Creative Therapeutic Techniques for Sexually Reactive Children

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Welcome/Introductions

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Goals

• Define and understand the term “sexually reactive.”
• Discuss and be able to implement creative techniques in therapy with sexually reactive children.
  – to teach healthy boundaries & healthy expression of feelings, and address trauma symptoms.
What is Sexually Reactive?

- The term “sexually reactive” refers to a child, typically under the age of 12, who has been prematurely sexualized and is exhibiting sexualized behaviors.
- In other words, a child who was exposed to sexual experiences or material at an early age and is reacting to it by voluntarily engaging in sexual behavior inappropriate for his/her age.

Sexually Reactive, cont.

- These children may have been sexually abused.
- They may have been exposed to sexual activity or material in their home
  - being in the room while adults were having sex;
  - a parent who prostitutes out of the home;
  - a parent who is overtly sexual and has multiple partners in the house;
  - witnessing a sibling’s sexual abuse;
  - being shown or watching pornography, etc.
  *these are also examples of sexual abuse

Sexually Reactive, cont.

- These children typically seek to find release for their sexual feelings through masturbation or sexual activity with other children.
- They may misinterpret other feelings (i.e., fear, anxiety, anger, sadness) as sexual and react to these feelings in a sexual way.
Dysregulation

- Abnormality or impairment in one’s ability to adjust, organize, or control something.
- Problems of dysregulation are often seen in the areas of:
  - Attunement
  - Communication
  - Emotional literacy
  - Narrative building
  - Anger management
  - Stress/anxiety management
  - Impulse control
  - Social relatedness

Treatment Components

- Establish safety
- Coping skills & relaxation
- Accurate identification and appropriate expression of feelings
- Self-esteem
- Social skills
- Healthy boundaries
- Good touch/bad touch
- Private Part Rules
- Trauma recovery

Safe Place Exercises

- Visualize a safe/happy place
  - Close your eyes (optional). Think of a place where you feel safe and happy. It can be a real place or a make-believe place. Now, answer these questions (to yourself or outload): What can you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? Taste? Remember your safe place...you can go there whenever you get scared or worried.
- Draw your safe place.
- Make a safe place in the sand tray.
Safe Place, cont.

• Build a safe place
  – Allow the child to chose an animal and make a
    safe place for it out of a shoe box and art
    materials.
  – Talk to the child about what the animal needs to
    feel safe and happy.
  – Talk to the child about what he/she needs to feel
    safe and happy.

Coping Skills

• Coping skills need to be assessed and taught to
  the child and caregiver before getting into the
  more difficult material, so you can practice the
  skills with them when they get upset/mad/
  scared/anxious/confused/frustrated, etc.

Coping Skills


• Coping Tree: draw a tree; have the client list all
  coping skills. For each one, put fruit sticker in tree
  or on ground. Discuss adaptive vs. maladaptive
  coping skills.

• Bubble wrap: list problem on bubble wrap. For
  each coping skill, pop a bubble: problem gets
  smaller.

• Coping Umbrella: list coping skills on umbrella.
  Child stands under umbrella while therapist
  sprinkles feather “problems” that have no impact.
Relaxation Exercises

• Visualization
• Bubbles
• Progressive muscle relaxation
• Belly breathing
• Tense & relax your body

Resources:
Babar’s Yoga for Elephants (de Brunhoff)
Digging for Buried Treasure 2 (Paris Goodyear-Brown)
Moonbeams: A book of meditations for children (Garth)

Feelings

• Many times, traumatized children do not know what they are feeling or do not understand what is happening in their bodies.
• Their emotions are all mixed up, and we have to help them make sense of it all.
• Help kids accurately identify feelings and figure out how to appropriately express and manage those feelings.

Books:
When Sophie gets angry- really, really angry… (Bang)
Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. (Cruz)
Today I feel silly and other moods that make my day. (Curtis & Cornell)
The way I feel (Cain)
My many colored days (Dr. Seuss)

Feelings Activities

• Feelings Collages
• Feelings Charades
• Matching Game
• Go Feelings
• Masks
• Pick Up Sticks
• Color Your World Exercise
• Mood Music
• Hopscotch
Color Your World Technique

Feeling Specific Exercises
- Anxiety
  - Worry boxes
  - Worry dolls
  - Stress balls
  - Party Hats on Monsters
- Anger
  - Volcano
  - Stomping feet
  - Mad Game
  - Clay Bombs/paper towels

Resources:
Handbook of Play Therapy (Schaefer & O’Connor)
101 More Favorite Play Therapy Techniques (Kaduson & Schaefer)
Moody Cow Meditates (MacLean)
Worry Wars (Goodyear-Brown)

Party Hats on Monsters
Self-Esteem/ Mastery

• Celebrate Everything!!!
• Reinforce strengths & positive behaviors
• List specific positives about the child (and help caregivers find the positives too)
• Personal Strengths Sheet
• Self-portraits

Books:
I'm gonna like me: Letting off a little self-esteem (Curtis & Cornell)
I like me! (Carlson)
Hooray for You! A celebration of “you-ness.” (Richmond)

Boundaries

• What are Boundaries?
  – A border or a limit
  – They help protect yourself from getting hurt
  – “Where I end and you begin.”

http://www.nataliedee.com

Types of Boundaries

• Personal Space/Body Boundaries
• Touching Boundaries
• Looking Boundaries
• Emotional/Talking Boundaries
• Generational Boundaries
Types of Boundaries, cont.

