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Interview with Risa Shaw starts at .44. 4 minute break 10:39-14:39

Introduction (Mark Alyn)

I'm Mark Alyn, along with the insane Darrell Wayne. There's a situation that's, I guess becoming more aware. It's quite serious and that's why I thought this would be a good topic for us. Sibling sexual abuse. Our guest is Risa Shaw. Risa, welcome to Late Night Health.

Risa Shaw

Mark, thank you very much. Thank you for having me, and thank you for bringing this book and this topic to the public which is what we really want to do, so we can have prevention and healing.

Mark Alyn

And the name of the book is?

Risa Shaw

Not Child's Play: An Anthology on Brother-Sister Incest. This is the second edition.

Mark Alyn

And this happened to you?

Risa Shaw

It happened to me. It happened to me; I'm a survivor of brother sister incest.

Mark Alyn

How do you think that's affected your life in general? And at what age did this happen?

Risa Shaw

It happened when I was 12, and it wasn't a one-time thing. It was over a period of time. So I was a pre-teenager. And it's affected my life in all kinds of ways. It's affected my life in terms of how I feel about myself... confidence, trust, self-trust. Whether or not I feel worthy or not. It's affected my life in terms of health. There are times when I don't want to see a certain doctor, or I don't want to have a certain condition dealt with because of trauma that has happened in the past. It's affected my life in terms of intimate and sexual relationships because it was sexual abuse. It's affected my life in terms of relationships with people in general. Just having trauma responses to things that are not intended in any [specific] way, but that it hits something in me that brings out a response that might not be in that context. If that makes any sense to you.

Mark Alyn

Sure. You're 12 years old. You're a kid. You're a child. Of course I think that that people are kids until they're 40. But did you tell anybody? Did you tell your parents?

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Interview with Risa Shaw starts at .44. 4 minute break 10:39-14:39

Risa Shaw

I did not tell my parents until I was 24. And I did not tell anyone else until I was 19. Part of that was because of the amount of shame and of feeling complicit and feeling like I did something to bring this on, which in reality nothing is farther from the truth. I didn't bring anything to... I didn't do anything to bring the sexual abuse on. And no one who has been victimized brings that on. There's just nothing farther from the truth. And because of the shame and the self-blame, and I thought that I would get in trouble if I told anybody, I didn't tell anybody until, like I said, when I was 19. I finally told an acquaintance. It took a long time, like a couple of months for me to actually be able to choke out the words. And then I did see a therapist some time in my early 20s. That led me to feeling like if I was going to go home and be with my family, I had to tell them otherwise I couldn't be around them.

Mark Alyn

Can you be with your family today? With family members? What about your brother?

Risa Shaw

I am with family members in different ways. Part of what this kind of abuse does is it damages everybody in the family. It damages the person who harms. It damages the other kids in the family. And it damages the parents, as well as the one who was sexually abused. Part of the reason for getting this book out again and getting to talk to people like you is to get it into the public discourse... get awareness about the fact that it's happening so that we can stop other kids from having to go through this. And so that more and more survivors, as well as other family members, including the perpetrators, can start to really deal with this in meaningful ways.

Mark Alyn

Do you think it has always been there and people like you held it in for years and just never talk about it and forget about it? That as the victim, because that's what you were, you are... you're embarrassed. You're shamed... that it happened. That you don't want to be accused of "it's your fault, you did it." Is there any truth to what I just said?

Risa Shaw

I mean there's truth to all of the shame and embarrassment and not wanting to talk about it because you feel like you're going to get blamed. But it's not the victim's fault. There is not one ounce of truth to that kind of statement.

Mark Alyn

Therapy. I've talked to many therapists over the years and they say almost everybody needs therapy, including therapists. Is that something that you would recommend for families to go through, in the case that there was sibling sexual abuse?

<https://www.latenighthealth.com/not-childs-play/>

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Risa Shaw

Yes, I would. I recommend therapy to anybody else as well. It certainly is one of the things that that has gotten me through life over the past 50 plus years. I think that when a family finds out, when parents find out that a brother is abusing a sister... let me just say something, Mark... I want to say something about language, and I also want to say something about who gets harmed and who harms. There are boys who are also victimized by other boys, by men, and by some women and girls. So I anything I say is not with the intent to minimize or dismiss the boys who have been victimized. This is real. It happens. And it is just as bad for them as it is for girls. And, I center girls and women in my book and in much of my work, because all of this happens in the context of this society we live in, which values males over females and which teaches males how to have power over females. The other thing I'll say is there's no good terms for this – so I don't want people to get caught up on, well, is it “sexual abuse”? Is it “sexual assault”? Is it “sibling or brother sister” or... it doesn't matter. It's all a violation by one child to another child in a family with a sexual violation, with betrayal and. It's lifelong trauma that that is then ongoing.

