

Sibling Sexual Abuse

Red River Children's Advocacy Center
10th Annual Spring Training
May 13-14, 2015/Fargo

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Session Overview

- Overview of sibling abuse
- Response
- Impact
- Different Perspectives
- Treatment
- Question of removal of abusive sibling
- Reconciliation & Reunification
 - Continuum approach
 - Considerations
- When it doesn't work out
- Reality & Real Life

OUR PRIORITIES

- Prevention of Sexual Abuse
- Best Interest and Well-Being of the Victim
- Protection of Children
- Community Safety
- Healthy Lives

SIBLING SEXUAL ABUSE An Overview

Sibling

- When defining sibling abuse, "sibling" is typically defined as children who grow up in the same family, household, home.
- This may include biological siblings, step-children, half siblings, foster children or adoptive children depending on the situation.

Sibling Sexual Abuse

- An abuse of power
 - Physical, intellectual, emotional, age, size, strength, developmental level
- Often has the trust of the victim and violates that trust
- May include physical force or threat of physical force
- May include a threat, bribe, special attention, gifts
- May involve sexual touching or may be hands off abuse
 - Watching sibling dress/undress, shower or in the bathroom
 - Have sibling watch a pornographic or sexually explicit movie or sexual activity
 - Force sibling to engage in sexual activity with another child

Sibling Sexual Abuse

From E. Sue Blume, *Secret Survivors*

- "Incest is both sexual abuse and an abuse of power."
- The power can be derived through the abusive sibling's "age, size, status, or relationships."
- "It is violence that doesn't require force."
- "It is abuse because it does not take into consideration the needs or wishes of the child; rather, it meets the needs of the other person at the child's expense."
- "A child who cannot refuse, or who believes she or he cannot refuse, is a child who has been violated."

Sibling Sexual Abuse Research

- Typically research related to sibling sexual abuse has mainly focused on:
 - case studies,
 - small clinical samples,
 - retrospective college samples,
 - adult survivors of sibling sexual abuse
- Research at times focuses on intrafamilial sexual abuse, but doesn't distinguish between sibling abuse and parental abuse

Prevalence & Incidence

- In retrospective general population UK sample of 2,869 sibling sexual abuse was twice as common as father-daughter incest
Cawson, Wattam, Brooker, and Kelly
- In one study 50% of 194 victims of child sexual abuse were abused by a sibling.
Shaw, Lewis, Loeb, Rosado, & Rodriguez
- Five times more likely to occur than parent-child incest
Mash and Barkely
- Most common type of intrafamilial sexual abuse
Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro

Prevalence & Incidence

- Kriener and Walsh, 2011
- Eight years of National Incident-Based Reporting System data (2000-2007)
- Captured all sexual assaults involving siblings age 21 and younger reported during this time period.
- The sibling sexual abuse definition utilized was an official criminal justice oriented legal definition encompassing sexual assault categories including forcible rape, forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, and forcible fondling.

Prevalence & Incidence- NIBRS Study

- 13,013 incidents of sibling sexual abuse
- Most incidents involved biological sibling with 27% of the incidents involving stepsiblings
- 94% of the reported incidents occurred at the victim's home
- Victims: 84% White, 15.2% Black and .9% Other
- Abusive Sibling: 83.8% White, 15.4% Black and .8% Other
- 92% of the abusive siblings were male
- 71% of incidents involved female victims

Prevalence & Incidence- NIBRS Study

- 67% involved male abusive and female victim but 25% involved male abusive sibling and male victim
- 68% of the abusive siblings were over age 12
- 82% of victims were under age 13; mean age of 8 years
- Average age difference was 5.5 years but more than 1/4 involved less than a 5 year age difference
- 77% involved single offender and single victim but 13% involved multiple victims
- Most prevalent abuse was forcible fondling, 55%, with rape/sodomy being 40%

Why Doesn't Someone Know?

- Victim may not recognize the behavior as abuse or may believe that this is what happens between siblings
- The abusive sibling is in a position of authority
- The abusive sibling may have threatened the victim if he/she tells
- Victim feels something is wrong, but can't explain it
- The victim may not know how to tell or who to tell
- The victim may be afraid that parents will be upset

Why Doesn't Someone Know?

