed in the Introduction, that's the percentage of American women who have survived childhood sexual exploitation. For men, the figure is 3 percent.

Ninety-five. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, that's the percentage of sexual assaults whose victims are women. Throughout the 1990s, approximately 300,000 women were raped in the United States each year. For men, the figure was around 20,000, approximately 5 percent of the total.

Eight. According to the National Violence Against Women Survey, that's the percentage of American women who are criminally harassed by stalkers. For men, the figure is 2 percent.

The recent scandals involving priests who have molested young boys demonstrate that anyone—male or female—can be sexually abused as a child. Anyone can be sexually assaulted or stalked. For poignant looks at male rape victims, read the novels *Deliverance* by James Dickey or *The Prince of Tides* by Pat Conroy, or watch the movies. But in the overwhelming majority of these crimes, the victims are women.

For all but a small fraction of men, sex is fun; and apart from the sex problems discussed in this book, that's all it is. However, for many women, memories of sex crimes complicate—and possibly ruin—lovemaking. Even for women who were never sexually abused as children and have never been sexually assaulted or stalked, the possibility of sex-crime victimization looms large on the sexual landscape, and it may distract them from the deep relaxation and undivided attention necessary for great sex.

Combine the statistics, and men have approximately one chance in five or six of becoming intimate with a woman who has survived a sex crime. The myth is that victimization is so traumatizing that survivors become sexually crippled for life. "Actually," says *Great Sex* advisory board member Louanne Weston, Ph.D., "healing is possible, and so is a satisfying sex life. Survivors can always move from where they start to better places. The issue is how far they can move how fast."

Compared with adults, children are psychologically fragile. They have less life experience and fewer skills for coping with trauma. As a result, childhood sexual exploitation tends to be the crime that causes the deepest wounds and requires the longest recovery period. But the recovery process is similar for sexual assault and sexual harassment. Depending on the crime, recovery typically takes from a few months to several years, and often requires professional therapy. Survivors who eventually emerge from the dark tunnel of recovery into the light of healing often experience sexual transformation. Their sex lives change from awful to deeply nurturing and erotically fulfilling.

Staci Haines, author of *The Survivor's Guide to Sex: How to Have an Empowered Sex Life After Child Sexual Abuse*, spent years recovering from her own abuse. Today, she enjoys sex and has become a therapist who specializes in treating survivors of sexual trauma. "Healing is possible," she explains. "Emotional and sexual healing. I tell survivors: You survived. You're more powerful than what happened to you. Victimization is a terrible thing. Surviving it is very hard. But you have the capacity to recover, to build the life—and the sex life—you choose."

No matter whether survivors are men or women, their lovers can play a key role in their recovery. Lovers who embrace this challenge with knowledge, caring, and a great deal of patience often are rewarded

by relationships that become more intimate and sexually fulfilling. "It's not easy to support a survivor," says *Great Sex* advisory board member Dennis Sugrue, Ph.D., "especially when her recovery involves a long period of celibacy. Enforced abstinence is a struggle for many men. But the key for men is to be patient and supportive, to be a man who's not abusive, exploitive, or violent, but rather loving and nurturing—even though that's difficult."

Because the vast majority of sex-crime victims are women, this chapter focuses on how men can help women recover. The dynamics of healing are similar for male survivors. The books and organizations listed in Resources are addressed to all survivors, regardless of gender.

HOW SEXUAL TRAUMA AFFECTS SURVIVORS

A key issue is trust. Someone who should have been loving and trustworthy was the opposite. "Survivors have a hard time with trust," says *Great Sex* advisory board member Marty Klein, Ph.D. "That's why they have trouble with sex. Great sex requires trust."

Another issue is control. Survivors were robbed of it. As a result, recovery often involves a deep need to assert tremendous control over their lives, and especially sex. This, too, makes sex difficult. Great sex involves a combination of setting limits and then, within them, letting yourself go. "Survivors' need to control sex often interferes with their ability to let go," Weston explains.

A third issue is "dissociation," a natural defense mechanism for trauma survivors, especially children. Their minds deny what happened to their bodies. Children dissociate the most because they are emotionally immature. As a result, recovery from childhood sexual abuse usually takes much longer than recovery from sex crimes occurring later in life. But survivors of all ages often push memories of their victimization out of their conscious minds, and store them subconsciously.

