

# I Wish Someone Had Told Me!!

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“काश ! मुझे किसी ने बताया होता !!”

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You know and meet many people who are older than you- *mama, mami, chacha, chachi, bua, mausi* or your mother's and father's friends, the friends of your elder sister or brother, your neighbours, teacher, etc.

Tell me, do you like all those people who are older than you (whom we can also call elderly people)?

Are you happy to meet all of them? Think for a while and tell me.



Till the time you think, let me tell you some of the experiences from my own childhood.



To tell the truth- when I was a child I did not like all the elderly people. There were only a few elderly people that I really liked. These were people who treated with me with love and respect. Treating me with respect means that they did not think that I was stupid. They would talk to me as if I was also capable of understanding things, that I could also talk intelligent things.

When I would talk they would listen to me attentively.

They would also touch me with love and respect. They did not pull my cheeks hard. They did not forcefully pull me towards themselves. I liked their touch. Their touch made me feel that I am safe. Even though I was a small child, they would treat me as an individual, as a human being. I like to remember such elderly people even today.



But there were some elderly people whom I did not like because they would do wrong things. They would express their love by pulling my cheeks very hard. My cheeks would become red and I would feel pain.

I did not like such expression of love and neither did I like the people who would show their love like this. I would think, 'What kind of strange people are they! They don't even know that children feel pain when treated like this.'

To tell the truth, sometimes I felt that I should also pull their cheeks very

hard to show my 'love'. Then they would understand how children feel about what they do to them.



But there were some people in my childhood whom I liked in the beginning but later I became afraid of them and started staying away from them because they had touched my body in a bad way.

These people knew how to win the heart of young children like me. They would try to know my likes and dislikes. After coming close to me and winning my trust, the way they touched my body and kissed me confused and upset me a lot. I could not understand these things. I could not understand their behaviour, I could not even understand my own response. But somehow I knew that the way they touched me when I was alone was not right. It was wrong and dirty. That is why they touched me like that only when I was alone and not in front of everyone else.



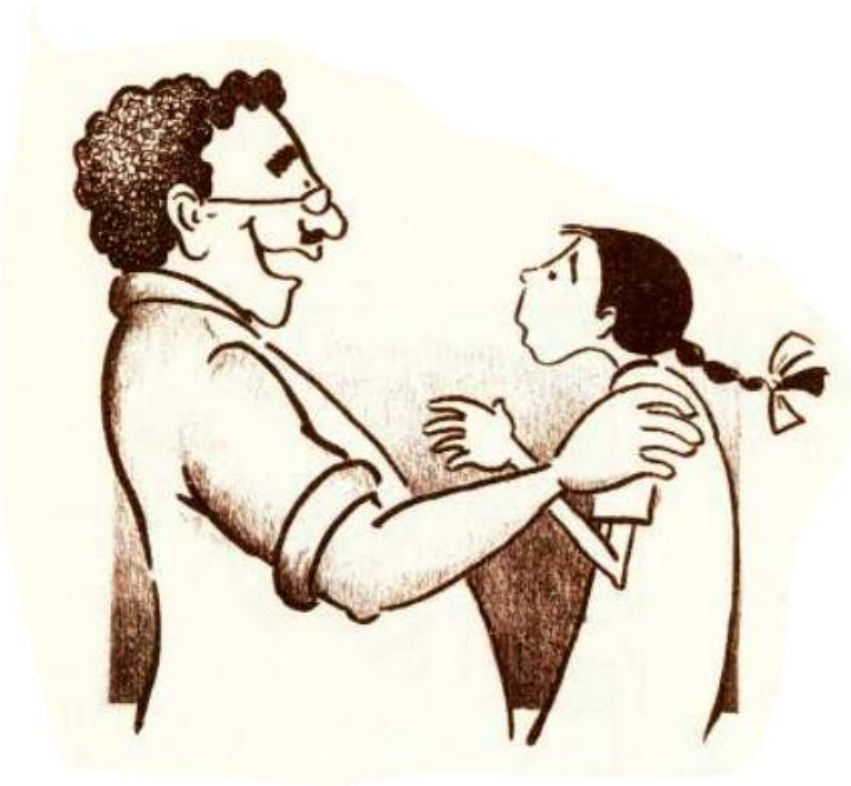
All these people were much older to me in age. Some of them were even 50-60 years old. All of them were either our relatives, or family friends, or teachers, or the father/ brother of my friends. My family members knew all of them very well. Like me, my family members also loved them and

respected them a lot. That is why I trusted them. At first I liked to be around them, talk to them, sit on their lap, and I also felt safe with them.

