

Episode 2, samsn's STRONGER: Silent All These Years / Disclosure

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On average, it takes 25.7 years for males to disclose their experience of childhood sexual abuse. Why?

Evidence shows that males are less likely than females to tell someone what happened and seek help. They often try to block the feelings (like fear and shame) resulting from the abuse, and cope by isolating themselves from others, or self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. Very few have ever met another guy who has experienced child sexual abuse.

What is it like to tell someone about your experience of childhood sexual abuse? What sort of journey towards healing and justice starts when you are finally able to verbalise what happened? What do the signs of distress look like for male survivors, and if someone does disclose, how should you respond?

Featuring (in order of appearance): Martin W, Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald AM, Les S, Lindsay G, Shane Greentree (SAMSN, Clinical Services Manager), Jarad G, Raelene Boxwell (SAMSN, Counsellor), Professor Rita Shackel, Matthew O, Professor Patrick O'Leary, Dr Judy Cashmore, Ryan C, Tony D, Luke S.

Resources for survivors:

<https://www.samsn.org.au/recovery-and-healing/resources-for-survivors/>

Music: Licensed via Audiio.com

OPENING / MARTIN - Luis Berra: *Dancing Michelangelo (Instrumental)*

LUKE - Carinthia: *Petrichor (Instrumental)*

CLOSING CREDITS - Seth Öphengon: *A Safe Place (Instrumental)*

SPEAKER	CONTENT
Rob Carlton	Welcome to SAMSN's 'Stronger', a podcast series featuring stories of resilience from male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and their allies. In some parts it <i>is</i> heavy going, so if you're not in the space to listen right now, switch to something lighter. But do come back. We learn a great deal about surviving and growing stronger than your past from survivors.
Felicity Blake	If what you hear stirs up strong feelings, know that you can contact SAMSN at samsn.org.au , or on 1800 472 676, or give Lifeline a call on 13 11 14.
Martin W	<p>My name is Martin. I'm a survivor of child sexual abuse. I'm 76 years old, and I first was able to speak my truth about my child sexual abuse when I was 72.</p> <p>My sexual abuse started when I was... the worst part of it was when I was six years old. And during that worst time I was away from my family unit for school, the long school holidays, and I was taken to the seaside and</p>

	<p>there were... there was, in those days, Punch and Judy on the seaside, on the beach. That Punch and Judy show - that 13th-century Punch and Judy show - was really striking to me, because it held some hope that I would get out of the trauma that I was in.</p> <p>Since I was six years old, I had this belief that I would recover. And I didn't know how that would be facilitated. But I, for the last 70 years, I knew... it was a belief that I had that I would recover. So I was up and game for pursuing any avenue that would give me some relief from my horror.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>What does it take to grow stronger than your past?</p> <p>I'm Felicity Blake; thanks for joining us for episode two of STRONGER, a podcast series from SAMSN, Survivors and Mates' Support Network.</p> <p>SAMSN's STRONGER shares the stories of survivors: the men, abused as boys, who - with extraordinary courage and resilience - are connecting with support and recovering from their childhood trauma. Not only did they survive; they have found ways to thrive.</p> <p>This is episode 2, titled 'Silent All These Years', and this time, we'll be exploring disclosure. In this context, 'disclosure' means telling another person about an incident or experience of sexual violence, like childhood sexual abuse.</p> <p>Here's our co-host and SAMSN's Ambassador, Rob Carlton.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>On average, it takes 25 years for males to disclose their experience of childhood sexual abuse. Academic research tells us that females tend to disclose much earlier. Males take longer, and are very selective about the few people they tell. Whether the abuse happened within the family, the community, or an institution (like at school or church), boys often carry painful secrets in silence for decades.</p> <p>There are lots of reasons why. Several of them are connected to the concept of masculinity, and we'll get into those in episode 4 of the podcast. Today we're going to hear about what stopped <i>these</i> survivors from disclosing, and what happened when they eventually did.</p> <p>Why don't children tell someone straight away? And why does it take so long for men to disclose?</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This is Robert Fitzgerald AM, former Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>In the Royal Commission, one of the most surprising learnings for us in the community, was the length of time between the first incidents of sexual abuse and disclosure, and the average length of time was, you know, you know, in the mid 20 - 20 years, you know, 25 years, 27 years. And really, nobody had understood that, everyone had assumed that most</p>

