

# Healing the Hurt: Caring for the Sexually Abused Child



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# Agenda – Sexual Abuse Overview

- Sexual Abuse Education
- When a Child Discloses Abuse
- The Grieving Process
- Building Resiliency

# 39 MILLION People



Photo by Matt Rourke, Associated Press, 2011

# Sexual Abuse

- 1 in 4 girls
- 1 in 6 boys
  - Will be sexually assaulted by age 18
- Sexual abuse rarely has a witness
- Abuse occurs in all racial, religious and ethnic groups, as well as at all socio-economic levels
- Child sexual abuse is seldom a one time occurrence

# What is Child Sexual Abuse?

- Sexual Assault
  - Intercourse with child without consent
  - Oral, anal and with objects
  - Penetration however slight
- Statutory Sexual Assault
  - Intercourse with child under age 16
  - Perpetrator is 4 or more years older

# What is Child Sexual Abuse?

- Indecent Assault
  - Touching without penetration
- Exposure
  - Showing or exposing body parts
- Engaging in acts with child
- Facilitating the child to engage in acts/or watch acts with someone else
- Acts by **COMMISSION/OMMISSION**

# Sexual Abuse Education

## Myths of Sexual Abuse

- Children lie about sexual contact with adults
- All children who experience sexual abuse are traumatized
- Children who are victims of sexual abuse usually tell someone
- Victims of abuse will go on to reoffend others

# Sexual Abuse Education

## Myths of Sexual Abuse

- Child sexual abuse is usually committed by strangers
- Siblings of victims are not harmed by abuse
- Most sexual abuse occurs as the result of an uncontrollable urge
- Child victims will never really heal from their abuse



# Sexual Abuse Education

## Myths About Offenders

- All sex offenders are male
- The majority of sex offenders are caught and in jail
- Most sex offenders re-offend
- Sexual abuse rates are higher than ever and continue to climb
- Treatment for sex offenders is ineffective

# Sexual Abuse

## Warning Signs in Children:

- Change in affect
- Verbal disclosure (accidental or purposeful)
- Overt sexual knowledge or inappropriate behavior
- Excessive masturbation
- Enticing other children in sexual play

# Sexual Abuse

## Warning Signs in Children:

- Specific fears of males or females
- Weight gain/loss
- Excessive clothes
- Hiding clothes (bloodied or stained)
- Thumb sucking
- Wetting/soiling

# Sexual Abuse

## Warning Signs in Children:

- Aggressive or “out of control” behavior
- Inappropriate sexual behavior
- Running away
- School failure
- Substance abuse
- Self hatred/self destructive or mutilation behaviors
- Inability to trust others or protect self
- Inappropriate interpersonal relationships

# Sexual Abuse

## Warning Signs in Adults:

- In relationships:
  - Ignores social cues about others' boundaries
  - Spends most of their time with children and shows little interest in someone their own age (may have “special friend”)
  - Encourages silence and secrets in children



# Sexual Abuse



## Warning Signs in Adults:

- Sexual Interactions
  - Makes sexualized threats or insults (calling child “whore” or “slut”)
  - Masturbates so often it gets in the way of important daily activities
  - Has interest in sexual fantasies involving children or asks their partner to dress or act like a child during sexual activity
  - Looks at child pornography

# Sexual Abuse

## Warning Signs in Adults:

- Personal Safety/Responsibility
  - Justifies behavior
  - Blames others or refused to take responsibility for their actions
  - Minimizes hurtful behavior when confronted



# Sexual Abuse

- Watch for these behaviors when adults are with your children:
  - Makes others uncomfortable by ignoring boundaries and limits
  - Uses teasing or belittling language to keep child from setting a limit
  - Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom



# Sexual Abuse

- Watch for these behaviors when adults are with your children:
  - Turns to a child for emotional comfort normally
  - Has secret interactions with children (ie. games, drugs, sexually explicit material)
  - Insists or manages to spend uninterrupted alone time with children
  - Seems “too good to be true”
    - With gifts, money or special outings

