



# Incest AWAREness Guide

**OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES  
TO END INTRAFAMILIAL CHILD  
SEXUAL ABUSE (ICSA)**

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**Edited By:** The Incest AWARE Alliance



**Incest AWARE**

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## AUTHOR

Josephine A. Lauren, MTS (she/they) is an internationally recognized, queer, and disabled author, activist, and anti-incest liberation agent. They have been published in outlets like *Ms. Magazine*, *Yes!*, *America*, *Spirituality & Health*, and *Elite Daily*, as well as consulted on a children's book published by Scholastic: *Extra-Ordinary: Celebrating Neuro and Physical Diversity*. As the founder of Incest AWARE, Jo. serves an alliance of individuals and organizations seeking to improve methods of incest prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice. Say hello to Jo. on their website or subscribe to their Substack at josephineanne.com.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Incest AWARE Alliance for the collective thought leadership – born of lived experience and professional expertise – that has been included in this resource. Additionally, the content in this guide has been gathered and disseminated by the labor of survivors, researchers, scholars, and various community-based organizations. Lastly, thank you to the reader for your interest in becoming Incest AWARE. Let's learn about it, talk about it, and end it.

## SUPPORT RESOURCES

### Hotline

National Sexual Assault Hotline | [rainn.org/resources](https://rainn.org/resources)

### Helplines

Stop It Now! | [stopitnow.org/get-immediate-help](https://stopitnow.org/get-immediate-help)

What's Okay? | [whatsok.org/ask](https://whatsok.org/ask)

### Websites

Incest AWARE | [incestaware.org](https://incestaware.org)

Sibling Sexual Trauma by 5WAVES | [siblingsexualtrauma.com](https://siblingsexualtrauma.com), [5WAVES.org](https://5WAVES.org)

### Services

Incest AWARE Alliance | [www.incestaware.org/incest-aware-alliance](https://www.incestaware.org/incest-aware-alliance)

Me Too Movement's Resource Library | [metoomvmt.org/explore-healing/resource-library/](https://metoomvmt.org/explore-healing/resource-library/)

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# Incest AWARE

## OUR PEOPLE, PRINCIPLES, & PROCESSES

Thank you for your interest in becoming Incest AWARE! Survivor-founded and funded, Incest AWARE envisions a world where children are safe from sexual violence in their homes, survivors and families are supported through their recovery journeys, and people who harm are offered treatment so they will not repeatedly offend or reoffend after conviction. The Incest AWARE Alliance – including national and international individuals and organizations all personally or collectively touched by the crisis of incest – recognizes the prevalence of this issue and seeks to center the safety of children and families in public and private discourse. Together, we commit to improving methods of incest prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice.

We are continuing to build the Incest AWAREness Movement (IAM) on a set of foundational anti-racist and anti-oppression principles that ensure we are addressing the intersectional social, political, economic, and spiritual complexities that contribute to incest abuse. Due to the lack of current research on the subject, as well as ineffective or retraumatizing methods of prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice, we first turn to the expertise learned from each other's lived experiences. Additionally, we align with other community-based organizations passionate about anti-incest work to dream and disseminate trauma-informed and culturally-affirming plans and policies. Lastly, we partner with allies in the fields of academia and research, medical and social systems, to verify that we are creating the most comprehensive solutions.

This resource is an introduction to what the Incest AWARE Alliance has learned from our history as advocates and activists. We provide the most comprehensive information we have gathered, then invite readers to ask questions, ideate solutions, and come up with a diverse set of conclusions that will further drive the Incest AWAREness movement within their own contexts and communities. Please, note that this document will always be evolving, so questions or feedback for edits and additions are always welcome. You can follow the Incest AWAREness Movement through the resources below, and reach out to the author, Josephine A. Lauren, with questions or concerns.

**THANK YOU FOR LEARNING WITH US!**

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# LEXICON

## **INCEST**

This word refers to any sexual activity between family members, consensual or non-consensual, especially within legal contexts. However, some activists use it solely to represent “incest abuse” in order to highlight the global crisis of incest abuse, especially against children.