	<p>people that have been sexually abused, would disclose at a much closer point in time to the original occasion.</p> <p>The second thing is the reasons why people didn't disclose, and particularly in relation to men. And again, there were a number of factors. Firstly, depending on the nature of the institution, it was fear of not being believed.</p>
Les S	<p>And over the years, I've often blamed myself, I used to say to myself, why didn't I stop this? Why did I leave it for so long? Why didn't my parents know? How come they couldn't see what was going on? And I never told anyone because I didn't think anybody would believe me.</p> <p>My perpetrator was a female, and she was a friend of my mother's. She groomed me from the age of 10 and the sexual abuse stopped when I was 16.</p> <p>Well, I know that if I would have actually told someone, particularly in, if I wasn't selective about who I actually disclosed to, people would say, "Oh, good onya, mate! Gee, you're lucky having an older woman to have sex with." And I know that's what they would say, and I actually shudder when I think of that because it is so far from the truth that they don't understand the intricacies of actually being abused by a female perpetrator.</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>And that fear of not being believed often also came with punishment if you were in a boys' home, if you were in a particular school or a boarding school, but also if you were in a very devout family, a religious family, quite often that disclosure that somebody, particularly a priest, or a brother, teacher was doing something to you: one, it wouldn't be believed, but secondly, they would punish you for actually besmirching the name of the church or the school, whatever it might be.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This is Lindsay.</p>
Lindsay G	<p>I lived in a family that was dysfunctional. My father was a very distant emotional character, my mother was extremely emotionally needy. And then into this, this, this massive dysfunction, if you like, came this predator priest who obviously identified me as a very vulnerable child. And then he was my teacher in my first year of high school, and then started coming to our house. Now, my mother thought that was a wonderful thing, having a priest come to the house, because it, it sort of verified for her in the eyes of the Catholic community that she was a valuable person. So my mother was happy, therefore, I am happy. So this predator priest would come and visit, you know, maybe every second or third week and it went on for a couple of years. But he would then take me with him to the drive-in where he would molest me at the drive-in. And it was a period of me being solitary, if you like, and isolated, and hidden, and being very fearful of being speaking up. Because I knew if I spoke up, something bad would happen.</p>

Shane G	<p>My name is Shane Greentree, and I'm the clinical services manager at SAMSN.</p> <p>Shame is also something that can be a response to or part of the way that perpetrators can set up the abuse dynamic. So a lot of perpetrators use grooming tactics. And that can be lots of ways, but whether it's using threats, not only of violence against the child, but also about if you tell you'll break the family apart, and that'll be on you, and that's your fault. Or you don't want to upset Mum or Dad or whoever. So there's lots of ways that children are made to feel responsible for the abuse that's occurring to them and being perpetrated against them by an adult, when really that responsibility lies squarely with the perpetrator of the abuse.</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>We actually learned that nondisclosure meant that people went through years of confusion about all sorts of things. Why were they the victim? Why were they the only one in the class that was victimized? Of course there may have been others but they didn't know. Was it an indication that they were weak? Was it indication that they were homosexual? Or was it in fact, their fault? Had they in fact brought it on? So all of these, these questions which were never answered, perpetrated through, you know, the lives of people for many, many years.</p> <p>So I think what we learned in the Royal Commission was quite a lot about the fact that early disclosure really is beneficial.</p> <p>But then it's only beneficial if the person that hears it understands what's being said. And a lot of people didn't understand what was being said. One of the most interesting things is, when we did research about disclosure, most people said they had actually disclosed as a child, but they did so in a way that either the adults rejected, or more significantly, didn't understand it. They couldn't understand the gravity of what was being disclosed. Because no child says, "I've just been sexually abused," especially, you know, in the '70s, or '80s. And so we didn't even have the vocabulary, the language, the understanding, when children were disclosing to us, let alone, those that actually rejected it.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>In the absence of words to describe what's happening to them, children find ways to let adults know something's wrong. These can include avoiding the abuser, or the places where abuse happened (or is occurring), and demonstrating in behaviours their fear or discomfort in the hope that an adult will pick up on the changes and discover the underlying reason. They might also <i>try</i> to disclose by saying something like "I don't like Mr J, he's weird" to test out an adult's reaction.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>When a survivor of child abuse first tells someone else what was done to them, how that person reacts is integral to the survivor's recovery, and the way they experience the aftermath of the abuse. One of the most crucial factors is whether the person believes you at all.</p>