- The victim may blame his/her self
 - This idea may have been introduced by abusive sibling
- Victim may believe that they did something to cause it
- Victim may have experienced pleasure or liked the attention, so blame themselves
- Abusive sibling may be giving the victim gifts, other attention to keep them from telling
- There may be signs, but the parent(s) don't recognize them or can't believe it
- Victim discloses but isn't believed or understood

Reality of Sibling Sexual Abuse

- Children are less likely to report sexual abuse in the family due to victim often feeling ashamed, fearful, and conflicted. (Baker)
- Attachment to the family overrides the negativity of the abuse.
- Reluctant to tell about the abuse due to obligation to the family, loyalty or fear of retaliation.

(Forward & Buck; Finkelhor)

RESPONSES

Responses Vary



Foundation for Proactive Response

- Top priorities
 - Safety
 - Victim comes first
- Knowledge about sexually abusive youth
- Knowledge about victims
- Knowledge about families

Barriers to Proactive Responding

- Lack of knowledge
- Policies or legislation that isn't evidence informed or supported
- At times, the complexity of sibling sexual abuse also challenges state agencies, courts, professionals in regard to responding in a proactive manner.

Impact

The Complexity of Sibling Relationships

- Siblings relationships are complex and not defined by one act
- Spectrum of emotions and feelings
- Ambivalence
 - "I hate my brother, but I love him too"
 - "He did something bad to me, but I don't want him to be in trouble"

Impact of Sibling Sexual Abuse

- Jones noted that if one looks at children's development and the important role of sibling relationships, then there is strong support to "hypothesize that abuse by a sibling may have an even greater impact on the victim."
- Most commonly noted impact relates to future psychological problems, most often fear, anger, and guilt.

Kiselica & Morril-Richards

- The effects of negative sibling relationships may be one of the most prevalent, long lasting, and damaging forms of familial violence.

Hardy

Impact of Sibling Sexual Abuse

- The victim may experience a variety of feelings which may include but are not limited to:
 - Betrayed
 - Pressured and/or trapped
 - Powerless
 - Confusion
 - Ashamed
 - Responsible
 - Guilty and/or shame
 - Dirty and/or bad
 - Humiliated

Impact on Victim

- Sexual abuse at an early age can have a negative impact on
 - Developing trust
 - Secure attachments
 - Developing solid identity

(Berzoff, Courtois & Ford; van der Kolk)

Impact on Parent(s)

- Go into denial
- Pain, guilt, self blame
- Failed as a parent
 - Why didn't I know, I was supposed to protect
 - This can be intensified if parent was a survivor themselves
- Conflicted feelings especially about abusive sibling
- Confused about loyalties
 - If continue to care about abusive sibling, am I being disloyal to abused sibling?
- What to do, how to support, do I take sides?

Impact on Parent(s)

- Are unsure how to be a "good" parent
 - Good parent to the victim-what does that mean?
 - Good parent to the abusive sibling-what does that mean?
- Who to turn to for support, who won't judge them or their child?

Grief & Grieving Process

■ Kübler-Ross

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

■ From recover-from-grief

- Shock & Denial
- Pain & Guilt
- Anger & Bargaining
- "Depression," Reflection, Loneliness
- The Upward Turn
- **Reconstruction & Working Through**
- **Acceptance & Hope**

Grief Is a Fluid Process

- Remember the stages of grief are loose and vary from individual to individual and are impacted by the situation.
- Grief isn't a straight progression, but often include looping back or experiencing more than one stage at a time.
- Stages can provide a guide of what to expect, what might be experienced; help the parent know they aren't alone.
- Each individual in the parental unit will respond to the situation in their own way.

Impact on Siblings

- The siblings may also experience an array of feelings about the situation including
 - Resentment or anger towards the abusive sibling
 - Resentment or anger towards the victim for "causing" the disruption in the home and family
 - Confusion
 - Afraid
 - Denial or minimization of the abuse
 - Alignment
 - Anger, anxiety and hurt
 - Guilt

Impact on Family Unit

- Family unit is disrupted
- Trust has been violated
- Parents are stressed which impacts interactions with family members
- There is an unknown about the future of the family as a whole

Impact on Extended Family

- May or may not be aware of the abuse
 - Parents of victim may choose to purposefully keep information from extended family
 - Victim may not want anyone else to know
- Extended family may be aware that something is going on, but doesn't know what to do or how to help
- Reactions of extended family members can be varied and include but not be limited to:
 - Disbelief, Blaming, Rejecting, Supportive, Encouraging

Impact on Support System

- Parents pull away from support systems including friends, church, etc. due to not wanting others to know about abuse, not knowing how to share what is going on, protecting victim's right to privacy, fear of being judged, etc.
- Family is unsure who to turn to for support or how to ask for support or what would help
- If support system does know, they struggle with how to best give support, what to say or do.