## **INCEST ABUSE**

This phrase has been used throughout history to identify sexual violence between family members.

## **INTRAFAMILIAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (ICSA)**

This phrase is being used in academic and research settings to clarify the legal confusion mentioned above and connect incest abuse to the wider work to end Child Sexual Abuse (CSA).

## **THE INCEST GAP**

The lack of adequate methods of incest prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice that leave children vulnerable to incest, survivors and families isolated in healing, and people who harm free to continuously offend.

## **INCEST AWARENESS MOVEMENT (IAM)**

This phrase refers to the international movement that seeks to improve methods of incest prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice.

## **CHILD-ON-CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (COCSA)**

This phrase refers to sexual abuse by a child against another child, which is far more common than previously understood.

## **SIBLING SEXUAL ABUSE OR TRAUMA (SSA/T)**

Incest abuse by a sibling is arguably the most common form of incest abuse, but can be referred to as “trauma” because it is often executed without the intent to harm and can hurt the victim, the person who harmed, as well as the entire family system.

## **COVERT INCEST ABUSE (CIA)**

This phrase describes the inappropriate positioning of a child as a family member’s emotional or physical caregiver when such responsibilities should be directed toward adults.

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## **COMPLEX TRAUMA CONDITIONS**

This is the medical phrase we use to refer to the ongoing consequences of violence on ourselves and our communities. Due to the prevalence of different types of injustice impacting individuals and communities throughout their lives, we choose to use language that suggests the continuation of harm, as opposed to medical jargon that proposes we are “post” the harm, or the victimization was a single-incident of the past. We also prefer to avoid deficit-based language like “disorders” when referring to the symptoms of survival that many of us experience.

## **DISSOCIATIVE AMNESIA**

Dissociative Amnesia is a condition that involves an inability to recall important personal information due to a traumatic or stressful event/s such as social injustices, physical or sexual abuse, rape, combat, genocide, natural disasters, death of a loved one, or financial troubles.

## **DELAYED RECALL OR RECOVERED MEMORIES**

Delayed recall or recovered memories are terms used to describe the experiences those with Dissociative Amnesia have when they recall or remember the stressful or traumatic events that they had previously forgotten.

## **VICTIM/SURVIVOR**

For those who choose to use words like “victim” and “survivor” to describe their identities or experiences, both terms can be spoken and written interchangeably depending on their preferences. However, in Incest AWARE literature, we refer to victims as those who are still being sexually abused, while survivors are those who have been removed or liberated themselves from their abusive family environments. That said, since so many incest abuse survivors experience multiple victimizations throughout their lifetimes, it’s also appropriate to identify as a victim and survivor simultaneously.

## **PERSON WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE**

For the purposes of this document, when we say “person with lived experience,” we’re speaking of those who have experienced incest abuse. However, the phrase can also include lived experience of any or multiple forms of harm, including harm that someone may have caused.

## **CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT OR LEGAL SYSTEM**

This refers to the system that victims, survivors, family members, and people who harm may navigate from reporting, to trial, to criminalization. We choose not to refer to the system as the “Justice System,” as historically engaging in this process has been retraumatizing for many individuals and communities, especially those who have been touched by the incest abuse crisis.

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## **TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE (TJ)**

Incest AWARE identifies as a Transformative Justice organization. This means that we commit to the ideal that people who harm can be transformed through non-violent justice methods into safe individuals who can be reintegrated back into society.

## **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (RJ)**

Restorative Justice is one method of Transformative Justice that centers the healing of victims/survivors and families, as well as the rehabilitation of the person who harmed through a process of accountability and action.

## **SURVIVOR-SUPPORTED JUSTICE (SSJ)**

In all justice methods, Incest AWARE practices centering the survivors' interests, agency, and needs throughout the justice process they choose, as well as recognizes that their priorities may change throughout their journey to justice.

## **HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIORS OR ABUSE**

This phrase refers to any sexual behavior that causes a person harm.

## **PEOPLE WHO HARM**

As a transformative justice organization, we choose to use person-first language that respects people regardless of what they have done, as well as believes in their transformation.