Dissociation extends to survivors' bodies. Childhood sexual abuse survivor Laura Davis, author of *Allies in Healing: When the Person You Love Was Sexually Abused as a Child*, once asked a survivor how she felt about her body. The survivor replied, "What body?" Many survivors speak of feeling numb, or "living only from the

neck up." They have difficulty feeling physical pleasure, which means they can't enjoy sex.

A fourth issue is guilt. Many survivors hold themselves responsible for their abuse, as though they brought it on themselves. Of course they didn't, but, "Every survivor I've worked with has expressed some guilt," says Haines.

Childhood sex abuse has the widest range of possible sexual effects. Some survivors lose their libidos or feel disgusted by the thought of lovemaking. Others become hypersexual and can't say no to sex.

IF THE WOMAN YOU LOVE GETS RAPED

Sexual assault has more to do with assault than with sex. It's similar to mugging, except that the woman's dignity is stolen instead of—or in addition to—her money. Any man who has ever been beaten up and robbed on the street can appreciate some of what women go through during and after sexual assault. The typical mugging survivor fears being killed during the attack, followed by intense feelings that there is no safety anywhere. Now suppose that instead of simply intimidating you with a weapon, imagine that the mugger ripped your clothes off and forced his weapon— or his penis—into your anus. Would you consider that a sex crime? Sex is certainly part of it, but, like women, men who experience sexual assault focus much less on the sex than on the assault.

If a woman you love gets sexually assaulted, here's how to help:

Remember, she's in charge. She should make every decision in response to the assault. She was the person attacked. She's had her sense of self-determination destroyed. A key part of her healing is to regain that precious feeling of control over her life. Encourage her to decide what to do, then support her decisions—even if you disagree with them. For example, rapists are most likely to be convicted if survivors call the police immediately and don't bathe or clean up until any evidence—semen, hair, et cetera—is collected. But she may want to wash and not involve the police. Feel free to question her decisions and point out their implications. But once she's decided, support her decision.

And some swing wildly back and forth; they want physical closeness with a lover, but when things heat up, they freeze or flee.

Cincinnati researchers surveyed 832 women, aged 14 to 59, who were survivors of childhood sex exploitation, and compared their responses with similar women who had not been abused. Survivors were more likely to have poor self-esteem, negative body image, eating disorders, relationship difficulties, and problematic sex lives—either withdrawal from sex or sexual recklessness.

Survivors of sexual assault or harassment usually shut down sexually.

Support her for surviving. Many rape victims fear that their attacker will kill them. This fear is justified. Anything the woman did to survive was a good thing to do. Survivors often wonder if they should have fought more or less, or taken other actions. Provide reassurance: You survived a life-threatening situation. What you did was the right thing to do.

Avoid accusations. She didn't "invite" the rape by dressing provocatively, drinking too much, giving directions to strangers, or anything else. She'll berate herself for a long time about this without you adding to it.

Don't become the injured party. If the survivor can identify her attacker, don't grab a weapon and take off in a vengeful rage. She's just dealt with one or more men who were completely

out of control. Don't become another. Control yourself. Be there for her.

Encourage her to get help. Find the number of a rape crisis center. Some survivors don't want professional help. Others do. Suggest counseling, then support her decision.

Reassure her of your love. Tell her you don't consider her "tainted," that you still find her sexually alluring. Then be clear that you're prepared to let her decide when and how to resume physical intimacy.

Continue to listen. As time passes, it's natural to say, "It's over. Don't dwell on it." But many survivors need to dwell on it for what might seem "too long." Give her all the time she needs.

THE ROAD TO SEXUAL HEALING

Therapeutic approaches vary, but Haines, who specializes in childhood sexual abuse, combines traditional "talk" therapy with hands-on exercises designed to reintroduce survivors to their capacity for sensual pleasure.

A key element of talk therapy involves processing survivors' guilt. Haines asks survivors of childhood sex abuse what they think was their fault. "We make a list," she explains. "It usually includes things like: 'I liked his attention.' 'I liked being held.' 'I didn't stop it from happening to my sister.'" Then Haines invites survivors to analyze their lists. "Eventually, they come to understand that they were powerless in the situation and are not to blame for it. They begin to forgive themselves." Survivors of sexual assault or stalking also typically have guilt feelings to process: I shouldn't have flirted with him. I shouldn't have accepted that ride, given him my address, trusted him.