Les S	<p>However, I struggled on, I had good friends and one particular night when I was 17, I was probably like a pressure cooker and I just wanted to release this steam. And my friend and I we were driving, irresponsibly we were driving at the time and and I just blurted it out that I had a sexual disease and I've been having sex with a woman since I was 11 years old. And I think at that stage my friend was quite shocked so he stopped the car quite quickly, and the good thing about it: he didn't judge me, he believed me.</p>
Jarad G	<p>My name's Jarad.</p> <p>And the first time I got blind drunk, I started jumping in front of cars, and my friends didn't know what was happening, because I was a happy go lucky kind of guy. And I ended up sitting in a gutter and just spilling it all out to my best friend.</p> <p>And, you know, we were, we had grown up in a church together, and which, you know, my father was the pastor of that church. And so him and I both had the same adults around us who are, who were not our parents, but whom, you know, put into our lives. And he sort of said to me, you've got to tell them, or you gotta tell your parents, or you've got to tell them.</p> <p>And I chose, I told them, I didn't tell my parents, because there was a lot of fear and shame about telling them, but they then helped me to tell my parents.</p> <p>And so I think, you know, I did disclose at 17. But that wasn't an overnight process. There was three and a half, four years from whenever I, you know, that 13/14 age, where I started seeing it crop up in the news, and, and made a few logical jumps.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>Some survivors' disclosures are met with disbelief.</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>Equally, it was shocking when they went to trusted people, you know, clergy, or teachers, or mentors, who didn't believe them. But profoundly problematic is if a parent didn't believe, and then would not in the face of mounting evidence, change their position. And so, so many people live with this sort of sense of complete rejection, almost betrayal. The good news is for many, it does get resolved at some point. But for many others, it just doesn't.</p> <p>But I might say the most shocking cases that we heard were men in their 50s and 60s, where their parents haven't believed them. And that lived with them all their lives. In fact, one private session I did, the man, he was in his 50s, he went to the deathbed of his mother in hospital. And she had point blank refused to believe his story that he was abused by a priest. On her deathbed, he asked her, would she now finally acknowledge that he might have been abused, and she said, "No, I won't." And she died. That's unresolvable, it is completely unresolvable. And we found that over</p>

	<p>and over again, that where the parents fail to believe, and then didn't later on, acknowledge that, that was shocking.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>A common reason why children don't tell involves the tactics used by perpetrators to enforce secrecy.</p> <p>One of the grooming techniques used by predators is to psychologically manipulate the child into thinking they're a willing participant in their own abuse. From an adult position of power and control, the abuser tricks the child into keeping the abuse a secret.</p>
Raylene Boxwell	<p>My name is Raylene Boxwell, and I'm a social worker and work as a counselor for Survivors and Mates Support Network, SAMSN.</p> <p>Secrecy is a part of the abuse that has been experienced by a child. And they are given the task to keep what has happened to them a secret. How that impacts upon relationships includes things like not knowing who they can trust, feeling like they are to blame for what occurred, and feeling like they, because they didn't, haven't disclosed for such a long period of time, feeling some immense shame around that.</p> <p>An example of this might be a man that I was speaking to recently. And he talked about really feeling torn about the relationship that he had with his abuser. And the man really fostered this relationship in a way that allowed this man to feel really a lot of love and a lot of care for the person who harmed him. And, and so when he disclosed, he also felt like he was betraying the person who harmed him in many ways. And some of the dynamics that that's created in relationships, particularly for people in his life, such as his sisters and siblings, were things like, feeling like they couldn't say anything bad about the abuser. And he feeling like he had to protect the abuser, in many ways. So while he felt like he needed to protect the abuser, it also meant that he felt like he didn't, he didn't deserve protection for himself. And that continued throughout adulthood and is still a theme that he's working on now.</p>
Rita Shackel	<p>My name is Rita Shackel, and I'm currently a professor of law and ethics at the University of Sydney Law School.</p> <p>One of the main characteristics of sexual violence often, and certainly, sexual violence perpetrated against children is that cloak of of secrecy, that surrounds this type of violence, and that, that cloak of secrecy is often what enables the violence to occur and to continue for a really long time.</p> <p>We know that it's also often a deliberate strategy, the research around grooming, for example, points to the fact that it's not uncommon for perpetrators to actively isolate victims, from other people, or from each other.</p>