## **PERPETRATOR OR OFFENDER**

Words such as "perpetrator" or "offender" are other options to refer to the person who harmed. As advocates for change and to promote prevention and support for the entire family, we try to avoid these terms in hopes of reducing stigma, especially in COCSA cases.

## **PEDOPHILIA**

Pedophilia (or sometimes spelled paedophilia) is a psychiatric condition in which an adult or older adolescent experiences a primary or exclusive sexual attraction to prepubescent children (under the age of 13). However, many people who acknowledge their exclusive sexual attraction to children do not offend them.

## **MINOR ATTRACTED PERSON (MAP)**

A minor-attracted person (MAP) is an adult who is sexually attracted to people under the age of 18 (including prepubescent, peripubescent, and postpubescent children). A MAP may have perpetrated in the past, but many MAPs are committed to a life of never harming a child.

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## **HARM DOER**

This can refer to the person who causes direct harm (and would be identified as a person who harmed, a perpetrator, or an offender in other contexts), as well as other people in a survivor's life who contributed indirectly to that harm (e.g., an adult family member who learns about the abuse, but silences the survivor or still requires the survivor to spend time with the person who abused them).

## **NON-OFFENDING PERSON**

This is another phrase for people who may be involved in childrens/victims/survivor's day-to-day lives who they believe hold the responsibility to care for and protect them. For example, if a sibling sexually abuses other siblings, the victims/survivors may refer to their parents as "non-offending people" within their home.

## **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL (CSAM)**

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) refers to the production, dissemination, and consumption of sexually explicit content involving a child including photographs, videos, or computer-generated images. It can also be referred to as: child sexual abuse imagery, child sexual exploitation imagery, and indecent images of children.

## **BETRAYAL TRAUMA**

Betrayal Trauma is when someone is harmed by another person who they trust or are personally dependent on.

## **INSTITUTIONAL BETRAYAL**

Institutional Betrayal occurs when systems built to support individuals and communities harm them instead.

## **CULTURAL BETRAYAL TRAUMA**

Cultural Betrayal Trauma happens when communities have to protect themselves from social, political, and institutional injustices like systemic racism or police aggression, forcing them to prioritize the protection of the group over the safety of individuals within that community.

## **INSTITUTIONAL COURAGE**

The courageous call for institutions to promote principles, policies, and programming that support those who they are meant to serve, especially historically marginalized and disenfranchised populations.

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# THE BASICS

## WHAT IS INCEST ABUSE?

Incest is also known as Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse. It can be perpetrated by all genders of various ages. It is the sexual abuse of a person by a family member including:

- Primary care providers
- Step/foster/grand/parents
- In-laws and other relatives
- Step/half/foster siblings
- Offspring
- Cousins

In addition, according to Heidi Vanderbilt, "Incest offenders can be persons without a direct blood or legal relationship to the victim such as a parent's lover or live in nanny, housekeeper, etc. – as this abuse takes place within the confines of the family and the home environment."<sup>1</sup>

The types of incest are:

- Elder Abuse
- Adult-on-Adult Abuse
- Adult-on-Child Abuse
- Intrafamilial Sex Trafficking
- Child-on-Child Abuse (COCSA)<sup>2</sup>
- Sibling Sexual Abuse or Trauma (SSA/T)

Incest can include:

- Groping
- Exposing of genitals
- Invading body privacy
- Orally, anally, and/or vaginally penetrating someone with an object or body part
- Creating sexually explicit photos or showing them to a child, including pornography and child sexual assault material (CSAM)
- Forcing children into sexual activity with other adults or children
- Grooming, seduction, bribery, manipulation, hitting, verbal sexualization, and/or threatening someone into performing harmful sexual behaviors
- Expecting children to meet the emotional or physical needs of family

## HOW COMMON IS INCEST ABUSE AGAINST CHILDREN?

This resource focuses specifically on incest against children or Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA). This form of sexual abuse happens in families of all class, racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Although there is a lack of accurate prevalence data regarding ICSA, here are some general estimates:

- 1 in 10 children may experience child sexual abuse before 18.<sup>4</sup> Rates increase due to marginalization caused by ableism,<sup>5</sup> racism, classism, and xenophobia,<sup>6</sup> as well as sexism, genderism, homophobia, and transphobia.<sup>7</sup>
- According to reported cases, approximately 30% of children who are sexually abused are perpetrated by family members.<sup>8</sup>
- The younger the victim, the more likely it is that the abuser is a family member. Of those molesting a child under six, 49% were family members. Family members also perpetrated 42% of children between 6 to 11, and 23% of those abusing children ages 12 to 17.<sup>9</sup>
- Child-on-child incest, such as sibling or cousin sexual abuse or trauma, is the least recognized form of incest, but is estimated to be at least as common and just as harmful as other types.<sup>10</sup>
- ICSA is often more continuous, aggressive, and prolonged than extra-familial CSA. The increase in welfare, criminal, legal, and medical fees from CSA costs the US billions a year and is largely covered by tax payers.<sup>11</sup>

## WHAT IS THE INCEST GAP?

The Incest Gap is the lack of prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice methods to prevent children from experiencing incest abuse, support survivors in recovery, help families to heal, and end continuous offenses and recidivism. It directly contributes to the crisis of ICSA. Due to The Incest Gap, children are vulnerable to sexual violence in their home environments or family systems, the intervention process can be retraumatizing instead of healing, survivors and families are left isolated in their recovery journeys, and people who harm remain free to reoffend.

Barriers to CSA prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice are experienced most by:<sup>12</sup>

- Survivors with physical and cognitive conditions and/or disabilities and language barriers
- People in racial, ethnic, and cultural historically marginalized groups
- Those with financial vulnerabilities
- LGBTQIA+ people

**TOGETHER, WE CAN END THE INCEST GAP!**

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# PREVENTION

## OBSTACLES

- In general, CSA is a taboo topic that adults feel uncomfortable about. ICSA is particularly stigmatized because it violates social and moral boundaries.
  - It is difficult to gather research that proves whether CSA prevention education is effective for children, adults, and/or professionals. However, some evidence suggests that it increases disclosure.<sup>13</sup>
  - Dominant approaches to CSA prevention address strategies to protect children from people who harm outside of the home, while failing to address when the perpetrator is within the home.
  - Although it is important to educate children on what to do if someone is violating sexual boundaries, past and current prevention education models have overburdened children with the responsibilities of abuse identification and disclosure, instead of adults.
  - Prevention education has focused on parents as the primary audience and facilitators for prevention dissemination to children, neglecting families where ICSA is occurring.
  - Social assumptions and legal protections of the family system assume that family members are the safest people to be caring for children, including other children, allowing them to be alone together in a nuclear home environment. This can isolate children in harmful environments throughout their upbringing.
  - Sexual and social stigma, denial of the issue, and the lack of education on boundaries, bodies, and sexuality all restrict adequate language and open conversations about the topic between children and adults.
  - There is a lack of culturally specific and affirming approaches to CSA prevention that meet the unique nature of how ICSA is understood and perpetrated within different communities.
  - The media and internet both provide easy access to pro-incest narratives and content which contributes to confusion around the issue.
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## OPPORTUNITIES

### **Talk About Incest Abuse**

Using the word, “Incest Abuse” and/or “Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse,” in day-to-day conversations and public discourse will normalize dialogue on the subject. Increased awareness will inspire more people and professionals to learn and practice the best methods of incest abuse prevention, intervention, recovery, and justice.

### **Respect Bodies, Boundaries, & Sexuality**

From birth through adulthood, teaching children to communicate and respect body boundaries, as well as the basics of healthy sexuality, can prevent CSA in all environments. From accurate language about genitals to a culture of consent, from safe exploration of gender and sexual identities to sex as a source of pleasure, reproduction, or release, trusted caregiving adults can initiate conversations with kids about body respect. Studies show that youth who have body confidence are less likely to be abused and are more likely to postpone initial intercourse.<sup>14</sup>

### **Provide Accurate Incest AWAREness Content**

Culturally-affirming and contextually-specific CSA prevention programs must be included in CSA prevention education, so that ICSA can be avoided, identified, or ended quickly. Additionally, Incest AWAREness education and support resources can be provided within media representation of the issue, as well as on the internet, to help people better understand the issue. Deterrence and signpost messaging can be added to internet search results for incest-related keywords.