# Sexual Abuse

- Educate everyone in the family
- Talk with your family about sexual abuse
- Set clear boundaries
- Get safe adults involved
- Know your communities resources
- Care enough to reach out for help

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Normal Sexual Exploration:

- Child looks at and touches his/her own genitals and other children's genitals; child exposes his/her genitals to other children
- Behavior is mutual between children of similar age/size and can be easily redirected
- **PURPOSE** of this behavior is to find out about same and opposite gender body parts

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

Who is this?

Anne, age 5, has her friend Bill, also age 5, over to play. Later, Anne's mom finds Anne and Bill under the covers in Anne's bed.

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Sexually Reactive:

- Self-simulation: touching, manipulations of genitalia, may engage other children in re-enactments of sexual activity, insertion of fingers into genitalia, oral sex
- Child has usually been sexually abused OR exposed to sexually stimulating experiences
- Child feels deep shame/guilt and has anxiety regarding sexuality

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Sexually Reactive (cont):

- Behavior is not aggressive or hostile and is not meant to demean another child
- Do not seek out other children to coerce or victimize; do not threaten other children
- Behavior occurs shortly after SA or sexually stimulating experience and then decreases

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Sexually Reactive (cont):

- Child usually acknowledges the need to stop behaviors and welcomes help to do so
- **PURPOSE** of sexually reactive behavior is to resolve confusion and anxiety regarding his/her experiences by re-enacting those experiences

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

Who is this?

After seeing naked people on a pornographic website, Christina, age 8, is found masturbating by inserting a magic marker in her vagina.



# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Extensive Mutual Sexual Behaviors:

- Full spectrum of adult sexual behavior with children in same age/size range
- Child's thoughts and behaviors are saturated with sexuality
- Child has usually been sexually abused; home life is often chaotic, dangerous and unfriendly

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Extensive Mutual Sexual Behaviors (cont):

- Uses influence and persuasion to engage other children of approximately the same age range
- Child often engages in self-mutilation
- Sexual behavior cannot be redirected; intense treatment is needed to correct behavior
- Blasé, matter of fact attitude toward behaviors with self and other children

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Extensive Mutual Sexual Behaviors (cont):

- **PURPOSE** of these behaviors
  - Act out aggression and violence perpetrated against them
  - Use power to control another child
  - May or may not engage in sex to satisfy sexual stimulation
  - Gain/avoid emotional intimacy and closeness
  - Shock adults and other children
  - Sex as a means of relating to peers/human connection

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

Who is this?

Brian, age 12, shows his sister Julie, age 10, a pornographic video when she gets home from school. Brian then acts out the video on Julie.

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Children Who Molest:

- Wide range of sexual behavior – genital manipulation, intercourse, rape, anal penetration, and forcible penetration of objects into genitalia and/or anus
- Sexual behavior is impulsive, compulsive, and aggressive

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Children Who Molest (cont):

- Child perpetrator meets his/her own needs at victim's expense
- Force/coercion is used
- Seeks victims who are vulnerable (easy to molest)
- Use threats to keep victim quiet
- Sexual behavior persists over time and is part of a consistent pattern
- Denies responsibility for offending and lacks empathy for victim

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Children Who Molest (cont):

- History of deviant sexual experiences
- Perpetrators usually have behavioral problems at home/school, often physically aggressive, lack problem-solving skills, and have little impulse control
- Child perpetrator requires extensive specialized treatment to extinguish perpetrating behavior

# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

## Children Who Molest (cont):

- **PURPOSE** of molesting behavior –
  - sexual acting out is linked to feelings of anger, rage, loneliness, fear and confusion
  - sex is paired with aggression
  - to relieve feelings of anxiety, fear, confusion associated with sex (relief is temporary and often followed by increased anxiety)

Adapted from Sexualized Children: Elaina Gil and Toni Cavanaugh Johnson, Launch Press, 1993.