Jarad G	<p>Up until about that point, you know - and it's very common with abusers and victims - I thought my abuser was my friend. I, you know, part of the reason I allowed his advances (let's say advances), was because because of that. And because he wasn't an, you know, an old man, he was someone only about 10 or so years older than me. He had a girlfriend, and a great car, and all very sort of normal things which me, as a kid, looked to and wanted myself.</p> <p>And so, you know, I thought that I was a co-conspirator in my abuse, and carried, you know, a lot of guilt from that. But as I started seeing it happening in the news, I started to understand that actually, it was something that had been inflicted on me and not something which I had allowed, because I'd invited it.</p>
Felicity Blake	This is Matthew.
Matt O'H	<p>I suppose there becomes a time where not too far into the abuse, you've invested so much time in trying very, very hard to convey this... this nice relationship to people, that it becomes, it feels like it becomes a little bit too late to actually go back and say, well, actually, hang on. This has not been good, right from the very start, you know, right from the very first time that I spent the evening, you know, over at over the parish house. It's, you know... something very untoward was going on, right from, you know, that very initial stage. So that's one coping mechanism. I suppose that's the 'tricking mechanism': I tricked people, I tricked myself into believing that there was really nothing going on.</p>
Patrick O'Leary	<p>Hi, I'm Patrick O'Leary. I'm a professor and director of the violence research and prevention program at Griffith University.</p> <p>I remember working with a survivor who was sexually abused by by clergy and you know, he very much helped me understand about the not only the grooming nature of child sexual abuse, that that impacted on his ability and impacted on his feeling of safety to actually disclose, but that the degree of unpredictability. So this perpetrator sometimes would be absolutely delightful and tell him all these wonderful things that children want to soak up about themselves. And then unpredictably, sometimes he would be sexually assaulted. And there was an unpredictability to when this would occur. But only the perpetrator knew what would happen next, at any stage, the child didn't. And I think this helped me really understand that, how that impacted on his decision not to disclose, because that doubt about what would happen next, if I do disclose, was part of that trauma, part of that grooming. And part of that power that the perpetrator took from him in terms of understanding what would happen next.</p> <p>You know, grooming is such a tricky thing to define, because it becomes clear to us after the event, rather than during the event. And so picking up on a child's developmental capacity. You know, if you're an eight year old, you want to be really, you want to be loved, you want to be told good</p>

	<p>things, you want closeness you have a sense of, of hands-on-ness with things you like contact, physical contact in different ways you like to be noticed. And any adult who's a safe adult will pick up on some of these things in in a way that will try and honor the child. And perpetrators want to look exactly like a safe adult, because that's how they get away with it is, is appearing to be safe. But the underlying intention is to have access or to build trust, so that trust can be breached.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>Adult survivors are quick to question themselves about why they kept the secret for so long. They often judge their childhood selves through an adult lens, rather than remembering that they were kids when the abuse occurred. They were <i>children</i> trying to do their best to cope in a truly horrific situation. Here's Shane, SAMSN's Clinical Services Manager.</p>
Shane G	<p>That's also part of the work at SAMSN, is giving guys information about the dynamics of child sexual abuse, grooming tactics, revisiting the vulnerability of being a child, you know, these are adult men talking about these experiences, and often, you know, well into adulthood when they're first disclosing and talking about it. So it can be easy to forget that this was actually happening to a small child or a boy. And so that's also something that, you know, happens within the group as well as that we kind of remind people of the vulnerability of childhood and why you know, things happen, because often the guys will be like, I could have done something to stop this or resist, but that's their adult mind thinking back. And so that's something that we kind of take some time to explore with them as well.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>When survivors have kept their secret all the way into adulthood, what can happen that provokes disclosure, either deliberately, or accidentally?</p> <p>Here's developmental psychologist Dr Judy Cashmore.</p>
Judy Cashmore	<p>Yeah, there's things around sleeper effects, that people think that they're okay, and then it can be triggered, for example, by getting married, by having a breakdown of a relationship, and particularly actually having children. And then when children get to the age that they were at the time that they were abused, that can really trigger all sorts of things that bring things back that they had successfully buried, compartmentalized, reframed in different ways. And that can all come back and really become quite overwhelming for some men and, and women, of course, at times.</p> <p>We're not particularly good at, in our society, I think, dealing with people in stress or in grief. And we know that for PTSD and trauma, and these sorts of consequences, they bubble up, and they bubble up, sometimes at unexpected times. They bubble up when people are facing other stresses in their lives. And it may take family members completely by surprise to see it as a complete overreaction. I didn't think it was that bad. Why have they responded in such an extreme fashion? And what they're responding to is the cumulative effect.</p>

	<p>So getting support, both for the person who's dealing with it, and with the transparency and the support of everyone around them, is what's really critical.</p>
<p>Matt O'H</p>	<p>I disclosed to my wife. If I hadn't have disclosed, when I did, I'm pretty sure that I would have self destructed in some extraordinarily explosive sort of way, I think I would have quite, my marriage probably wouldn't have lasted. My... I probably would have been estranged from most of my family. I think it was an extremely important thing. And like I said before, I don't know why I disclosed when I when I disclosed, it was just something that snapped inside me that I just couldn't hold in any longer.</p> <p>And the response from my wife was, was extremely, extremely supportive. And it has been right throughout this whole period of time. You know, even, even today, coming into this interview, she gave me a big hug and said that she's very proud of me for being able to share these sorts of thoughts for other people to try and understand what it's like. It's... even all of these years on, it's an extremely emotional... it digs up really strong emotions.</p>
<p>Rob Carlton</p>	<p>Men often compartmentalise our emotional pain, put it in a box, and try to bury our memories of abuse. But the effects of child sexual abuse can emerge in our <i>current lives</i> in the form of addictions, relationship breakdowns, unstable emotions, and problems with authority. In seeking help with these effects - for example, by seeing a counsellor - long avoided memories may become overwhelming and lead to disclosure.</p>
<p>Lindsay G</p>	<p>The cathartic experience of saying "Things are not right with me, I need help" was very influential in me getting help with other issues that were, if you like, the comorbidity of having abuse issues. Those alcohol, and that the gambling stuff, and my poor relationships with my family were all improved when I went to seek help.</p> <p>The way I saw myself very much affected all those other issues. So I would do well in what I was doing and I'd start to rise up the ladder a bit with promotion and moving along. And then issues would come that I couldn't cope with or couldn't deal with. And I would see those issues very much as my inadequacy, my uselessness, my poor, if you like, my poor status as a person. They were all my perceptions. But they all impacted on my progression in the workplace, my relationships with my family, how I saw my connections with the community.</p> <p>And it was almost like I was repeating a cycle, I was repeating a cycle of, I would work really well, things would go well, there would be a crisis, I would withdraw, and go and seek some other new situation. Then I'd do well, there'd be a crisis, I would withdraw, and off we go again. So I was perpetuating this flight and fight response every time stress came along.</p> <p>But the real turning point came to me when a school I was working in. And the school I was working in was a school for special students. And a</p>