### **Respect Children as Whole Individuals**

Children should have the same civil rights as adults in our society. Besides cleaning and care by safe providers, children’s bodies should be respected as their own, their opinions recognized, and their feelings valued. This also means that children can determine where they feel safe and decide the best living environment for themselves.

### **Adopt a Community Approach to Care**

The development of a community-care model founded on interdependency for children’s wellbeing makes everyone responsible for the safety of our children. A Prevention Team™, coined by CSA Prevention Expert Feather Berkower, LCSW, can be created that focuses on adults who have contact with children inside and outside of the home like family members, teachers, coaches, childcare workers, religious organizations, and other parents.<sup>15</sup>

### **Develop Transformational Justice Programs**

People who may harm or have harmed need social and clinical support services to ensure that they too receive the peer-to-peer and professional assistance to prevent or stop incest abuse. The more that transformational programs become accessible, the more patterns of perpetration can be avoided before harm, stopped before continuous abuse, and ended after conviction.

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## OBSTACLES

- For an individual outside of the family to perpetrate sexual abuse, they must gain access to the child. Wherein access is assumed through normal roles and/or dependency within the family or care provider team, allowing for alone time with a child without causing suspicion.
- As ICSA often happens within private spaces like family or group homes, it is unlikely to be observed by those outside of the family or care provider units, further preventing identification.
- Most often, victims do not disclose due to grooming, including threats, shame, or lack of support. Research suggests that children who are abused by family members are less likely to disclose ICSA in childhood, as they may fear jeopardizing their need for life-sustaining care by parents/caregivers or being blamed for the breakup of the family.<sup>16</sup>
- If CSA victims do disclose, more often than not, they are not believed. Survivors of incest who chose to inform their relatives, care providers, or report to the police often encounter negative reactions: denial, blame for the abuse, expectations to forgive, as well as family or care provider abandonment.<sup>17</sup>
- Delayed recall caused by Dissociative Amnesia after CSA can cause survivors to forget the abuse, then recover and verify memories years later.<sup>18</sup>
- Delayed recall, social stigma, dependency on care, and lack of support can delay disclosure. The average age of disclosure for CSA survivors is in their 50s.<sup>19</sup>
- Victimized children and adult survivors often do not identify as being abused because it has been normalized in their home environments, or they do not have the language to disclose due to age, disability, or lack of education.
- Studies show that recantation is common in cases of CSA, especially incest abuse, as the child may be threatened by the person who harmed, other family members, or care providers. The difficult legal process and potential consequences of family separation may also contribute.<sup>20</sup>
- Families or care providers often do not report abuse to authorities to protect themselves or each other, as well as to avoid the risk of a child being removed from the home or left without necessary life-sustaining care. When someone does report, the family risks being broken apart, the child removed, and care terminated.
- The foster care system and group homes leave children much more likely to be sexually abused.<sup>21</sup>
- Historically, non-offending parents have been held legally accountable in criminal and civil courts for the abuse due to Failure to Protect Laws.<sup>22</sup>

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## OPPORTUNITIES

### Be the Safe Adult in Children's Lives

One of the best ways to improve long-term effects of CSA is to be a buffer, or a person who models safe love and care, as well as sets and honors boundaries, with a child. Regardless of how other adults may be treating the child, your example shows the child what love and safe behaviors should be, as well as helps them to understand that mistreatment is not to be normalized or expected from adults or other children.<sup>23</sup>

### Learn the Patterns of Perpetration

Patterns of perpetration, from the grooming process to harmful sexual behaviors, can be recognizable. Invite your family and friends into a conversation about your intentions to keep children safe in your community from sexual violence by watching for these signs and intervening when necessary.<sup>24</sup>

