

I Don't Have Time For Empathy,
I Have A Job To Do,

a Guide to Working With Non-offending Parents

Dan Powers, LCSW

1

Did you know?

- The rate of child abuse is estimated to be 3 times greater than is reported.
- 1 in 4 girls is sexually abused before the age of 18.
- 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused before the age of 18.
- Nearly 70% of all reported sexual assaults occur to children ages 17 and under.
- An estimated 39 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse live in the US

2

Sexual abuse can occur at all ages, probably younger than you think

- The median age for reported abuse is 9 years old.
- More than 20% of children are sexually abused before the age of 8.
- Nearly 50% of all victims of forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, and forcible fondling are children under 12.

3

Are kids safe at home?



- 30-40% of victims are abused by a family member.
- Another 50% are abused by someone outside of the family whom they know.
- Approximately 40% are abused by other children.
- Between 4 -6 % are abused by strangers

4

258 Million

Cost of child abuse and neglect in United States per day

Source: Prevent Child Abuse Texas



5

Myths and Misconceptions About Child Abuse

- Children adapt to being abused
- Abused children will tell someone about their suffering
- Most abusive parents are single, uneducated and have low incomes
- Most abused children suffer serious physical injuries that you can see
- Educated and professional people are educated on child abuse

6


- Every 10 seconds a child is abused
 - National Committee to Prevent Child abuse
- Each day in the United States, more than 4 children die as a result of child abuse in the home
 - Childhelp USA
- The Rate of Child Abuse is ten times the rate of cancer
 - A National Call to Action
- Without intervention abused children are 67% more likely to be arrested as a teen
 - Child Welfare League of America

7

EMPATHY

The ability to recognize and understand the emotion of another.

- Understanding
- Being sensitive
- Compassion



8

What do you Think About These Parents?

- Do feel sorry for them?
- Do you think they are lying?
- Do they piss you off?

9

What Does Your team Think About These Parents?

- @\$%^&??!!**&^%\$!!!!
- They are lying
- Don't give them a chance
- BS - They KNEW !!!!!

10

With all this, why focus on non-offending parents?

- Parental responses associated with child functioning
- Child placement often a function of parental support
- Parents are a key to child' s recovery
- Possible reunification of family

11

Characteristics of Non-Offending Parent

- Low self esteem
- poor communication skills / limited social skills
- dependency
- trust issues
- isolation / no social support
- cd issues
- depression
- stress
- domestic violence
- own abuse

12

What can happen if the Non-Offending Parent is not supported ?

- denial
- distancing
- withdrawal
- avoidance
- sabotage
- perpetrator back
- deny services

13

Types of Parents

- **Did not know – Supports child**
Believes – takes action
- **Did not know – Denies**
“ I can’t believe it”
Guilt – internal map of the word changes
- **Did not know – Sides with Spouse**
“She seduced him”
Child is seen as colluding with father

Anna Saher, Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims, 1988

14

Types of Parents

- **Knew –did not stop**
Takes no action
Spouse abuse may play role
- **Sets up or participates in the abuse**

Anna Saher, Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims, 1988

15

Initial Responses

- Disbelief
- Denial
- Confusion and Doubt
- Distance
- Minimization
- Guilt
- Numbness
- Sense of Inadequacy/Self-esteem Issues
- Self-blame

16

Initial Responses

- Hurt and Betrayal
- Jealousy
- Anger Hatred/Revulsion
- Revenge
- Desire to Protect Offender
- Social Isolation
- Financial Concerns
- Religious Concerns

17

• Denial is a common initial reaction to a sexual abuse disclosure. A parent may feel that their whole world is shattered and denial may be part of their struggle to hold on to their security. Parents need time to alter their view of the offender and previous assumptions about their family.

• Denial is powerful and can seem out of touch with reality. Some women have held onto their denial even after the offender admits to committing the sexual abuse.

18

Types of Denial

Type of Denial	Non-Offending Parent
Denial of the facts	It couldn't happen in our family. That kind of stuff doesn't happen here
Denial of Awareness	I never saw anything unusual. He was never alone with her!
Denial of Responsibility	I told her not to wear that. She came on to him.
Denial of Impact	She will get over it. I was abused and I'm ok
Denial of the Need for Protection	Now that I know, I can keep them apart
Treatment	She doesn't seem effected. It's better to let her forget

19

Initial assessment

- Ability/willingness to believe, support, protect
- Nature of parent's psychological response
- Needs of child
- Resources available
- Parenting skills
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence

» Levenson & Morin, 2001

20

Costs of disclosure to non-offending parents

Parents experience many losses

- relational
- financial
- vocational
- residential

» Massat & Lundy, 1998

21

Why would they stay with the offender?

- Religion
- Family pressure
- Dependency
- Substance abuse
- Low self esteem
- Lack of resources
- Lack of trust in agency professionals

22

Why would they stay with the offender?

- Fear of losing children
- Inability to see child's needs
- Denial
- Abuse
- Money



23

Co-occurrence of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence

Review of 31 studies show between 30 and 60 % of families who experience child abuse also experience domestic violence

24

Co-occurrence of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence

- Batterers do:
 - Exert control and intimidation
 - Socially isolate
- making disclosure of this is difficult

25

Freud was right, It's all mom's fault

- Regarding her role within the family
 - mother is a significant part of dysfunctional family system
 - mother has disturbed personality/poor social skills
 - neglectful as wife and/or mother
 - mother as conscious or unconscious colluder

26

It's all mom's fault

- Assumptions regarding her response
 - Non-believing
 - Non-protective
 - Punitive towards child

Mothers traditionally are in a no-win situation

27

How Can We Better Do This?

- Investigators emotional supportiveness, kindness and sensitivity increased overall satisfaction in the process
- We can do a MUCH better job communicating and explaining the process

Atoro, K. E., Cross, T. P., Jones, L. M., Magnuson, S., Shadoin, A. L. & Walsh, W. (2010). Non-offending caregiver and youth experiences with child sexual abuse investigations. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*(2), 291-314.

28

Initial needs of non-offending parents

- Someone nonjudgmental to talk to
- Support
- Information about what happened
- General information about abuse and its effects
- Information about resources

29

Our/Your role in this mess

- Clarify confidentiality limits
- Clarify role in the case
- How roles differ

30

Do' and Don'ts

- Educate yourself on what has been done thus far
- Clearly state your role in the process
- State your willingness to assist the child and the parent
- "I believe your child" statement
- State who is responsible
- Expect a wide range of emotions and responses
- Expect anger directed at you – try not to react to it or get into a power struggle

31

Do' and Don'ts

- Attempt to normalize the response
- Offer support for their position and possible divided loyalties (especially if perpetrator a sibling)
- Do not blame them for the abuse
- **You didn't know?** – This smug implication sets up a negative scenario for the future
- Point out their strengths
- If possible, meet with the parent separately and discuss the findings
- Again, clarify your role

32

Do' and Don'ts

- Educate them on what to expect from: Police, CPS, Medical, Court
- Discuss with them what to expect from the child
- Discuss with them what to expect from siblings / family
- Ask them their own feelings

33

Initial issues for ongoing work

- Build a relationship and develop a context for change
 - Establish trust
 - Address initial reactions
 - Identify unreasonable expectations
 - Provide information about what happened
 - Provide information about what will happen

34

Dan Powers, ACSW, LCSW
Senior Vice President and Clinical Director

Collin County Children's Advocacy Center
2205 Los Rios Blvd
Plano, Texas 75074
972.633.6615

DPowers@caccollincounty.org

35