	<p>lot of them didn't have a lot of strong life expectancy. And a few of them passed away. And I was attached to quite a few of them. And one of them in particular who died. It really sort of set me back a little bit, that really rocked me on my haunches. And the social worker came to me one day and said, "Unless you're prepared to do something about this, you're gonna keep going down the tubes, here". So what she could identify was that I was an angry, controlling, noisy, loud person. And she could see that there was something troubling me. So she would come and visit me from time to time and we'd talked about the death of this child. And we talked about the things that affected our lives. And then she said to me, "Is there anything else that you want to tell me?" and I had developed such trust and faith in her that I told her about my childhood experiences.</p>
Ryan C	<p>And right at the very end of my drinking and drugging, I had no identity. I was a shell. And, and so my friend was the bottle. And I took drugs so I can drink more. And when I drank, I looked for drugs, and it all turned on me. And how can someone in that position know what to do?</p> <p>And I remember when I ended up in Prince of Wales psych ward. And I was confronted with being told that I need to stop drinking, and that was after a suicide attempt that morning. And I remember telling them, they can all go and get "effed". And it was because, is that they didn't understand what I was going through. And so I always push people away, because I didn't know how to deal with what I was experiencing. And so my go to was to drink and drug.</p> <p>And to cut a hell of a long story short, I was taken to Royal Prince Alfred sexual assault centre. And that's where my journey with regards to this particular subject around my life, which is the abuse that occurred or happened to me, I was able to start on the journey with.</p> <p>One process that came to mind with regards to a major, major breakthrough was... I think it would have been about three years in. We had a whiteboard in the counseling room, and we pinpointed particular moments where I'd been drinking and where I had major rock bottoms. And he said to me, "Ryan, do you, do you understand that you're drinking yourself to death?". And I was, I think it was 25 or 26. And I remember the feeling I had when I heard that. And that was the first time where I realized that I was actually doing that. And since then I have not gone back to it. And that was a major, poignant moment in my recovery where I realized I had someone who had my back with understanding.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>Things don't always go to plan.</p>
Tony D	<p>Hi, my name is Tony Daly. I have resided in Sydney most of my life with stints overseas with my sport. My situation was announced to the community by the front page of a newspaper back in 2017.</p>

	<p>Since my article was on the front page of the newspaper, and that was because, you know, I was an ex-Wallaby. I played for Australia for eight years with rugby union. And I think because, you know, if Tony Daly, an ex-Wallaby who played in the front row against the All Blacks was abused and can come out and tell people about it, well, it gives the people the confidence and the courage to do that. Not everyone does that.</p> <p>It's a matter of not being scared and having the courage to announce it. And that's what stops you, because you feel ashamed. You don't know how people close to you are gonna react, you don't know how people are gonna take you because of that. And I took a risk. And, you know, it came out in the newspaper, and it has affected me.</p> <p>And I've had many guys ring me without even being, you know, and I've said, well, look, I just wanted to contact you because, you know, I followed you in sport and I never realized that you were abused and you've given me the courage to sort of go out and get some help.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>When you disclose your abuse, as an adult survivor, what kind of responses do you receive?</p> <p>Matthew found that some people he told preferred to “close the door” on his disclosure.</p>
Matt O'H	<p>I'm really okay with disclosing to pretty much anyone, if they if I feel that it's going to do some have some benefit for them, in telling them, I'm not a you know, I'm not someone who's had childhood sexual assault as a major part of my life. It is a part of my life, it's a very important part of my life. And I'd really like to be able to, you know, continue to try and help people understand, from the point of view of a survivor of childhood, I'd like people to understand, from the point of view of a survivor of childhood sexual assault, how important the the process can be to, to all of the people surrounding surrounding it. There's a lot, there's an awful lot of hard work involved. But it's a bit it's a really, it's a really worthwhile process to go through.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>Disclosing that you're a survivor of sexual violence isn't something that you only do once. You do it repeatedly, throughout your life, deciding with each new relationship whether or not it's important or helpful to share that information. And if you do... how much do people actually need to know?</p>
Matt O'H	<p>I'm just gonna go on to say that it doesn't, it doesn't ever disappear from your life, which is, I suppose one of the downsides, it doesn't ever get to the stage where you can close the door and say, "That never happened to me." And I think it's an important thing to be able to keep that door open.</p> <p>There's been a number of people that I've disclosed to that haven't been, I suppose, as supportive as I would like. And some of the things that they, that they do, you get a sense from some people that they just don't want</p>