# Continuum of Childhood Sexual Behaviors

Who is this?

Michael, age 17, forces his brother Brian, age 12, to engage in a wide variety of sexual activity and then calls Brian gay.

# Sexual Abuse Education

## Understanding the Grooming Process

- Building trust
- Favoritism
- Alienation
- Secrecy



# Sexual Abuse Education

## Understanding Child Disclosure Process

- Accidental disclosures
- Purposeful disclosures
- Disclosure happens in process



# When a Child Discloses Abuse

- Be aware of your own feelings about abuse so that you are careful not to project them onto the child
- Allow the child to have opportunities to feel in control of self and environment
- Create an environment that fosters trust, structure and predictability

# When a Child Discloses Abuse

- Listen – it is okay to be silent!
- Treat the child/adolescent with respect and understanding
  - Use age-appropriate language with the child
- Do not question the child's truthfulness
- Watch your body language
  - Do not react with shock, dismay, outrage, etc.
  - The victim may have other feelings for the AP
- Watch the child's body language

# When a Child Discloses Abuse

- Reassure the child that the abuse is not their fault
- Praise the child for their courage to tell about the abuse
- Reassure the child that they are not in trouble with you or other officials present – you cannot promise what you cannot control (home environment)

# What to Say...

- I'm glad you told me. I know that wasn't easy. Thank you.
- I'm sorry I wasn't there to stop this from happening. It wasn't your fault. We're going to talk to people who can help us.



# What to Say...

- You are smart to talk to me. I am really proud of you. Now we need to tell someone who can help us. There are people who know how to work with this kind of situation.
- You are very brave and did the right thing by telling me. I know it may not have been easy, but you need to know you didn't do anything wrong.

(Brohl & Potter, 2004)





# Mandated Reporting

Dare to reach out  
your hand  
into the darkness  
to pull another  
hand into the  
light.

~ Norman B. Rice



# Mandated Reporting

- Who is a mandated reporter?
  - A person who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of a profession comes into contact with children.
- As a mandated reporter, you only need a **REASONABLE CAUSE TO SUSPECT** abuse or neglect

# Mandated Reporting

- A report must be made to Childline within **24 hours** (1-800-932-0313)
- A written report (CY 47) must be submitted to the local CYS office within **48 hours**

# The Grieving Process

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression/Sadness
- Acceptance



# The Grieving Process

## Common Reactions to Sexual Abuse



# Common Reactions

- Fears
- Nightmares
- Regression behaviors
- Loss of self-esteem
- Tantrums (anger)
- Social withdraw
- Increased neediness/attachments
- Sleep disturbances
- Eating disturbances
- Feelings of guilt/shame
- Increased frustration
- Sexualized behaviors
- Flashbacks or “body memories”
- Aggressive/  
Self-destructive behaviors
- Recantations
- Confusion about affection, love, sex
- Anxiety/panic attacks

# The Grieving Process

Impact of abuse on child will depend on:

- Age of child at the onset of abuse
- Relationship with the perpetrator
- Duration of abuse
- Support system

# The Grieving Process

## Dealing with the Child's Anger





# The Grieving Process

## Dealing with the Child's Anger

- Teach the child words to express how he feels
- Teach the child to understand that some things that happened in the past can affect how we behave now
- Teach the child to understand that her behavior can have positive or negative consequences

# The Grieving Process

## Dealing with the Child's Anger

- When the child is upset, ask her why
- Refrain from making negative comments when the child shows his temper
- Don't allow anger to go unnoticed. Retrain for health anger expression

**REWARD POSITIVE BEHAVIOR**

Notice and comment on it!

# The Grieving Process

## Common Questions Parents Ask

- How do I know my child is telling the truth?
- Why did my child go along with the abuse?
- Why didn't my child tell me sooner?
- What about my feelings?
- What if my child touches another child?
- Should I treat my child differently now?