I remember that I liked a friend of my elder brother,

but on finding me alone he would kiss me on my lips. I felt bad and wrong about his kissing me.





A friend of my father loved me. Many times he would hug me tightly. When I was alone he would rub his body with my body in strange ways, he would kiss me hard. I did not like him

touching me in this way. I tried to stay away from him. I liked him, but his actions made me afraid of him.

A 70-75 year old teacher started coming to my home to teach me English. He taught me alone. Often he would try to make me sit very close to him and then he would try to kiss me on my lips. At that time his face would become very strange. I told my father many times that I don't want to learn from him but my father would say- "No, no, he is a very good teacher. He doesn't even take money." Fortunately after some days he fell ill and stopped teaching me. I felt very relieved.

There was a distant relative who would sometimes come to stay with us for one or two days. I also liked him. I would start going near him as soon as he came to our home. He would also take me outside to roam around. We were friends. One day I was sitting in his lap and he was reading a book with me. Suddenly I felt that he had put his finger in my panty. I immediately jumped out from his lap and ran away. There was a strange fear and confusion in my mind. I felt very sad by his action. I liked him so much and this is what he did? Did he love me for this reason? Now should I go to him or not? He would call me just like before, as if nothing had happened, but now I was afraid of him. There were many questions in my head. A person whom I liked, how and why did he do such thing to me? Perhaps I also did not like to be suspicious of him or complain about him. These incidences happened so long ago that I can't even properly remember my frustration and anxiety.





I had a friend Seema. Both of us used to go to our friend's home for playing. Her brother would also come there. He would give toffees to all of us. He would make Seema sit on his lap. We would keep playing. One day Seema told me that he rubs his penis on her body while making her sit on his lap. After that we got scared. We never went to play there again.

I had another good friend. She would come to my home and I would go to her home. We would play with each other for hours. Sometimes her father would also play with us. He would chat with me a lot. I would think- how different and better he is from other fathers, but one day he also touched me in a bad way. This time I felt very uncomfortable and sad. Because of this act of her father I



had to stop going to her home. I would think, do all the men that I like do this with girls? Do they want this from girls?

After this incident a question often came to my mind- does my friend's father touch his daughter also in a bad way? If yes, then how would she escape from her father? I stopped going to her home but where would my friend go to escape from her father? I would shiver in fear thinking all this. I would have the same confusion, same anxiety in my heart.

All these experiences are from a time when I was 5-10 years of age. I was a child but I knew that these types of touch were wrong and dirty. The people who touched like this were also not good. They were using small girls in a wrong way. I would question that why and how people whom I like do these wrong things? I couldn't even understand the difference between good and bad.





When I grew up I came to know that this type of sexual abuse does not happen only to girls. Some men also sexually abuse boys. They use them too.

Seeing these relatives, family friends, teachers who sexually abused children, I felt as if a ferocious animal had come wearing the mask of an innocent cow. Other

people in the family were not able to see their real face. They still considered them good people, but I had seen their real face. I had frustration inside me.



I could not understand this properly. I could not even talk to anyone about it. What should I tell my mother and father, how to explain, I couldn't find a way. I didn't even have the vocabulary to tell my experiences. What words could I have used? What could I have said? I just kept being afraid of such people and tried to stay away from them.

For many years I felt very angry towards these bad people wearing masks. I kept thinking of ways in my mind to take revenge from them. I kept making plans of getting them punished.