• **Personal Space/Body Boundaries**
  - Is everyone’s personal space respected?
  - Are people appropriate with their bodies?
  - Is everyone allowed to have privacy?

• **Touching Boundaries**
  - Does everyone ask permission to touch?
  - Is anyone forced or coerced to touch?
  - Is everyone comfortable with how people touch?
  - Is the child allowed to choose whether or not to give hugs and kisses?

Types of Boundaries, cont.

• **Looking Boundaries**
  - Is there pornography in the home?
  - Is there media with sexual content?
  - Does everyone wear appropriate clothing?
  - Is anyone staring/looking at others in a sexual way?
  - Does anyone try to look at others while undressed?

• **Emotional/Talking Boundaries**
  - Is all talk respectful of others? yelling and swearing?
  - Are there sexual comments, even as a joke?
  - Do adults talk about sex in front of the kids?

Types of Boundaries, cont.

• **Generational Boundaries**
  - Adults should be the adults. Kids should be the kids.
  - Is any child left in charge or to babysit?
  - Do kids determine punishments for each other?
  - Are kids involved in grown-up discussions/decision (i.e. finances, love life)?
  - Do caregivers use kids for emotional support?

• **Examples of adults and children crossing boundaries**
  - The child answers questions for the parents
  - The child wants to be a part of adult conversations
  - The child acts "in charge" of the parent and other siblings
  - The child wants access to adult material and information (movies, TV shows, internet)
Boundaries

• Boundary Maker Exercise (Hula Hoop)
  – This is my boundary maker. It represents my personal space. If I step into someone else's personal space, I will say “excuse me” and back away. If someone else moves into my personal space, I will ask them politely to move away. If they do not, then I will move away.

Boundary Experiments

– Divide up into pairs.
– Have person A stand still and have person B start from across the room and walk towards person A.
– Person A should tell person B when to stop when he/she is as close as is comfortable.
– Repeat, with person B standing still and telling person A when to stop.
– Repeat with variables: walking speed, one person sitting, rather than standing, two people who know each other well vs. not knowing, etc.

Boundary Circles/Circle of Safety

• **Purple** – Purple Private Circle
  – contains only the self and is the circle from which all other relationships are based.
• **Blue** – Blue Hug Circle
  – is reserved for family or boyfriends and girlfriends. This is the only group where a special type of hugging and kissing is allowed.
• **Green** – Green Far Away Hug Circle
  – is limited to best friends. It is appropriate to give people in this circle a hug, but not to become excessive when showing affection.
• **Yellow** – Yellow Handshake Circle
  – Permits touching but limits it in shaking hands with acquaintances upon meeting them.
• **Orange** – Orange Wave Circle
  – Includes children and friends. The proper greeting for this group of people is a friendly wave.
• **Red** – Red Stranger Circle
  – Includes people you don’t know. You do not touch strangers and they should never touch you.
Personal Space Activity

- Different size paper dolls represent the child and other people in his/her life.
- Have the child place his/her doll on the paper, and color around the doll how much personal space he/she needs to feel safe.
- Place other people on the paper. Decide who is allowed to be in the child’s personal space.
- Show how close or far away people should be.
- Include family, friends, therapists and strangers.

Anderson & Berry-Ellis. A boundary program for sexually reactive children. In Schwartz (ed.) The sex offender vol. IV.

Family/Group Aquarium

- Each group/family member is a different fish
- Place on paper/bulletin board where ever they want to be placed.
- Discuss boundaries, how much room each fish needs to feel safe, and how it’s okay to be closer to some fish than others.

Psycho-educational Components for Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse

- Good Touch/Bad Touch
- Safety Rules
- Safe People

Good Touch/Bad Touch

- Books
  - Good Touch Bad Touch (Church, 1993), It's My Body (Freeman, 1984), My Body Belongs to Me (Baird, 1986).
- Videos/DVDs
- Activity Books
  - Red Flag Green Flag People (Rape and Abuse Crisis Center, 1994); Good Touch Bad Touch: An Educational Coloring Book (Liptak, n.d.).

Private Parts

- Many, if not all, of the listed resources will define private parts as
  - “the parts of your body that are covered by your bathing suit.”
- Discuss this with the kids and caregivers.
- Discuss the words they use in their home.
- Explain what the technical terms are, or “the words that the doctor uses.”
Good Touch/Bad Touch Activity

• Explain:
  – Good Touches are touches that make you feel good or happy or safe.
  – Bad Touches are touches that make you feel bad, or scared, or confused, or mad.
• List examples of good and bad touches.
  – Make sure private part touching is included as a bad touch.
• Show on a body drawing where the child has received good touches and bad touches.
  – Use green (good touch) & red (bad touch) bingo markers.