# The Grieving Process

## Helping the Child After the Abuse

- Believe and support the child
- Be ready to listen, but don't pry
- Treat the child as usual
- Increase positive self messages
- Allow the child to be a child
- Don't blame or punish yourself

# The Grieving Process

## Helping the Child After the Abuse

- Talk with people you can trust
- Educate yourself about sexual abuse and prevention
- Don't expect to make the child feel better all of the time
- Don't blame the child

# Building Resiliency



# Building Resiliency

## Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse Set and Respect Clear Guidelines

- Family boundaries
- How to say no
- Proper names of body parts
- Okay touch versus not okay touch
- Secrets (surprises)
- Tricks (bribes)
- Who to trust
- Child on child touching
- Age of consent

# Building Resiliency

## Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse

### Speak UP!

- When you see or hear of inappropriate behaviors
- Practice talking about sexual abuse before there's a problem
- Report suspected abuse to  
CHILDLINE: 1 (800) 932-0313



# Building Resiliency

## Helping Children Feel Safe

- Return child's normal routine as soon as possible
- Ask child if there is anything worry them. "Do you feel safe right now?"
- Does the child have a possession that makes them feel safe?
- Change the locks at the house
- Ask the child if they are having bad dreams

# Building Resiliency

## Helping Children Feel Safe

- Help the child take risk by signing up for a new class or exploring nature
- Engage the family in activities (board games, exercise, swimming)
- Praise the child for their courage
- Be careful not to overreact if child resists safety suggestions
- Use humor to accentuate the positive

**Children are Resilient!**

(Brohl & Potter, 2004)

# Building Resiliency

## Building Positive Self Esteem in Children

- Positive parenting
- Accepting feelings
- Respect
- Encouragement
- Needs
- Talking/listening



# Building Resiliency

## Tips on Positive Parenting

- Wisdom of Solomon
- Strength of Hercules
- Patience of Mother Theresa
- “When the world says,  
“Give up,” hope whispers,  
“Try it one more time.”

~author unknown

# Building Resiliency

## Tips on Positive Parenting

- Find ways to take time for you and your needs **ON A REGULAR BASIS**
- Don't rely on the child's accomplishments to feel good about yourself



# Building Resiliency

## Strengthening Family Communication

- Don't keep your feelings a secret
- Keeping things quiet supports angry behavior
- When sharing feelings, speak without shaming and blaming
- Use a timer during serious discussions

(Brohl & Potter, 2004)

# Building Resiliency

## Strengthening Family Communication

- Notice and positively comment on good behavior
- Write loving messages to family members
- Don't guess at what others are thinking and feeling
- Take a time out if anger is getting out of control

(Brohl & Potter, 2004)

# Building Resiliency

## Strengthening Family Communication

- Be honest, but avoid being blunt
- Take responsibility for mistakes
- Use humor
- Reward positive discussion

(Brohl & Potter, 2004)



# Building Resiliency

## How to Know the Family is Healing

- There is clearer and less blameful family communication
- The family has returned to normal routines
- The family is less socially isolated
- The family spends more time on fun activities
- The family is less burdened and more empowered
- There is more effective communication within the family

(Brohl & Potter, 2003)

# Building Resiliency

## How to Know the Family is Healing

- All children are considered equally
- Safety plan discussed with each child as it pertains to possible abuse scenarios
- Victim child behaves in age-appropriate ways
- Parent/caregiver is reasonably cautious by not overly protective with the child/children

(Brohl & Potter, 2003)

# Resources

National Sexual Violence Resource Center  
[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

Child Welfare Information Gateway  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse  
<http://www.adoption.org/adopt/national-adoption-clearinghouse.php>

Stop It Now  
<http://www.stopitnow.org/>



# Thank You!!!



Once you choose hope,  
anything is possible!  
~ Christopher Reeve