



# INCEST

## Understanding the Unimaginable

**I**ncest is generally defined as any sexual contact or interaction between family members who aren't married. The exact legal definition of incest, however, varies from state to state. The broader definition includes family figures, such as step-parents, regardless of the biological relationship. "Sexual contact" includes, but is not limited to, intercourse. There are two types of incest.

### **Open Incest**

"Open" incest is family sexual abuse with blatant sexual contact. This includes any sex act or forced touching of the victim by the perpetrator, as well as any touching of private body parts, sexual kissing and hugging.

### **Hidden Incest**

"Hidden" incest is any inappropriate sexual behavior which could be seen as "accidental," making it eas-

ier for the perpetrator to rationalize or cover up his or her behavior. It's also more ambiguous and difficult for the victim to recognize but it's as intrusive as open incest. This includes sexual staring at private body parts, disrespect for privacy needs, inappropriate comments, pornographic photography and more.

### **Incestuous Families**

Incestuous families tend to be isolated from the world around them. There might be strict curtailment of outside activities or in choice of friends. In fact, "outsiders" are often spoken of disparagingly and family members learn not to develop trusting relationships with them. Within the family, however, there are no strict boundaries of privacy and personal feelings. The family allows for little or no individuality, and little value is placed on individual needs or feelings. An

incest victim growing up in this atmosphere is not able to acquire the self-esteem necessary to set limits on others' behavior.

### **Victims of Incest**

Because incest is a violation of trust and security children need, victims of both types of incest share a feeling of lack of safety and security, the need for constantly being on guard, and feelings of confusion and fear.

It's important for incest victims to realize that they're not to blame. Children don't have adult responsibility. They have no control over adults in the family.

It's equally important for incest victims of any age to receive competent professional help. Incest victims need to recover the self-esteem and the ability to trust that was taken from them. Without help, the problems will compound themselves in adult relationships.