



A Better Way

Is It Verbal Porn?

By Hope Anne Dueck

Folks, there is something serious we need to talk to you about.

Advocates are repeatedly having survivors get in touch with us after they have reached out to people who they thought were safe, only to be interrogated with invasive questions, which caused them to feel dirty, ugly and re-traumatized.

Would you be shocked to know that most of the time, these intrusive questions are focused on sex? The supposedly safe people want to dig into details of child sexual abuse, molestation, rape, any possible extra-marital relationships, and even may have gone so far as to try to dig into our client's sexual interests/orientation.

Let me give you some examples of types of experiences survivors have reported to me or other advocates in this year alone.

- “Is your child a product of rape?”
- Asking questions about the level of contact the survivor has with their abuser (and putting pressure on them to handle it a specific way).
- Nosing into whether or not the survivor has “forgiven” the abuser, and insisting that the abuser is repentant.
- Demanding explicit details about each sexual encounter, including specifics about what clothing items were worn, positions used and much more.
- Insisting that survivors *must* reveal all details about their child abuse or assaults to them. (These have included demands for the dates, locations as well as other specific details, including insistence on graphic retelling of the abuse despite survivors protesting.)

Unless you are Law Enforcement investigating a case, or part of the justice system seeking to hold the offender accountable, it is none of your business.

You do not need specific and/or graphic details to support a survivor, and, in fact, if you want to support them, you will not do this.

This is not supportive. It is, in fact, extremely harmful to the survivor. It could even indicate something very toxic about you. Did you know that there are people who obtain sexual gratification from verbal accounts of sexual abuse and assault? And in fact, it is so similar to someone viewing porn for sexual gratification that some professionals refer to it as “verbal porn”.

This is a problem that is not being talked about enough, and some professing pastors, self-appointed gurus (aka ‘counselors’), and unfortunately even some advocates and advocacy organizations are doing this to survivors. When those who survivors view as being in a position of some power or authority over them engage in this harmful practice, this is even more wrong than if your “average Jane” did it. The survivor can not give you informed consent, and it is removing any ability for the survivor to be able to navigate through the maze of what is safe for the survivor.

One final thought: many survivors are often unable to say NO, when you place them on the spot like that as someone who has power and/or authority. They cannot consent to answer the invasive questions and when they answer those questions, it causes them additional harm as it re-traumatizes them and they end up reliving events without proper support to survive that.

Professionals ranging from law enforcement to trauma counselors have confirmed to us that they con-

sider this extremely harmful to survivors, as well as potentially incriminating evidence against the supposedly “helpful” person asking the invasive questions.

Trauma trained counselors are taught not to dig into details of sexual assaults and abuse lest it harm their client. They listen, if the survivor feels safe and ready to share, but they do not dig or interrogate. Trained law enforcement have to ask questions to investigate a crime, but they know to do it in a calm, kind, non-forceful way, allowing a survivor to refuse to answer if they are not able or ready to. They know how to interview in small, short segments if necessary to obtain the information without causing more harm to the survivor. They also understand how to provide support

during the process.

If you really want to help survivors, STOP asking nosy, none-of-your-business questions. You don't need to be the next person we put on our list as a possible predator who is obtaining sexual gratification from the suffering and pain of others.

Would you like to be treated in this manner?

Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?

Choose wisely, folks.

This article is a joint project between Hope Anne Dueck and Mary Byler.

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