	<p>to know. They don't want to know, because they don't want to take on the burden of having to deal with problems. Maybe they've got their own issues. Or maybe they just really don't care that much about who you who you are, and what you're saying. I think there are people out there who you disclose to that you wish that they wish sorry, that you could just close that door. Say, "Okay, we've talked about it. Let's... You know, that's it. We never need to move. We never need to go back there. We never need to talk about those sorts of things ever again". And there are people around me who were like that, and, you know that that's, part of life. That's how they deal with it. I'd prefer that they deal with it differently. And, you know, sometimes no amount of work seems to, seems to help them comprehend that. But it's, you know, my life goes on and I can keep in touch with the people that are really important and special to me.</p>
Felicity Blake	Mark had a mixed experience of disclosure.
Mark W	<p>The first person that I disclosed to was a girlfriend that I had at the time, we were going through a bit of a rough patch, and I was feeling like, I need to talk about it. I've never told my parents about what happened. And I told the girlfriend that I was with at the time about what had happened. And she seemed to understand and seemed to believe what I was talking about. A few weeks later, we had a fight about something. And she then threatened to disclose it to my parents. And I guess that's how that relationship pretty much imploded because we didn't last much longer after that. Because I felt that there was a sense of betrayal. That really knocks you with your sense of identity and we sit.</p> <p>I disclosed to my wife after we'd been married for three years. We had a very long discussion about it. And that was when I first started seeing a psychologist about it. And I just never felt that I was getting any further because going to the psychologist and having those talks and reliving the experience. I guess I felt like I was a hamster on a wheel because I wasn't getting anywhere. And I was just going in circles with what we were talking about.</p> <p>My wife actually said to me, I think you need to tell your brother because you're going to need, you know, that additional bit of help. So I rang my brother and he was in the United States. And I disclosed to my brother what had happened. When I did tell my brother, he said, Oh, that would explain why in that period of your life, these things happened. And he knew exactly who it was that was my perpetrator, or my main perpetrator.</p> <p>I could hear it in his voice that he was a bit shocked. But the fact that he had an understanding of the fact that I'd actually changed as a person, and the fact that he could actually pick when that time was, and actually who my perpetrator was, I guess that was sort of a sense of relief for me. I guess the reason my brother was fairly aware of who the perpetrator was, is because he was someone that was in the local community. My mum had actually asked me a couple of times, if I'd ever been, you know,</p>

	<p>to his place or been involved and because of the grooming and the abuse I always denied that there'd ever been any involvement with him at all. And I guess, being able to disclose it to my brother meant that at least one other person in my family knew about it.</p> <p>I guess one of the biggest things that's helped me to start to get my identity back as to who I am, where I fit in the world has been to disclose to people. In particular, my wife, and we've, we've talked about many things along the way. But more importantly, knowing that there are other people out there who've been through the same thing.</p> <p>And there are a few people around where we live that are friends of my wife, because she felt she needed somebody to talk to. And I have actually had a couple of them ask me questions. And it's actually been quite good for me. And I think it's a really good part of my recovery.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>Male survivors often speak about the differences between disclosing their abuse to a professional, and talking about it with other men who are survivors too.</p>
Luke	<p>I've only disclosed to, you know, really close friends who I can feel are emotionally there, can really understand it from, like, an emotional viewpoint. But like I said before, if you're, it's really it's so difficult to talk about. You know, even with family members, I found like even the subject, bringing the subject up is just like... because there's so much there's so much history, there's so much tension there around it, it's so difficult to sort of start knowing where to start.</p> <p>But I think I've also been surprised by how understanding some people are as well. So it's not all, it's not all negative, it's like, if I had to disclose to someone, they really get it, it's so worth the effort. Like it just makes the relationship so much deeper. And I think especially when you start telling people and you don't feel judged, that's when things really start to ease.</p> <p>Yeah, it's really like, revealing something about yourself that can have, really, it feels like the biggest thing in the world, or it feels like, Oh, shit, I'm going to be judged for this or It feels like, you know, people won't understand. But I don't know, once you sort of get around that you sort of get that off your chest, you sort of start to realize that, you know, these terrible things sort of do happen and people are there. There is love there and that people are going to support you with whatever you decide to sort of disclose.</p> <p>I guess, I've only told a handful of people sort of what I was dealing with and how I was, you know, my admissions at the time. And yeah, definitely, it was, I think, as a 26 year old at the time, it was really, it was tough to come to terms with that, the fact that I had to go to a hospital, you know, for a mental health reason and have no concrete, you know, no visible... like it wasn't like I had a broken leg or a broken arm or something and I</p>

