

Surprises, Private, Confidential and Secrets: What's the Difference?

There are the good secrets, which really are **SURPRISES**. Keeping this information hidden usually feels good and exciting and has a point in time that you know it will come out (think birthday presents).

Then, there are things that are **PRIVATE**. For example, you don't want everyone knowing who your crush is, but the end goal would be that someday this little secret would get out when you two are dating.

Some things are **CONFIDENTIAL**. This is the serious private stuff that you might only share with a therapist or nurse/doctor. The only way your confidentiality would be broken is if your safety or the safety of others was in serious jeopardy.

And finally, there are **SECRETS**. A true secret is something that you don't want **ANYONE** to know about. True secrets are very lonely. Real secrets can be toxic. They are like taking in a daily dose of poison that brings you shame, pain, and fear of it getting out. Secrets often feel like a burden and can lead to behavioral problems and mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression. Research has taught us that the "secrecy" traumas can also take a significant toll on their physical health now, and long into adulthood!

Secrets about abuse?

For some teens, a secret about sexual abuse is the biggest secret they have, and the hardest to reveal. Telling can be scary for many victims. Some teens don't want to tell because they are worried about getting their abuser in trouble; this is common since most teens have a relationship with the person who has taken advantage of them. Another BIG reason victims do not tell is that they feel to blame for the abuse. Often times, it just seems easier to keep their sexual abuse a secret rather than telling. By not telling, you continue to carry the burden of your secret around every day.

So, why should you tell this secret?

You should tell this big secret for your health first and foremost! We know that trauma victims get better when they get support.

You should also tell to get through denial. Many victims feel like telling will make the abuse real, and if they just don't tell you can pretend that it didn't happen. Unfortunately, it did happen. It was real. Telling will help the reality of what happened not be so scary. Telling can help put the abuse where it belongs – in the past. By not telling you continue to carry that burden of your secret around every day; you continue to be a victim.

Telling is the only real way to get an abuser to stop their behavior. Even if you are able to stay away from them yourself, there is still the concern of others. People that are aroused by aggression or by young children need a therapeutic intervention to get them to stop these behaviors. Getting them the help they need to stop these behaviors is actually a kind thing to do for them...much kinder than allowing them to continue to suffer with their actions.

Telling can help end child sexual abuse. Sex offenders depend on the secrecy. If all kids were able to tell as soon as the abuse happened, it is possible that sexual abuse would abruptly end. Think of it this way. A person who sexually offends has one rule – *Don't Tell Anyone Who Will Make It Stop*. And for victims, this is usually an easy rule to follow.

Telling will connect you to others who will show you that you are not alone. Unfortunately, sexual abuse happens to a lot of teens and the more you can talk about it the more you will be able to heal through relationships with other survivors. Telling will also help you know that you are not at fault. Talking about it and getting connected to professionals will help you to understand that you **did not** do **ANYTHING** to deserve this.

How will telling help me?

Anytime something is traumatic, it is because a person feels powerless. Victims of abuse continue to be traumatized until they tell. Once you can tell your secret and begin to get help, you can go from being a victim, to being a **SURVIVOR!**