### Encourage and Support Disclosures

Early disclosure, intervention, and treatment can help to mitigate long term negative effects of CSA. Many children may disclose about abuse in ways that might not be obvious to an adult: they may express they don't want to see someone or cry when they learn they have to. If a child ever expresses any fear, concern, or resistance about another person, ask them questions to better understand the reason for their feelings. Research suggests that children are most likely to disclose when asked if they are being abused, especially by a peer. Check in regularly with children in your life about how others are treating them.<sup>25</sup>

### Learn How to Respond to a Victim's Disclosure

Children can be reactive or internalize the emotional responses of others, so staying calm and neutral when you receive the disclosure will help the child feel safe. The response to disclosure can aid in a victim's safety and recovery journeys, or result in shame and silence. You can respond to a child's disclosure by saying things like:

- "Thank you for telling me."
- "It's not your fault."
- "I'm so sorry that I didn't protect you. It's my responsibility to help you now."

### Create Community Intervention and Support Teams

Mandated reporter laws vary by state. You can learn who is a mandated reporter in your state and decide if you would like support with filing a police report. You can also report yourself. People who are not mandated reporters can create intervention teams to work with the victim, so that together they can decide how best to care for the child with or without the engagement of authorities. Some individuals and communities may not want to engage law enforcement due to safety concerns or the reality that victims are removed from homes instead of those who harm.

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# RECOVERY

## OBSTACLES

- Medical and psychological institutions have historically failed ICOSA victims by blaming it on children, denying the reality of survivors' recovered memories, as well as misdirecting the causes of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) in children away from CSA. Additionally, the medicalization of incest abuse has placed the burden of liberation and recovery on survivors, instead of society to address, solve, and recover from the problem.<sup>26</sup>
- The incest abuse stigma and lack of external credibility by the adults who are supposed to protect children and support their recovery (e.g. care providers, courts, and clinicians) both contribute to the internalization of shame by incest survivors resulting in silence, self-isolation, and self-harm. All exacerbate negative long terms symptoms and can lead to revictimization or increased rates of suicidality.<sup>27</sup>
- Developmental trauma is an ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience), that can lead to significant chronic health challenges. However, the specialization of US medicine may not suit the numerous psychosomatic symptoms of CSA survivors, including chronic pain. Additionally, medical and psychological treatments are often unaffordable or inaccessible, as well as lack trauma-informed and/or culturally affirming approaches to care.<sup>28</sup>
- Many physical and mental health clinicians are not incest-informed. They are trained to treat physical and psychological symptoms and not to heal the root of conditions, causing chronic health challenges to continue. Additionally, many effective methods of psychological trauma treatment (e.g. CBT, EMDR, etc.) have proven to only be effective for 50% of survivors of various sex crimes.<sup>29</sup>
- Most rape recovery programs are modeled off of "crisis theory orientation," which describes a single psychological crisis as a significant incident that can be a turning point in a person's life. The symptoms and treatment are seen as temporary. However, since ICOSA often happens repeatedly at such a young age, the crisis stage can be longterm, the symptoms may be chronic, and survivors may need long-term treatment options.<sup>29</sup>
- Rape crisis centers generally provide legal advice, short-term counseling, and rape test kits, when long-term care is needed. Unlike in the human trafficking and intimate partner violence networks, no basic needs or transitional housing is provided to rape and incest survivors, leaving them without a safe place to run or to land. Social support is one of the primary components of complex trauma recovery, however there is a lack of incest survivor-specific resources or communities.<sup>29</sup>



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## OPPORTUNITIES

### **Help ICOSA Survivors Reclaim Incest AWAREness History**

All CSA survivors, but especially ICOSA survivors, have been historically marginalized in political, social, spiritual, economic, and medical contexts. Together, we can reclaim our history as a historically marginalized population, then join together with allies across communities and industries to create social change that will help survivors to heal, while also improving methods of recovery for the next generation.