When I grew up, even then many men tried to harass me, but they were not successful, because I was more alert. I think it was my good fortune that I escaped so many times. I was not hurt a lot physically. But mental

anxiety hurt me. Today I know that girls are even raped inside homes and the rapists are relatives, friends of parents, neighbours or teachers. Many times even fathers rape their daughters.



Obviously, because of all these bitter experiences, a fear crept in my heart. Today I understand that this suspicion and fear was not good for my mind and heart. Every fear and suspicion harms children, especially when children cannot talk about their bitter experiences and fear with anyone.



Today what I feel most sad about is that I could not talk to anyone about these people. I could not make anyone my companion in sharing my bitter experiences. Neither anyone in my family, nor any friend, teacher or relative.

I often ask myself that why did I remain silent?

Why didn't I tell anyone anything? Did I remain silent because my own thoughts about such type of experiences were not clear? Or whether I did not have the words to tell about this sexual abuse? Or whether I did not want to



complain about those people whom I also liked? Did I have this fear that my mother, father or brother-sister would not listen to me? They would not believe me? Instead they would scold me back? Who would trust the story of a child? Those whom I would blame were

powerful and were seen as good people by others. By trusting a child, would anyone have dared to put a charge on them? Today I think whether all these thoughts came to my young mind then?

Or did I remain silent because I felt that perhaps I was to be blamed, there is something wrong with me, something is lacking in me?

Or did I not speak because I was taught that it is wrong to tell about such things, to discuss about such things? Good children don't talk such things?



I don't know even today why I was silent? Why a young child kept hiding such experiences for so many years? She kept walking around carrying such a heavy burden in her mind and heart?

**WHY???**



Another painful question comes to my mind- I was small, innocent, I remained silent in fear or confusion. But why did my mother, father, elder brother-sister remain silent? Why didn't they tell me that some people touch young girls and boys in bad ways, use them wrongly. Why did they not tell me about good touch and bad touch?

They were all adults. They were not small like me. They would have known about these things. Then why didn't they tell me? Why didn't they make me cautious? Is it

possible that elderly people don't even know that young children are sexually abused?

My family members loved me. Despite this, why didn't they have any idea about my experiences, my fear, my anxiety?



Today I think that why didn't anyone among my mother, father, elder sister, elder brothers, my teachers, friends build that trust within me that I could talk to them about anything? That I don't need to hide anything from them. Why didn't I feel that my story would be believed? My problems would be solved?

Why were there these distances within a family? Why were we strangers to each other? Do all families have these distances and silences?

After gathering some courage when I talked to a friend of mine then she told me- "In my childhood a friend of my father used to come to our home. He was our neighbor. He often took us children for trips. One day he took us to a lonely

building. He gave toffees to all children. After making me sit on his lap, he kept rubbing his penis on the lower side



of my waist. I was feeling very awkward and bad. I was trying to get up but he was holding me tightly. I pulled away screaming loudly and started crying. All of us children ran to our home. I told this incidence to my mother. She told my father. My father handed over the man to the police with the help of other people in our colony.”

After hearing this I felt I wish I could also tell everything to my family members.

If my family members would have talked openly to me about everything, if they had told me about my body and sex, then I could have been cautious. I could have identified bad touch and bad people. I could have faced them better.

Then I would have also told my family members about people touching me in a wrong way. Maybe



then my mother and father would have talked to those people, would have scolded them or would have stopped them from coming to our home. At least something could have been done against them.

Maybe these people were touching other children also in a wrong way. Maybe they were sexually abusing other children also, harassing them. Maybe those children would have also remained silent like me?

How many children did we harm by keeping silent? We let culprits go free. Neither did they get punished nor did they ask for forgiveness for their wrongdoing. Maybe nothing would have happened by my talking, but at least my silence would have broken. At least we would have started discussions.

If my family members and the people in my school had asked me properly and explained to me properly, then I would not have hidden this secret for so many years. I would not have the discomfort, fear and anger within me. I could have thrown off such a heavy burden from my mind and heart.



Ok, let's stop talking about me. I have told many things about myself. Now you tell me-

Have you ever felt that someone is watching you or touching you in a wrong way?