Talk therapy also explores how survivors feel about sex. Survivors of childhood sexual exploitation generally have the most complicated feelings: aversion, disgust, engaging in sex only to keep their lovers happy, and faking pleasure and orgasm. But survivors of other sex crimes also experience sexual negativity. Counselors say that recovery involves honestly owning up to these feelings—and eventually confessing them to their lovers. It's excruciating for survivors to confess that they hate sex, Haines explains, and it's agonizing for lovers to hear it. "But," she says, "sexual honesty is the foundation of sexual recovery."

On the "body" side of therapy, the goal is to overcome dissociation, transcend sexual negativity, and learn—or relearn—to enjoy physical pleasure. "To feel is to heal," Haines explains. The process often begins with a period of sexual celibacy, or perhaps sensual—but no genital—contact: hand-holding, cuddling, hugging, but no more. For survivors of rape or stalking, the time-out typically lasts a few weeks to several months. For survivors of childhood sex abuse, it may last years. During this period, therapists encourage self-touch—massage and masturbation—which allows survivors to experience physical pleasure while completely controlling the experience.

"Masturbation is the foundation of sexual self-education and recovery," Haines explains. "Know thyself." During masturbation, survivors

learn or relearn how to enjoy sensual pleasure without the complications of partner sex. By the time they return to their lovers, they have more sexual self-knowledge, and a firmer foundation for enjoyable partner sex. For survivors who have difficulty experiencing sensual pleasure and genital arousal, using a vibrator provides more intense stimulation than a woman can provide for herself. If "to feel is to heal," vibrators facilitate feeling, and as a result contribute to healing.

Unfortunately, masturbation often triggers flashbacks, vivid memories of victimization. Therapists urge survivors not to deny these memories, but to reassure themselves while masturbating: This is loving touch, not abuse. I have a right to pleasure.

Masturbation begins the process of sexual self-rediscovery, but the real challenge is partner sex. One key for recovering survivors is to take total control of the experience. During the abuse, they had no control. Healing involves reasserting control, deciding if they want to be sexual, and how they would like sex to proceed. It means learning to say, "No, don't," and having that decision honored. It often means becoming sexual, and then deciding to stop. That, too, must be honored.

Recovery is arduous, especially for survivors of child sexual exploitation. "There were times I wished I was dead," Davis recalls. "I remember thinking I would always be obsessed by my abuse. But I was wrong. I have a life now, not a perfect life, but a good one, with integrity, joy, and pleasure. I am rooted in the present. I'm no longer sentenced to replay the past over and over again. Healing is worth it. With the right support, 100 percent of survivors can heal."

HOW MEN CAN HELP

To support a sex-crime survivor through recovery takes the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of a saint. Few men are Solomon or saints. All you can do is your best. Many relationships do not survive the recovery process. I hope yours does. But understand that, despite both of your best efforts, it might not.

Here's how to help.

First, take care of yourself. On airplanes, shortly after take-off, you hear the oxygen-mask drill: "If you are traveling with anyone who needs assistance, put your mask on first. . . ." Why? Because in an

emergency, if you're struggling to breathe, you can't help anyone else. Recovery from sexual abuse is also an emergency. You can't help your lover recover if you're not taking care of yourself. "The major mistake I see is that partners try to become rescuers," Haines explains. "They martyr themselves, and deny their own needs." At first, this seems noble, but in the long run, it doesn't work for anyone. No one can "save" sex-crime victims from their emotional trauma. Survivors must recover on their own. A lover can help by being patient, available, understanding, and willing to discuss the many issues the recovery process raises. But recovery is something survivors ultimately do themselves.

Your lover can't provide the support you need. She has enough on her plate. Instead, make regular dates with a few trusted friends. Better yet, join a support group for partners of survivors. In a support group, you don't have to explain how you're feeling. Everyone knows. The organizations in Resources may be able to introduce you to support groups for survivors' partners. Or try women's social service organizations or the rape crisis group in your area.

Marshall your resources. These include: compassion, flexibility, resourcefulness, humor, knowledge of your own needs and limits—and patience, lots of patience, tons of patience.

Learn as much as you can. Read about the crime from which your lover is recovering. See the books and Web sites listed in Resources.

Ask questions. Don't wait for the survivor to discuss her feelings. Ask. Then listen carefully to the answers.

Don't try to "fix" her. Over time, she can heal herself with your support, sympathy, and love—and, often, professional therapy.

Be prepared for personality changes. Brace yourself for a long period during which the survivor is maddeningly self-absorbed or seems like a different person. You might think: "Who are you? I don't know you any more." If she often withdraws from sex, or starts to make love, then insists on stopping, you're likely to feel confused, distraught, and angry. Personality changes are temporary, but they're part of the recovery process.