needed to be fixed. It was just this sort of process where I was really stuck and I didn't have an outlet.

There was definitely a power imbalance at times. I felt it the most with the clinicians. It was sort of, you know, because you're opening up, you're telling all your vulnerabilities or your symptoms, and they're sort of just sitting there, you know, taking them on, and it's sort of, it's not a level playing field, whereas the group, I found, everyone was on a similar plane, and you could sort of just, you know, you're just talking about what you need to, there was no pressure, I guess, in a way.

Whereas with the health system, with the public system, that it felt like there was a lot of pressure to sort of get things out and really recover. It was a really traditional approach that I found was a bit pressuring in a way.

I really only, I've only told, probably a handful of people close friends, who I think, yeah, were really... I could really trust with it. I've always felt a sense of trust with a therapist to be able to tell them because that's what you're there for, you're there to work on your issues, and you're there to open up. But it doesn't necessarily mean it's always easy.

It took a lot of time to sort of be able to talk individually with someone. But it paid off. It really paid off, like opening up individually to that therapist I was working with who eventually led me to SAMSN. And I don't think I would have had the confidence to do this or to disclose my story if I hadn't done that eight week program.

I've been quite lucky, like I've had, I've had pretty good, anyone I've disclosed with one on one, it's been quite, the reception has been great. Like it's sort of been, they've been quite understanding and really helped. I remember I was skateboarding one time with a friend. And it was sort of on the forefront of my mind, I didn't really want to bring it up, because we were just relaxing and just doing our own thing. But eventually, I got to a point because he knew me from a very young age. This was a close friend from school, because he'd known me throughout the whole experiences. And throughout my whole life, I really felt that sense of trust with him. So eventually, I ended up bringing it up with him. And he was very understanding and his initial reaction, you know, I think was a bit of shock. Because I think it's hard to, it's hard to stomach, like when someone when someone opens up to you about, you know, this kind of experience.

You know, the fact that it sort of happens is, you know, it's such a great, great shame, but it was sort of - it was really nice to sort of be able to look into someone else's eyes and just sort of be like, "Hey mate, you know, this is what's happened. This is what I'm dealing with. Thank you for understanding".

Jarad G	<p>I can imagine if I'd been 13. And someone had talked about it. Someone accessible, not just a news story, I might actually have spoken up before I got blind drunk and tried to kill myself at 17. You know, I might have spoken up, and then I would have dealt with it, I would have crossed so many boxes off in my teenage years, not in my 20s. And so I think that's why I'm so passionate. That's why I'm willing to do things like this. I'm just so passionate about the conversation. I think the conversation is critical and talking about it is critical. And I, you know, there is no way that you can deal with this on your own.</p> <p>And, you know, yeah, I, again, in that group, I was so privileged to be hearing their stories and be part of their first disclosure. But also was just like recognizing how at 35 I was so far beyond that first disclosure, and, and, you know, just thinking this, people have got to start talking about this earlier. People have to start dealing with this earlier, as early as possible. You know, it can't be swept under the rug.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>So, what can we do, going forward, to protect kids and ensure that - if something does happen - they can disclose, and adults will believe them and take action?</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>So we hope now that we've actually got a discourse happening with children with young people around sex, around, you know, the possibility of sexual abuse, and about the ability to disclose. And today what we find with younger people, they will disclose, but again, it's a bit oblique.</p> <p>They will tell a friend that somebody is acting weird, they'll use their social media to actually reach out to a group to say, you want to avoid Mr. X or Mr. Y because of this.</p> <p>They'll actually use intermediaries to actually tell their stories. And even so some won't mention it at all, many people still don't disclose until many years later.</p> <p>So going forward, what we have to do is try to encourage people to disclose close to the time of the event. It has to be safe. And most importantly, the person that receives the information has to do something with it, whether it's formally reporting it or some other action.</p> <p>It's no good if the person discloses, and then they're shut down. That's going to be catastrophic.</p>
Rita Shackel	<p>Child sexual abuse can occur anywhere. I think that's a really important message. The biggest risk is actually opportunity.</p> <p>So I think prevention is very much about acknowledging the fact that child sexual abuse is very common, unfortunately, and sadly, it's very common within families. And I think that there is still a resistance to accepting that that is the reality.</p>