Mark Alyn

And doing this interview, I believe it's international women's month or week.

Risa Shaw

On the 8th, yes.

Mark Alyn

On the 8th day

Risa Shaw

Let's make it the year. Let's just make it a year.

Mark Alyn

Let's look at the year of the women. Yeah, absolutely.

You mentioned your work. Is this your work? Is this what you do?

Risa Shaw

This is what I've done on the side since the mid 1980s. My professional work was as a professor of interpreting, translating, and linguistics, sociolinguistics. Also, I'm an activist. I'm retired from teaching full time. I still interpret some and because I've been able to retire from those jobs, I was able to spend time and get the 2nd edition out.

Mark Alyn

You're too. You're too young to. Retire, go back to work.

<https://www.latenighthealth.com/not-childs-play/>

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Risa Shaw

I'm not sure. I'm not sure I'm any younger than you there.

Mark Alyn

I'll bet you are.

The name of the book is *Not Child's Play* and it's an anthology, A collection of stories that our guest Risa Shaw has put together to help other families and victims. And it... I just... you know... I'm the oldest of three. And I have two younger sisters. And I just can't imagine, in any way shape or form... and somebody told me recently that I let them push me around – not in a sexual way. But we should talk about that because it is about power.

All right, we're going to take some time out. Our guest, the author of *Not Child's Play*. Her name is Risa Shaw. I'm Mark Alyn, along with the insane Darrell Wayne. Be sure to join us at [latenighthealth.com](https://www.latenighthealth.com) That's [latenighthealth.com](https://www.latenighthealth.com). We'll have a way for you to get in touch with Risa if you need some help, as well as a way to get hold of her book. We'll be back in just a couple of moments don't go away.

(10:40-14:39 Break with instrumental music in the background. Mark Alyn: Late Night Health is proud of our partnership with the EBC, the Evolutionary Business Council. Check them out at [EBCouncil.com](https://www.ebcouncil.com). Other voice: You're listening to Late Night Health with Mark Alyn. The show continues in a moment. Commercials for Bright Hear, Late Night Health, Write it Right, and more.)

Mark Alyn

Late Night Health continues. I'm Mark Alyn, along with the insane Darrell Wayne. This is a very serious topic, sexual abuse between siblings. And our guest I should say is Risa Shaw. Risa is this all about power? From what I've read, from what I've heard from the experts I've talked to over the years, that sexual abuse is not about sex. Sex is beautiful. It's intimate. It can be lovely. It can be bad, it can be good. But it's still intimacy. This is not intimate. This is power, isn't it?

Risa Shaw

It is. It's about power. It's also about sex in using sex as a tool to gain something in. Can I say that again?

Mark Alyn

Sure.

Risa Shaw

OK it. It is about power. There's no question about that. And it's also about sex, Mark, because it's using sex as a tool to use power over someone else. And so the tool of betrayal is not only... first of all in this case... it's your brother, and a peer, and probably someone you trusted and were close to, and are expected to remain close to. But it's also about

<https://www.latenighthealth.com/not-childs-play/>

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using our bodies. It puts us in an adversarial relationship to our bodies because we feel like our bodies betrayed us and our bodies didn't betray us. Our brothers betrayed us. But they used our bodies against us. And that affects how we not only see ourselves, but also how we then care for our bodies and ourselves throughout the rest of our lives. And so this is a health program and specifically there are health ramifications. If I can give you a couple of examples.

Mark Alyn

Sure.

Risa Shaw

A good friend of mine doesn't want to go to the dentist. Doesn't get dental care on a regular basis because it is such a traumatic experience to go to the dentist and have dental work because of what her brother did to her. Another friend of mine, when she was in her late 40s, she asked me to go to a doctor's visit with her. This is a doctor's visit that she had been putting off for 10 years, and she had been putting it off for 10 years because of the effects of the trauma. Both of these are survivors of brother-sister incest. Both of these people. And she finally went to the doctor for the reason that she needed to be there. And she had me come with her. And that was part of the reason that she could actually get this health concern addressed, but it took 10 years.