If yes, then what did you do?

Did you also remain silent like me or did you talk to anyone?

Whom did you talk to?

Can you share everything with anyone among your family, relatives, teachers or friends? Have your family members or teachers given you the confidence that you can talk to them about anything?



If you have any question about your body or sex, then do you have someone whom you can ask? Who?

Or do you think sex is a bad thing and you should not talk about it with anyone, at school or at home?

Have your family members initiated any discussion about your growing and changing body? Or did they give you any book that you could read and understand from?

Or the silence about sex that was in my family 40 years ago is there in your family even today?

Today when I am grown up, I believe that there should be a friendly environment in families. There should not be an environment of fear or silence. Children should be made to feel that they can ask anything without fear, they can share their mind's fears and confusions. A trust should be built with

children that we would try to understand their questions, feelings, confusions, and fears.

They won't be made silent by being treated as children and by scolding them. It is important to respect the thoughts and personality of children. Children grow well in an open and democratic

environment, not in an environment of pressure and fear.



Today I am a mother of two children and I also believe that it is important to talk openly about all topics. No topic is dirty. Not even sex. Yes, people can have bad thoughts about sex. But sex is not bad or wrong. I feel that family members, family friends or teachers, can teach us very nicely. They can teach us about good touch and bad touch. They can tell us that some people sexually abuse children.



**Some people think that by telling children about sex their minds get affected negatively.**

But the truth is if we tell children about their bodies and sex properly, then they can understand themselves properly. The wrong thoughts or beliefs that children have in absence of information can be removed. By talking about body and sex the fears diminish or get removed, and this wrong belief is also removed that talking about sex is wrong or harmful. If sex is a part of life then how can it be wrong to talk about it?

**Some people think that we should not talk about things which will make children upset or afraid.**

But I believe that if children are told properly, then instead of being upset or afraid, their fears will run away. By talking, children grow in courage and their relations with elderly people improve. Children also become more cautious.

**Some people also say that if something wrong happens with a girl then we should remain quiet. By telling it to others or by talking about it the girl gets a bad name.**

But I believe that by talking about it the girl doesn't get a bad name and should not get a bad name. Those who do such things to girls/ children should get a bad name. These people are wrongdoers and we should tell about their bad deeds. By remaining silent we only increase the dangers for our children.





You tell me what do you think? Should there be an open discussion or not?

We believe that if you have any question or fear in your mind then you must talk- to anyone- whom you trust, whom you like. That person can be anyone- mother, father, brother, sister, any relative, friend or teacher.

By discussing understanding and trust increase and fear is reduced. The knots of the heart untangle.

Just like by opening doors and windows light, wind, and freshness comes in the room similarly by opening closed hearts and minds, there comes courage.

By sharing our thoughts we also make friends. Elderly people can also become children's friends.

If you share your thoughts with someone then maybe they will also tell you their thoughts. Maybe they also want to talk to someone, maybe they are also searching for a friend and friendship.

Tell me, what do you think?

**Let's Talk, Let's Make Friends  
&  
Let the Light and Courage Grow!**





Kamla Bhasin (born 24 April 1946) is a feminist activist and social scientist. Her work focuses on gender, education, human development and the media. She is an advocate for equality between genders. She lives in New Delhi.

After she finished her M.A. from Rajasthan University, she got a fellowship to study Sociology of Development at Muenster University in West Germany. On finishing it in mid-1970, she taught at the Orientation Centre of the German Foundation for Developing Countries in Bad Honnef for about a year. She returned to India after that and worked in an NGO in Rajasthan. She then got a job offer from the Food and Agriculture Organisation to go to Thailand to do gender training for women from South Asia. Four years later, FAO posted her in New Delhi, giving her ample scope to focus on gender issues. She then started a South Asian feminist network called SANGAT.

She has written dozens of books, songs and slogans celebrating womanhood, books for children, and has created many posters and banners for different movements. She also conducts gender sensitization workshops gender, sustainable development and human rights at the local, national, and South Asian levels, for activists, senior policy makers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, police officers, U.N. staff etc.

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