Good Touch/Bad Touch, cont.

• Emphasize that private part touching done by an adult or a bigger/older kid is NEVER the child's fault.
• Teach the Safety Rules:
  – Say “No!”
  – Get away.
  – Tell an adult.
  – If the adult does not believe you, keep telling until someone does.

Private Part Rules/Manners

• It is important that rules about private parts are made explicit for children.
• Sometimes they have never been taught what is and is not acceptable.
• Can be done as a rule book, incorporating other safety rules and house rules.
• Can be done as a “manners” tea party, where you demonstrate table manners before explaining that there are also private part manners or RULES.
Private Part Rules

• Don’t touch anyone else’s private parts.
• Don’t let anyone touch your private parts.
• Don’t show anyone your private parts.
• Don’t look at anyone else’s private parts.
• Don’t talk to other kids about private parts or private part touching.
• Don’t keep secrets about private part touching.
  — Add a rule about masturbation or playing with toys in a sexual way when needed.

Trauma Recovery

• Paper Dolls
• Before and After Drawings
• Garbage Bag
• Offender Drawing
• Stories, books, poems
• Superheroes

Resources:
*Paper dolls and paper airplanes (Crisci, Lay, & Lowenstein)*
*Short-term play therapy for children (Shelby)*
*Treating traumatized children (James)*

Paper Dolls

• The child uses/makes a string of paper dolls and identifies one doll as him/herself and the rest as important people (family, etc.) and the offender.
• On each paper doll, the child uses the following:
  — Bandaid to represent who got hurt
  — A black dot for the person who did the hurting
  — Stars for who was brave (i.e., the child telling)
  — Smiley face stickers for who believed about the abuse
  — Red dots for who was mad about the abuse

Before & After Drawing

- Use a large piece of paper and fold it in half (or use multiple pieces of paper).
- Ask the child to draw a picture of what it was like before and a picture of what it was like after
  - Before the abuse & after the abuse
  - Before telling & after telling


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Garbage Bag

- Use an empty paper trash/shopping bag
- Talk about trash and “yucky” things that need to be thrown away.
- Have the child hold the bag, guess how much it weighs. Discuss what it would be like to carry it around forever – to school, while playing sports, on a date, etc.
- Explain that many adults come to therapy and unlike the child, have never talked about the bad things that have happened. They say that keeping the secrets is like carrying around a bag of garbage all the time.


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Garbage Bag, cont.

- Give the bag to the child and explain that it will be his/her garbage bag and can be decorated however he/she wishes.
- Explain that you are going to write down all the bad things that have happened to the child and put them in the bag. Specifically state that you will not discuss, but just write them down.
- There should be one item per piece of paper with brief details. The therapist should have NO reaction.
- Every week, choose one piece of paper out of the bag to discuss. Talk about it, do some art, process, etc. until the garbage bag is empty.
**Offender Drawings**

- Instruct the child to draw a picture of the thing that frightened him/her and tell what it did.

- Encourage the child to verbalize feelings to the drawing. The therapist can talk to the drawing as well: “Hey you. We don’t like what you did. We don’t like you because you... (allow the child to fill in the blank)”

- Let the child do anything he/she wants to the drawing (rip it, cut it, punch it, shred it, etc.).


**Stories, Books, Poems**

- Davis (1990). Once upon a time...Therapeutic stories to heal abused children.

- Goodyear-Brown (2010). Worry Wars


- Sweet (1981). Something happened to me.

- Goodyear-Brown. Gabby the Gecko.

- Have the child write his story or make up stories.

- Have the child write a story for other children who are going through something similar.

**Superheroes**

- Works particularly well as a group or family activity.

  - Can be used to increase self-esteem and help the child develop the sense that he/she can overcome the abuse.

  - Can also be used to externalize a touching problem in sexually reactive children.

  - Introduce Superheroes (What do we know about superheroes, what they do, some examples, etc.)

  - Discuss the superheroes fighting against the Touching Monster

  - Make a Touching Monster (as a group/family)
Superheroes, cont.

- Have each child/family member make their own superhero.
- Draw the superhero.
- Name the superhero.
- Name the superhero team.
- Answer questions about the superhero
- Develop a story about the superheroes, their team and how they defeated the touching monster.

Superhero Info

- My superhero is a: _______________________
- My superhero's name is: _______________________
- My superhero's power is: _______________________
- My superhero wears: _______________________
- My superhero has the following qualities: _______________________
- My superhero gets around by: _______________________
- My superhero's sidekick is: _______________________
- My Superhero Team name is: _______________________
- My superhero fights against: _______________________
- My superhero fights to protect: _______________________
- My superhero secret identity is: _______________________

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