Be honest about how you're feeling. If you feel frustrated, say so. But try not to blame the survivor. Blame the perpetrator.

Suggest therapy. This is especially necessary for survivors of childhood sexual exploitation.

Seek therapy for yourself. For survivors, voicing anger is an important step beyond guilt and dissociation. Unfortunately, survivors sometimes direct their anger not only at the perpetrator, but also at their lovers. Try not to take this personally. Of course, that's virtually impossible. That's why it's so important for you to get emotional support outside of your relationship. In addition to turning to friends and a support group, consider professional therapy yourself.

Schedule fun together. Insist on a day off—one day a week when you spend fun time together and don't discuss the abuse.

IF SHE'S BEEN STALKED

Stalking gets nowhere near as much press as childhood sexual abuse or rape, and it's not tracked by law enforcement. It's a hidden trauma—but it can be extremely unnerving for women, and the experience can have lingering effects that may impact subsequent relationships. Men need to understand how it feels to be stalked, and how it affects women.

Ask her about her experience. Don't demand to know. Telling you is her decision. But let her know that you care about her and would like to know about her life, including its unnerving episodes.

Ask if she still feels threatened by the stalker. If so, encourage her to contact the police. It's her decision. Respect it. But she may believe the police can't help or won't. In recent years police have become more sympathetic to women threatened by

stalkers. Many police departments now confront stalkers and tell them in no uncertain terms that if they don't stop completely and immediately, they will be arrested and jailed. Tell her gently that the police may be able to help. Then abide by her decision.

Bottom line: Never stalk an ex. If a woman breaks up with you, you have every right to feel sad, angry, confused, and betrayed. Still, she has the right to break up with you. Relationships require mutual consent. If she wants out, it's over. Grieve your loss. Rail about her to your friends, if it makes you feel better. But leave her alone. You don't own her. Spying on her and harassing her won't bring her back to you. They are much more likely to convince her that she was right to break things off. In addition, stalking is illegal. Do it and you risk arrest.

Get out of her way. You can't "make" anyone heal sexually. You can't orchestrate progress to recovery. You can't make someone enjoy sex. All you can do is get out of the survivor's way and not put up any more roadblocks to healing than she already faces.

Get a grip. Childhood sex abuse, rape, and stalking teach women that men are out of control. Control yourself. Respect her need to take total control of her sex life, even if she does not want to make love with you for an extended period.

Don't rush the touch. When she feels ready to return to physical contact with you, begin with gentle, whole-body sensuality, and postpone anything genital until she invites it. Try cuddling, hugging, and massage. If she's open to receiving professional massage, offer to make the arrangements. An excellent video, *Relearning Touch: Healing Techniques for Couples*, can help survivors and their lovers enjoy sensual pleasure (see Resources). Encourage her to masturbate. Offer to buy her a vibrator, or two, or more.

It's okay for you to want sex. If she needs a long break from it, it's okay for you to express frustration. "But don't pressure her for sex," Sugrue says. "She has to return to sexuality on her own schedule." She needs to know that you care about her more than you care about sex with her.

Keep in mind that just because she feels ready to return to love-making, it doesn't mean she's recovered. She still has a long way to go, especially if she is a survivor of childhood sex abuse. Even when sex seems to be going fine, don't assume that it is. Check in with her. Ask: "Is this okay. Do you need to talk? Do you need a break?"

She also may express interest in sex, and then insist on stopping. Respect her wishes. Invite her to talk about what she's feeling. Don't express your frustration at that point. Discuss it some other time.

