Working with Non-offending Parents

Dan Powers, LCSW
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.
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.
Type of Abuse at CAC’s

- 68% Sexual
- 12% Physical
- 10% At risk
- 6% Child witness
- 2% Sexual and physical
- 1% Neglect
- <1% Child fatality

In Texas, Source CACTX
Relationship to the Victim

- 26% Known non-relative
- 24% Biological parent
- 20% Other relative
- 9% Step parent
- 8% Paramour of parent
- 6% Sibling
- 2% Step sibling
- 2% Stranger

In Texas: source CACTX
258 Million

Cost of child abuse and neglect in United States per day

Source: Prevent Child Abuse Texas
Myths and Misconceptions About Child Abuse

• Abused children are usually poor
• 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
The perpetrator was telling the truth…
- “No one will believe you”
- “They are going to take you away from your family”
- “Your mom is going to be upset”
- “They are going to take me away and put me in jail”

The system fails the child
- Child has to retell their story over and over
- Child is left in the home with unsupportive/non-believing caregiver
Risk Factors for Recantation

- Child’s relationship with the offender
- Placement after disclosure
- Direct pressure from family members
- Family’s response after disclosure
Why Kids Recant?

- False allegations
- Perpetrator/Child Relationship
- Age of Child
- Financial problems
- Pressure to recant by others
- Placement – where am I living now?
- Lack of support by the system

Lack of caregiver support
EMPATHY

The ability to recognize and understand the emotion of another.

- Understanding
- Being sensitive
- Compassion
What do you Think About These Parents?

- Do feel sorry for them?
- Do you think they are lying?
- Do they piss you off?
What Does Your team Think About These Parents?

- @#$%^&??!!**& ^=%%$!!!!!
- They are lying
- Don’t give them a chance
- BS - They KNEW !!!!!
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
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
Initial Responses

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

- Hurt and Betrayal
- Jealousy
- Anger Hatred/Revulsion
- Revenge
- Desire to Protect Offender
- Social Isolation
- Financial Concerns
- Religious Concerns
What can happen if the Non-Offending Parent is not supported?

- denial
- distancing
- withdrawal
- avoidance
- sabotage
- perpetrator back
- deny services
• 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.
### Types of Denial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Denial</th>
<th>Non-Offending Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial of the facts</td>
<td>It couldn't happen in our family. That kind of stuff doesn't happen here</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial of Awareness</td>
<td>I never saw anything unusual. He was never alone with her!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial of Responsibility</td>
<td>I told her not to wear that. She came on to him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial of Impact</td>
<td>She will get over it. I was abused and I’m ok</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial of the Need for Protection</td>
<td>Now that I know, I can keep them apart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>She doesn’t seem effected. It’s better to let her forget</td>
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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 Salter, *Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims*. 1988
Types of Parents

- **Knew – did not stop**
  Takes no action
  Spouse abuse may play role

- **Sets up or participates in the abuse**

Anna Salter, *Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims*, 1988
Costs of disclosure to non-offending parents

Parents experience many losses

- relational
- financial
- vocational
- residential

Massat & Lundy, 1998
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
Why would they stay with the offender?

- Fear of losing children
- Inability to see child’s needs
- Denial
- Abuse
- Money
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.
Co-occurrence of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence

- Batterers do:
  - Exert control and intimidation
  - Socially isolate

  making disclosure of this is difficult
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
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.

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
Our/Your role in this mess

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