



Facilitating Sexual Abuse Disclosures: What Everyone Working with Children and Youth Needs to Know

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Objectives



- How common is with-holding of child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure
- How common are delays in child sexual abuse disclosure
- What are the barriers to disclosure
- What are the facilitators to disclosure
- Using a trauma informed framework
- Questions to ponder for your practice



Withheld and delayed disclosures persist

- 25-50% of children deny sexual abuse even when there is the presence of STI or when there is video evidence
- Up to 80% of CSA survivors report withholding disclosure until their adulthood
- 50-80% of children and youth delay disclosure
 - Average 1-4 years

Disclosure is a process –a life long process



- Alaggia's (2004) many ways of telling disclosure model
- Staller & Nelson-Gardell's (2005) disclosure process description
- McElvaney, Greene & Hogan's (2012) 'containing the secret' formulation

Disclosure Trends Review

(Alaggia, Collin-Vezina & Lateef, 2017)

- Disclosures increase with age
- Boys are less likely to disclose
- Disclosures are more likely when the perpetrator is not in close proximity to the victim
- Families with open communication and social supports increase likelihood of earlier disclosures
- Adolescent females are less likely to be believed; more likely to be blamed
- Patriarchal societal structures impede CSA disclosure

Types of Disclosure

Established and Emerging

- Purposeful
- Accidental
- Behavioural
- Elicited/prompted
- Triggered
- Progressive
- Naïve



Disclosure precipitators

- Getting worse
- Fear – of pregnancy, of escalation of abuse
- Realizing the abuse is not normal; sex education
- Information about abuse and what to do about it –school assemblies; prevention talks
- Increased symptoms (anxiety, suicidal ideation, disordered eating)
- Decreased school performance
- Availability of supportive adult –extended family member, school personnel

What facilitators help to tell



- CSA disclosures are more likely to occur in a dialogical context – formal helping relationships and informal supports
- Disclosure is a process, time is an important factor and giving adequate time for disclosures to emerge
- Environmental factors with families and in schools

Family Environment



- Close relationship with mother and open communication in the family
- Families in which children were encouraged to talk about experiences and feelings contributed to disclosure
- Disclosures increase when perpetrators no longer reside with victims or no longer in close proximity to the victim

School Environment



- Providing information and education on topics of sexuality in general, and sexual abuse specifically, can help children and youth to disclose
- Raising awareness and prevention programs can promote disclosures of sexual violence committed against children and youth



Therapeutic Environment

- Having the support of a child advocacy service-
 - Child and youth friendly
 - Age appropriate language
 - Use child's name; eye contact
- Non-clinical settings/informal settings
- On-site counsellors (i.e. social workers in schools)



Strategies

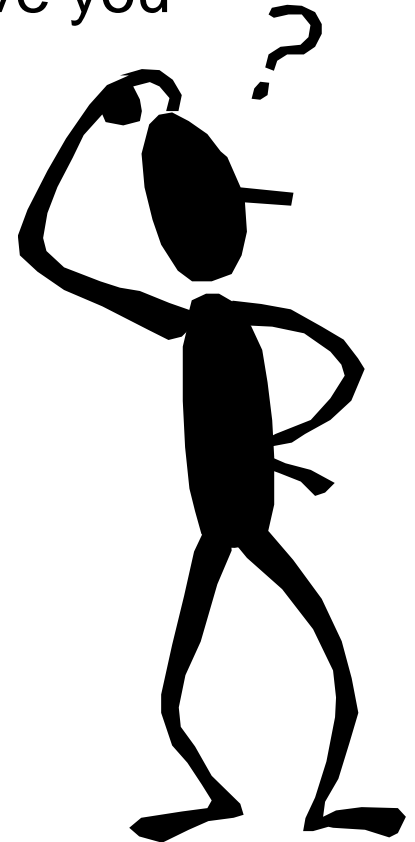
- Ask the child if it would be easier to draw than to tell
- Employ an anatomical drawing to identify where something happened or what part the offender used
- Ask them if they prefer to write the answers to your questions

Creating trauma informed environments for CSA disclosures

- Principles of trauma informed practice (Harris & Fallot, 2001)
 - Safety
 - Trust
 - Choice and control
 - Collaboration
 - Empowerment
 - Strengths-based

Questions

- What do you do that is working in CSA disclosures?
- What facilitators for disclosure have you identified?
- What else could you be doing?





Thank you!

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