

Responding to Sexual Abuse Disclosures in the Real World

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Disclosures:

How many kids DO tell?

- ▶ Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse
- ▶ Estimates of childhood sexual abuse disclosures

Disclosures: How many kids COULD tell?



What keeps kids from telling?

Victim choice

Grooming

Conditioning

Justification

What keeps kids from telling?

- ▶ Secrecy
- ▶ Coercion
- ▶ Threats
- ▶ Punishment

Who do kids tell?

- ▶ Adults
- ▶ Peers

How do kids tell?

- ▶ Accidental disclosures
- ▶ Purposeful disclosures

How do kids tell?

- ▶ Stages of disclosure
 - Denial
 - Tentative
 - Active
 - Recantation
 - Reaffirmation
 - Sorensen and Snow (1991)

How do kids tell?

- ▶ Characteristics of tentative disclosures
 - Forgetting
 - Distancing
 - Minimizing
 - Empowerment
 - Dissociation
 - Discounting

Sorensen and Snow (1991)

What to do when kids tell?

- ▶ Minimal facts/ Cursory interview
- ▶ Engage community support

Who is there to help?

The purpose of a Child Advocacy Center is to provide a comprehensive, culturally competent, multidisciplinary team response to allegations of child abuse in a dedicated, child-friendly setting.

National Children's Alliance Standards

- ✓ Child Friendly Facility
- ✓ Forensic Interviews
- ✓ Multidisciplinary team approach
- ✓ Victim Advocacy
- ✓ Case review and case tracking
- ✓ Therapeutic intervention
- ✓ Medical exams

Why refer a child to the CAC?

- ✓ Multidisciplinary team approach
- ✓ Trained forensic interviewer
- ✓ Digital recording of interview
- ✓ Child-friendly setting
- ✓ Advocacy
- ✓ Follow-up
- ✓ Case review
- ✓ Court testimony

Purpose - Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Approach

- To provide a coordinated response among the agencies involved in the investigation of child abuse of a serious or criminal nature.
- Response involves:
 - Written protocols
 - Members are routinely involved in investigations
 - Implemented procedures for routine sharing of information

Multidisciplinary Team

- Law Enforcement
- Child Protective Services
- Prosecution
- Family Court
- Victim Advocacy
- Children’s Advocacy Center
- Medical Professional
- Mental Health Professional

CAC Referral Criteria

- ✓ Child between the ages of 3 through 17
- ✓ The child is safe (no contact with the alleged perpetrator)
- ✓ The alleged incident occurred in your County or the victim resides in your County
- ✓ Child has not previously participated in a CAC Forensic Interview regarding current allegations

CAC Referral Criteria (Cont.)

Allegation involves:

- Sexual abuse
- Severe physical abuse
- Witness to a crime

Child has not disclosed BUT

- Physical findings;
- Alleged perpetrator confessed to abusing the child; OR
- Other compelling physical evidence (i.e. chat logs, pictures, etc.)

Outcomes when MDT is Utilized

Designated team members from each of the core agencies trained to work together on the most serious cases.

The Result:

- Team investigations
- Better communication
- Less conflict
- Professional Accountability
- the SYSTEM IS LESS TRAUMATIC FOR KIDS

Interviewing kids following disclosure

Best Practice:

Reduce the number of interviews children go through in the investigative process.

Minimal Facts/ Cursory Interview Defined

An interview conducted for the purpose of obtaining factual information as part of a criminal investigation.

- Neutral
- Open-minded, objective
- Fact-finding, NOT detailed
- Research-based techniques

For the purpose of gaining MINIMAL FACTS to:

- assess the child's safety;
- determine the need for protective custody; and
- determine if appropriate to refer to CAC

Purpose of Cursory Interview

- ✓ ESTABLISH SAFETY
- ✓ Ask LIMITED open-ended questions to determine:
 - WHO
 - WHAT
 - WHERE
 - Avoid WHEN and HOW
 - Never ask: WHY

What is a Forensic Interview?

- ✓ Fact finding
- ✓ Neutral and non-biased
- ✓ Based on research
- ✓ Takes place in child friendly environment but discourages fantasy and offers little distractions
- ✓ Not part of the treatment process
- ✓ Concern about suggestibility

How to Respond to a Child Who Discloses Abuse

Just Remember: I CARE!

The Cursory Interview Setting

- ✓ Talk with the alleged child victim outside the presence of the parent(s) or caretaker(s), or any other children.
- ✓ Find a quiet, comfortable place to talk with the child. Under no circumstance should the child be questioned where the abuse occurred.

Contact With Child

- If during contact with the child he/she begins to talk freely about the abuse, do not stop him/her.
- Don't interrupt
- Document the child's statement as close to verbatim as possible.
- Offer reassurance when needed.
- Don't make assumptions.

I – Information

Secure *ONLY* Basic Information

- ✓ Remember, our job as a mandated reporter is to *suspect* abuse, not *investigate* abuse.
- ✓ Do not ask “why” questions – it places blame.
- ✓ Do not interview the child; there are trained professionals in your community designated to do this.
- ✓ Do not make the child repeat the disclosure to others.

I – Information

Secure *ONLY* Basic Information

- ✓ Do not question a child in detail.
- ✓ Questions you should ask include:
 - ✓ What happened?
 - ✓ Who did this?
 - ✓ Where?
 - ✓ When? *Do not ask this question to younger children because they have no concept of time.*
- ✓ Listen to the child when they are in active disclosure.
- ✓ As soon as you suspect abuse, Report it!

C – Calm Demeanor

- ✓ Let the child know you are proud of them for coming forward; make the child feel safe and protected
- ✓ Remember, you are not angry at the child, but at what happened. Children can mistakenly interpret anger or disgust as directed toward them.
- ✓ Listen to and answer the child's questions honestly.

A – Assure the child that what happened was NOT THEIR FAULT!

- ✓ Sexual abuse is **NEVER** the victim's fault!
- ✓ Children cannot prevent abuse, only the abuser can.
- ✓ Some children may have conflicting feelings because when they were touched it “felt OK”.
- ✓ Inform the child they should not be ashamed with statements such as, *“What happened was not your fault!”*.

A – Assure the child that what happened was NOT THEIR FAULT!

- ✓ Most disclosures made are completely accidental.
According to Sorenson and Snow:
 - 74% are accidental disclosures (abuse revealed by chance).
 - 26% of disclosures are purposeful (child makes conscious decision to tell about abuse).

- ✓ When children do disclose, it may be months, or even years, after the abuse has occurred; do not blame the child for waiting to disclose.

RE – Report the Abuse

Report suspected abuse to
Missouri's Child Abuse Hotline at

1 800 392-3738

Important Points When Reporting Child Abuse:

- You do not have to have physical evidence of abuse, you only have to suspect abuse.
- It is your responsibility, as a mandated reporter, to contact the hotline *every time* you suspect abuse has occurred.