### **Use Strengths-Based Language**

Much of the more recent medical research that supports ICOSA survivors focuses on chronic health conditions caused by developmental trauma. This is important for survivors to understand themselves and how to treat their symptoms, as well as for the medical community to accompany them on their healing journeys. However, deficit-based language like “disordered” can be harmful to describe the symptoms of survival. Focusing on survivors' traumatic growth and strengths like courage, creativity, resiliency, sensitivities to child and sexual protection, commitments to liberation and healing, etc. can aid survivors in self-affirming development.<sup>30</sup>

### **Become Versed in Incest Recovery Processes**

Due to the medical suppression of incest abuse, many physicians and clinicians remain uninformed about the complexities of survival after ICOSA. Devoting more research and developing healing modalities that help survivors, then guiding them competently through the recovery journey, will help survivors to feel supported and heal or improve symptoms management more quickly.

### **Create a Community Recovery Plan**

Community validation and support have been proven to be one of the most effective ways for developmental trauma survivors to recover. Creating a society made up of people, organizations, and institutions that understand the unique harms of incest abuse and how to help survivors will aid in their recovery journeys.<sup>31</sup>

### **Ensure Recovery Modalities Address Intersectional Harms**

Incest abuse is often only one of many types of harms that survivors experience. From other forms of domestic violence and child abuse to social injustices like racism, sexism, ableism, genderism, sizeism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia, healing modalities must address the intersectional issues that survivors face.<sup>32</sup>

### **Make Treatment Options Affirming, Affordable, & Accessible**

Recovery modalities must meet survivors in their socio-political, economic, and spiritual contexts in order to be effective. They must also be easily affordable for a variety of income brackets, as well as accessible in both urban and rural living environments.

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# JUSTICE

## OBSTACLES

- Due to lack of victim identification, disclosure, and reporting, people who sexually harm are often left free to repeatedly offend against children. Of 1000 reported rapes of all kinds, only 25 people who harm will be incarcerated.<sup>33</sup>
- The population of people who are criminalized for sexual abuse is increasing. However, most criminalized people who harm will eventually be released into the community untreated.<sup>34</sup>
- Although Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has proven to be effective in treating some people who harm, better execution of this method, as well as research into new methods, can continue to be developed.<sup>34</sup>
- Studies on rates of recidivism, which are based on first conviction and then subsequent convictions after discharge, reveal a 10–15% chance that a convicted person will reoffend. However, with low rates of identification, disclosure, reporting, and criminal convictions, accurate data is difficult to gather.<sup>35</sup>
- Although restorative justice programs are expanding, few community-based (as opposed to prison-based) justice processes exist or are effective to end incest abuse.
- Due to reporting barriers, lack of awareness, and application complexities, many survivors will not receive victim compensation to pay for recovery and loss of wages. Many who engage the civil legal system will not be represented unless the person or institution who harmed are well resourced.
- Although there is no longer a federal statute of limitations for certain federal sex crimes, many states still have statute of limitations for some sex crimes.<sup>36</sup>
- Failure to Protect laws can hold a non-offending parent legally responsible for the violence of the offending parent, which restricts reporting.<sup>37</sup>
- In many states, children who harm are added to sex offender lists (some for life). This restricts reporting and treatment, even though treatment has proven to be effective to end recidivism by youth.<sup>38</sup>
- Although some organizations focus on secondary prevention, there are few places where people who are attracted to children can go to receive support so that they do not harm in the first place. Vilification of adults at-risk to sexually harm isolates them from acknowledging and accessing help.<sup>39</sup>

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## OPPORTUNITIES

### **End Statutes of Limitations**

Statutes of Limitation laws limit survivors' abilities to receive justice in both criminal and civil courts, as well as rob them of victim compensation. Due to delayed recall and disclosure that are both so common for incest survivors, the law needs to side with survivors by allowing them to report cases of ICSA when they are ready and able regardless of how much time has passed.

### **End Failure to Protect Laws**

Failure to protect laws have held the non-offending parent (usually women) legally accountable for the harm of the offending parent in cases of incest abuse. This has discouraged families from reporting. Ending failure to protect laws and increasing family support in the case of violence will help family members feel safer to engage the criminal and civil legal systems.

### **Remove Children from the Sex Offender Lists & Provide Treatment**

Treatment for children who sexually harm others has proven to be effective in ending recidivism. However, in many states, children whose harmful sexual behavior is reported to authorities end up on sex offender lists for the remainder of their lives. This discourages families from reporting the harm, as well as restricts them from receiving compensation for treatment so that their children can learn healthy and consensual sexual behaviors and boundaries.

