

Case Study – Child Sexual Abuse (Historical)

A good friend that is aware of the work you and your friends (pod) are doing around transformative justice, has just reached out to you about needing support in beginning an accountability process with a family member who sexually abused her as a child.

Lena was sexually abused by her uncle, Luis, for a period of four years while living in the same home. She is now 26 years old and the abuse happened between the ages of 9 and 13. While in college, she witnessed many people being open and loud about the ways they had experienced sexual abuse. This inspired her to reflect on what had happened to her, begin to open up to close friends about what she had experienced, and embark on a lengthy process of healing. This is still something that is very difficult for her to talk about, but through reflection and countless conversations with her community, she has come to the decision that she wants to have a conversation with her family about the abuse and engage her uncle in an accountability process, if possible.

Lena is the eldest of two children. Her sister Lorena is two years younger than her, and Lena is unsure as to whether her sister also experienced abuse through her uncle. Their mom was a single mom and was not very present because she worked long hours. They were often left with their grandma Lolis and their uncle Luis, whom they shared a home with at the time. Her grandma is 65 years old and loves Lena and Lorena deeply. Lena has a very beautiful and intimate relationship with her, and her grandma is extremely supportive of her and Lorena. The abuse finally stopped when Lena was 13 and Lorena was 11 because they moved into their own apartment with their mom. At age 20, Lena disclosed to her sister what their uncle had done to her, but Lorena dismissed her and asked that she didn't start any drama or add stress to the family. After this conversation, Lena never said anything else about it to her sister, nor got the opportunity to ask her whether she had also experienced abuse. Their uncle Luis and grandma are some of the very few family members that they have here in the U.S. Most of their family still lives back home in Ecuador. Lena has never told her mom or grandma about the abuse. Her sister's response to her disclosure made her feel extremely self conscious and afraid of speaking about it.

Even though their mom was not very present, Lena has a very special and close relationship with her mom. She is now living back at home with her mom in Oakland, CA. She moved back about three years ago after finishing up her studies at UCLA. Her sister Lorena moved out with her boyfriend when she was 19 and has been sporadically attending community college in Oakland. While in college Lena kept in constant

communication with her mom, but not so much with her sister. Lena has a loving, but also complicated relationship with her sister. The fact that her sister was so dismissive of her really stayed with Lena and hurt her deeply. Lorena also was not as close to family as Lena was. She often prioritized friends while growing up, and starting in middle school spent most of her time at other people's homes. Her uncle continues to live with her grandma. Lena feels most afraid of her grandma's response because Luis is her son, and she feels nervous about what the stress could do to her grandma. Lena thankfully has an amazing group of friends in Oakland, many of whom also attended college with her, and she feels confident that they will support her through this process. They are also heavily involved with community organizing, and understand and respect Lena's decision to not get law enforcement involved, and instead use transformative justice.

For Lena, there are many layers of fear when it comes to holding her uncle accountable. First, they don't have much family here in the U.S., which makes it really difficult for Lena to think about tension existing within their tight knit and small family. Second, she, her uncle, her mom, and her sister are all undocumented. This has always made it extremely scary for Lena to tell folks about her abuse, especially anyone who she feels could get law enforcement involved. Even though she holds a lot of anger toward her uncle, she also does not believe the punitive system will solve anything for her or her family, and does not wish for her uncle to be deported. For this reason and for the purpose of having a healing and open process with her family, she has reached out to you about supporting her in this accountability process. She is hoping you and your pod can provide guidance to her as to how to approach her family and what she should be thinking about when beginning this process.