	<p>Child sexual abuse can happen in any home. It happens in our homes. People tend to think it happens in someone else's home, or it happens to other people's children. Child sexual abuse occurs within our own homes, it occurs. Well, it's perpetrated against our own children, and I think if we can, if we can get people thinking that way, then I think that's really a big step towards prevention. I think it will make people a lot more vigilant. I think parents do need to be vigilant. And that vigilance is born of the acceptance that it can happen within our own home.</p>
Rob Carlton	Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>In relation to the raising of children today, I think parents and educators generally do understand that it's part of our role and their role, to try to build the resilience of children. To build, to build and empower children to be able to deal with the potential difficulties and risks. And so in a sense we are and we have started down that track, in terms of trying to educate children. We start to talk about sex in a different way, we start to talk about inappropriate and appropriate behaviors, we start to encourage people to disclose. And children today are more likely to talk and discuss and disclose than they were in the past, but not all children. And in not all circumstances is it safe to do so.</p> <p>Our education system is very much geared to age appropriate education of children in a way that didn't exist in my day at all. And it's important to build resistance within the child, because the very last line of defense against an attack is in fact, the child. You know, a person that's going to perpetrate has to overcome a number of barriers. They have to overcome their own moral conceptions that this is wrong. They have to overcome the opportunistic barriers, how am I going to do this? How am I going to find a spot where I can do this? They've actually got to overcome the child's resistance to it at the end. And so it's not the child's fault that they get abused. But if you can build that resistance, you give that child a little bit of armor, a little bit of ammunition.</p> <p>The second thing is, and it's absolutely critical now, is parents believe their children. So when the children say that something's not quite right, the guy down the road is a bit weird. You've probably got to be attentive to it. Does that mean, you rush off and report it to the police, or to the child protection authorities? No, not necessarily. But you have to, the first thing is to believe what the children are saying.</p> <p>And if there starts to be a pattern in those statements, or a genuine concern, or a change in the way in which the child's behaving, then you've got to go and seek assistance. Ring up the line, the child protection line, talk to people about this issue. You don't have to be certain that something's happening, you don't have to jump to the conclusion that yes, your child is, has been abused or is at risk of abuse. But if you're in doubt, talk to people that know. And that's critically important.</p>

	<p>Now, previously, nobody would talk to anybody. I would think today, most parents are willing to have those conversations. The danger is that some parents are jumping to extraordinary conclusions, particularly in relation to early childhood development, childcare centres, you know, you keep hearing another five year old sexually abused my son, that is very unlikely to have occurred, but something might be going wrong. We've got others that, you know, are too quick, to make judgments about certain types of men, you know, if they're a cleric, or they're this then they've got a propensity to abuse, that's not true. So we've got to avoid jumping to conclusions. But all that aside, I'd rather you jump to a conclusion and act, than to be indifferent to what a child or a young person is saying. Because that's the worst. So even if you get it wrong, it's better to have at least acted.</p> <p>The other thing too, I think long term is I look back on the people that I've spoken to, they respect and value what their parents did. They look back and say at least Mum cared, at least Dad did something, you know, he went up to the school when he said something. And that is important. You've got to look back and say these people who cared for me and loved me actually did something. They might have got it wrong. But you know, that matters.</p> <p>So my view is listen, and be prepared to believe. I think that's a big step in Australian parenthood, as we go forward. It's a big change, big change.</p>
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Closing Credits

<p>Rob Carlton</p>	<p>SAMSN is the only specialist charity in Australia dedicated to helping all male survivors of child sexual abuse and their families. Each year, SAMSN provides free services to hundreds of male survivors and their supporters. SAMSN believes that male survivors of child sexual abuse can recover and thrive. Help him believe. Donate today. Visit: samsn.org.au (that's s-a-m-s-n).org.au. Remember to rate and share this online, because it helps others - especially survivors - to find it.</p>
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<p>Felicity Blake</p>	<p>STRONGER was created for Survivors and Mates Support Network entirely remotely during the pandemic of 2020 and 21. It was produced and directed by me, Felicity Blake of The Dove Media, with Julie Blyth of SAMSN. Our Executive Producer is Craig Hughes-Cashmore. Interview help from Les Spencer and Shane Greentree. Audio editing by Dion Brooks. Transcript assistance from Dr Anna Kamaralli and Melanie Teychenne-King. A big “thank you” to our co-host and SAMSN Ambassador, Rob Carlton.</p> <p>Very special thanks to all 32 of our participants; your insights make others STRONGER.</p>
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