

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

The power of child sexual abuse lies largely in the perpetrator's ability to blame-shift onto the victim. As children being abused, we have no choice but to accept this projection, as our view of our 'self' is formed by the adults around us. Much of the psychological damage comes from us internalising these beliefs about ourselves, which is a way for the perpetrators to evade taking responsibility for their actions. One of the things we need to do to recover is to 'exchange' the guilt, blame and shame that was dumped on us back onto our perpetrators — where it belongs — and be able to see that we were made to feel bad, not because we are bad, but as a way of the perpetrator being able to avoid feeling bad for what they were doing. Mentalising, and reflecting on our beliefs — where they came from and why they are there — is a really helpful exercise in recovery from child sexual abuse.

What the victim of CSA often thinks and feels:

- I am bad
- I am guilty
- I am ashamed
- I am powerless
- I am dirty
- I don't belong
- I am toxic

What the perpetrator 'should' think and feel, but often projects onto the victim:

- I am doing bad things
- I am guilty
- I should be ashamed
- I am acting out of my sense of powerlessness, to make someone else powerless
- I am engaging in dirty, defiling acts
- I belong in prison while I am committing these crimes
- My behaviours are toxic and contaminate others with negative feelings

When the victim dumps the blame back where it belongs:

- I am NOT bad
- I am NOT guilty
- I have NOTHING to be ashamed of
- I am NO LONGER powerless
- I am NOT dirty
- I DO belong
- I am NOT toxic