Mark Alyn

Is there a way to prevent? This I mean parents need to be aware, don't they?

Risa Shaw

Yes, I think that there are ways to prevent it. I think that, one, parents need to have this in the forefront of their minds as a possibility. I think that they need to know that this is happening. It happens across economic class, race, geography, ability, education levels. And I think that they have to really think about the fact that if they're looking away, if they're dismissing the possibility, if they're saying, "well, boys will be boys", if they're not attending to changes in behaviors of their kids, that they're really doing their kids a disservice and they are contributing to possible harm.

Mark Alyn

It's got to be a criminal activity.

Risa Shaw

It is. I don't know if it's on any criminal, in any statute. But it's criminal.

Mark Alyn

Are there more enlightened men today, do you think?

<https://www.latenighthealth.com/not-childs-play/>

Interview with Risa Shaw starts at .44. 4 minute break 10:39-14:39

Risa Shaw

I hope so. I hope that we are raising boys in a way that they would not only never consider doing this, but that they would also watch out for it and teach their own kids – and when I say their own kids, it could be the kids in the neighborhood, it could be their nieces and nephews – to also make sure that the power imbalances that are inherent in our society don't get carried on in our families.

Mark Alyn

You know, as we're talking, I'm thinking there's gotta be a way of a catharsis, of saying, “okay, it happened. I have to get along with my life”. Would an apology help? Would from a perpetrator, to say “I'm sorry, I didn't know what I was doing. I was. A kid”... Whatever it is, does that, would that help or not?

Risa Shaw

It's a great question and it's a great place to start and an apology will never hurt. And it's also a single act and it's not the end of the road. So an apology can be part of acknowledgement. That acknowledgement then needs to also lead to ownership and accountability. The perpetrator then needs to take responsibility for what they did. And they may have been a kid, but they caused harm. And that harm is an ongoing harm. They also are in that position, in in large part because of harm that was probably caused to them. But they need to take responsibility for harm that they caused. And then they also need to – that's not enough, that's not the end – they also need to get to a place, I believe, where they can speak out about it and that they can get past their own shame so that they can make a difference in other people's lives. So, apology is good. It's a step. It's not the end of the road. And, accountability can mean all kinds of things, but it's taking that responsibility and then figuring out how to make repair with the survivor, if the survivor wants to have repair made for them.

Mark Alyn

I mean this is, to me, it's a mind blowing situation. How a brother who's supposed to protect their younger sisters... It's generally an older brother to a younger sister? What about the other way around? A younger brother to an older sister?

Risa Shaw

Generally, it's an older brother to a younger sister. I know of situations where it's an older brother to a younger brother. And I know of one situation where it was an older sister to a younger brother. Again, we're talking about this in the context of the way males are treated in our society, and so that's why it is in large part males sexually abusing younger females and sometimes younger males.

<https://www.latenighthealth.com/not-childs-play/>

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Mark Alyn

And it would seem to me that the boys who become men, who have been perpetrators, potentially could do this to women in the community.

Risa Shaw

It's definitely a potential. And I think that even if they never sexually abuse anyone again, you can see it come out in relationships and behaviors. Whether it's with coworkers or family members or friends that that sense of "I am more worthy, "I have more power," "I need to exercise my power," that that can come out in a multitude of ways and that's not good for them either.

Mark Alyn

Are there any signs that indicate that a girl has been sexually abused by her brother? I mean. I would think, you know, somebody who's bright and bubbly and outgoing becomes withdrawn. That would be one thing that I would hopefully notice. Other signs?

Risa Shaw

Yes, I think there are all sorts of behaviors to watch for. The withdrawal is one. Changes in behavior overall. Angry, they might show up as angry outburst, recklessness, rebelliousness, distance between siblings who, where there hadn't been distance before. Or fighting between them. It can show up in overachieving. It can show up in not stopping talking. I mean, so it really can show up in a multitude of ways and...

Mark Alyn

I have to I have to interrupt and say that we're out of time. The book is called *Not Child's Play* by Risa Shaw. Risa, thank you very much for sharing your story with us. We really appreciate that. And look forward to the next edition because this is edition #2

I'm Mark Alyn. Darrell, thank you very much for everything you do.

Darrell

My pleasure

Mark Alyn

And thank you at home for listening. Have a great week everybody. Most importantly have a healthy week. See you next time.

(instrumental music)