### **Ensure CSA Legal Resources Are Written in Plain Language**

Incest abuse laws especially for non-lawyers can be confusing and differ among states. Survivor empowerment in the justice system begins with resources written in clear and plain language to better understand incest-related laws so that survivors can learn to navigate their cases.

### **Fund Research & Treatment for Transformative Care**

The prevention of harm and ending recidivism depend on non-stigmatizing support systems for those who desire to harm or who have already harmed. Research, funding, and program development that prevent and end harmful sexual behavior through non-stigmatizing treatment will help to address the problem at the root.

### **Make Justice Models Survivor-Centered**

Improving access to victim compensation and providing a variety of paths to justice after incest abuse can make the process healing for survivors and their families. Each step of the way, survivors can be empowered to choose what method is best for them, while keeping up with costs of living and recovery.<sup>40</sup>

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**LEARN ABOUT IT. TALK ABOUT IT. END IT.**

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## THE INCEST AWARENESS MOVEMENT NEEDS YOU

Thank you for learning more about the Incest AWAREness Movement! As I hope is now clear, incest impacts everyone and can't be prevented or ended until we as a community come together to prioritize the protection of children. There is so much work to be done, and we hope that you will join us by offering your passions, your potential, and your plans to the movement. Please, explore the various ways to get involved below and reach out to Josephine A. Lauren to say hello!

## WAYS TO SUPPORT INCEST AWARENESS WORK

The Incest AWARE Alliance seeks to build a community of survivors and supporters on values of diversity, equity, friendship, prosperity, and sustainability. We encourage people to explore various opportunities within anti-incest work to find their fit, change their minds as they learn more about their interests, as well as take breaks, step away, and return whenever is best for them. No matter your level of experience, we welcome you to join us and will celebrate you along the way!

### LEARN

[www.incestaware.org](http://www.incestaware.org)  
[www.siblingssexualtrauma.com](http://www.siblingssexualtrauma.com)  
[www.bookshop.org/shop/incestaware](http://www.bookshop.org/shop/incestaware)



### VOLUNTEER

Reach out to volunteer your time or services to Incest AWARE.

### DONATE

You can donate one-time or monthly financial resources, as well as non-monetary gifts and services at the following links:

[fundraising.fracturedatlas.org/incest-aware](http://fundraising.fracturedatlas.org/incest-aware)

### CONTACT

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[josephinealauren.substack.com](http://josephinealauren.substack.com)



JOIN THE MOVEMENT

# RESOURCES

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## DOWNLOADABLE PDFS

### TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence | TransformHarm.org. (n.d.). TransformHarm.org. [https://transformharm.org/tj\\_resource/toward-transformative-justice-a-liberatory-approach-to-child-sexual-abuse-and-other-forms-of-intimate-and-community-violence/](https://transformharm.org/tj_resource/toward-transformative-justice-a-liberatory-approach-to-child-sexual-abuse-and-other-forms-of-intimate-and-community-violence/)

### END CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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*Family Secrets: Stories of Incest and Sexual Violence in Mexico* | Gloria González-López

*Father-Daughter Incest* | Judith Lewis Herman

*Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors in Therapy* | Christine A. Courtois

*Love with Accountability: Digging Up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse* | Aishah Shahidah Simmons

*Rape by the Numbers: Producing and Contesting Scientific Knowledge about Sexual Violence* | Ethan Czuy Levine

*Sibling Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Confronting America's Silent Epidemic* | Brad Watts

*The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* | Bessel van der Kolk

*The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* | Laura Davis & Ellen Bass

*The Cultural Betrayal of Black Women and Girls: A Black Feminist Approach to Healing from Sexual Abuse* | Jennifer M. Gómez

*The Politics of Child Sexual Abuse: Emotion, Social Movements, & the State* | Nancy Whittier

*The Politics of Trauma: Somatics, Healing, and Social Justice* | Staci Haines

*Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence -From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* | Judith Lewis Herman

*Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* | Judith Lewis Herman

*We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* | Mariame Kaba