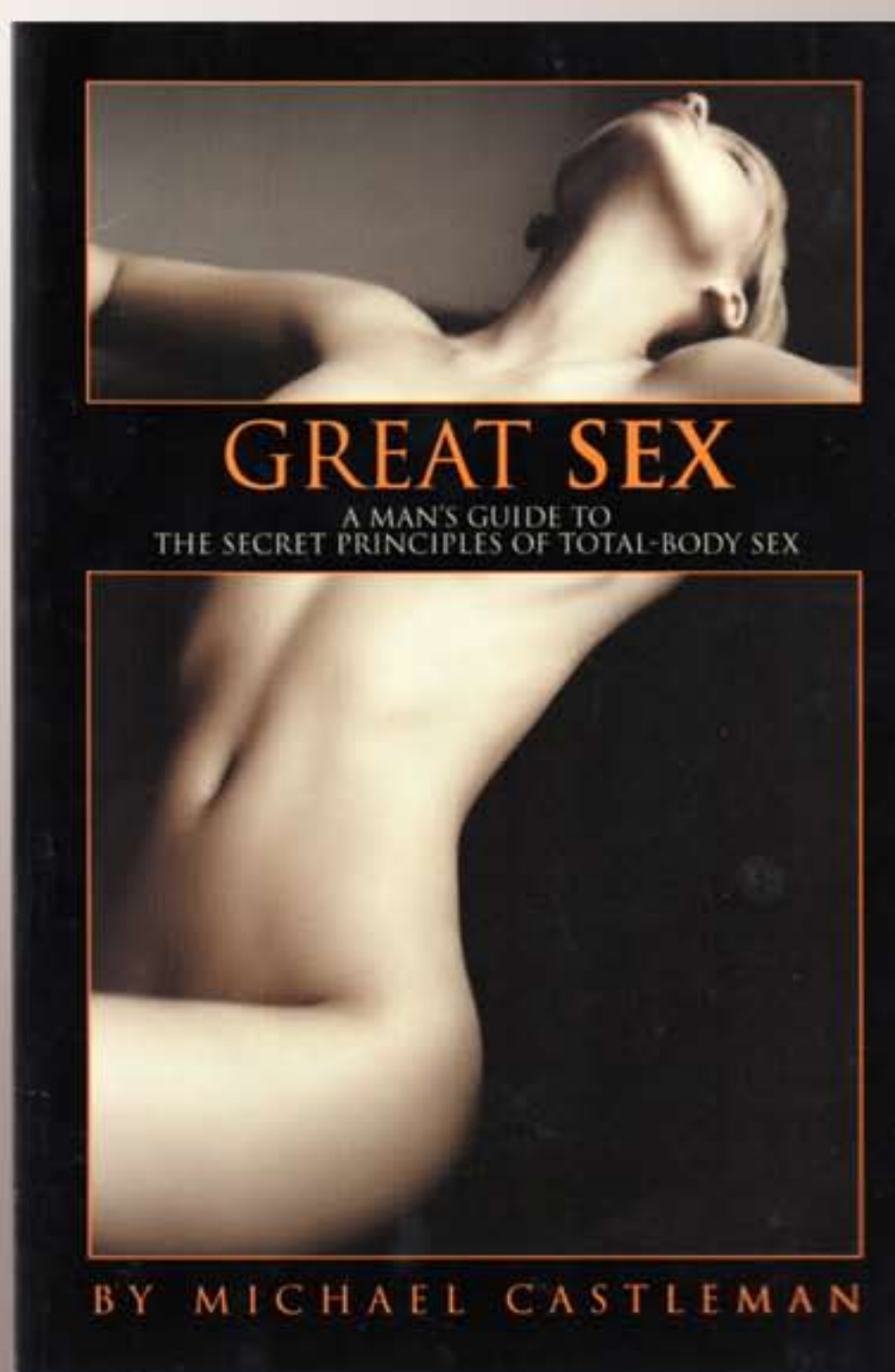
Expect her to experience flashbacks. Develop a signal so she can tell you she's having one. When she signals you, ask what she would like to do. Some women want to change sexual positions. Others need to be held. Some need time by themselves. Others want to talk. If she wants to talk, ask what she's feeling, what she's afraid of. Help her explore her fears and stay in the present. When flashbacks happen, remind her that her memories are real, but they're not happening now. She's not with the perpetrator. She's with someone

who loves and respects her, someone who's doing everything he can to support her healing.

Don't seek revenge. If the perpetrator is still in your lover's life and yours—such as a relative or friend of the family—don't get violent. Control yourself. If she wants to maintain contact with her abuser, respect her wishes. If she wants to shun the abuser, that's fine, too. "Violent fantasies are normal," Klein explains. "They are also a sign that you could use professional therapy."

Accept that the relationship may not last. Dealing with sexual-trauma survivors is hard, especially survivors of childhood sex abuse. Your relationship may break up. That's sad, but possible, and in the case of childhood sex abuse, fairly common.

Those who hang in there usually find it a major growth experience. Surviving the recovery process deepens the love and intimacy in the relationship. Ultimately, that helps both of you enjoy great sex. "Survivors can have happy, fulfilling lives, and great sex lives," Haines says. "As one survivor said to me: 'We who have done the work of sexual healing have some of the best sex lives around. We've had to re-define sex for ourselves. We've done the personal work that most people need to do, whether they're survivors or not.'"



Great Sex



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