Impact on The Professional

- Experience increased feelings of responsibility about what happens to family unit
- Begin second guessing decisions
- Feel pressured to reunite family
- If have children, may experience increased concern about normal developmental behaviors
 - Read into innocent physical contact, become hyper-vigilant, overprotective
- Sibling abuse cases are considered some of the most complicated and anxiety provoking that we may encounter
(Kambouridis and Flanagan)

Different Perspectives

Different Perspectives

- Recognizing and understanding the role of each person involved in the case
- Respect and value the role and responsibility of others
- Accepting that there are different perspectives
- Using the different perspectives to help ensure that all aspects are taken into consideration
- Remembering that we all want the same thing: no more abuse

Together

- Working relationship all professionals involved in the case is crucial to proactive responses and helping the family heal
 - Communication
 - Respect
 - Not rooted in us against them mentality
 - See value of each other's role

Some Different Perspectives

- Victim
- Abusive Sibling
- Victim's Therapist
- Abusive Sibling's Therapist
- Parent
- Probation Officer
- Policy Maker
- State agency case manager
- Victim Advocate
- Attorney
- Other siblings in home
- Juvenile Court
- Investigator
- _____
- _____
- _____

Possible Challenges

- Difference in views about how to ensure best interest of victim
- Unintentional inconsistency in responses from agencies and professionals
 - May be rooted in a lack of knowledge about what to do or being unsure what is best for the victim and family
- Lack of knowledge about different roles
- Balancing needs of individual family members and the family as a whole
- Need for knowledge about this type of abuse
- Impact on self

Treatment/Interventions

Treatment

- Victim
- Caregivers
- Abusive Sibling
- Family
- Involvement of other siblings as appropriate

Providers Involved

- Providers meet licensing requirements
- Provider for victim has specialized training and/or experience related to victims of sexual abuse
- Provider for the abusive sibling has specialized training and/or experience related to sexually abusive youth
- Knowledgeable about child and adolescent development
- Knowledgeable about family systems and dynamics
- Training and/or supervision in reconciliation and reunification

Treatment Provider

- Be honest with the family from the beginning
 - Can be done in a supportive manner
 - Decreases reasons for mistrust
- Straightforward approach
- Supportive confrontation
- Discuss decision making process
- Encourage expression of thoughts and feelings
 - Families don't have to agree with you
- Non-judgmental

Treatment Provider

- Must be prepared to address family member's resistance and views that disagree with the program
 - Calm presentation of information combined with support and acknowledgement of other person's view and feelings
 - Provide some explanations
- Involve the family in the decision making process
 - They can be involved even when they disagree with you

Treatment

- Treatment approaches and modalities may vary:
 - Assessment (Individual, Family Systems, Ecological)
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - Multidisciplinary Meetings
 - Socio-Ecological Interventions
 - Individual Therapy
 - Group Therapy
 - Family Therapy
 - Multifamily Group
 - Family Group
 - Sibling Group

Some Non-Negotiables

- There are some things that cannot be negotiated
 - Doesn't mean that they can't be discussed and differing views and opinions shared
- Non-Negotiables
 - Safety related including safety rules and guidelines
 - Caregiver's involvement in treatment unless contraindicated
 - Abusive sibling's involvement in treatment
 - Support and treatment/intervention for victim as clinically indicated

Victim Treatment Highlights

- Addresses any trauma related symptoms that are present
- Individual needs
- Supports victim
- Helps promote healthy development
- Victim's input is a part of safety plan development
- Provider is involved in any decisions about contact with abusive sibling
- Decisions made on best interest of victim
- Involves family

Treatment with the Abusive Sibling

- Adheres to the risk-need-responsivity principles
 - The **risk** of the adolescent will guide level of care, structure, supervision and intensity of treatment decisions
 - The **needs** of the adolescent, treatment targets that relate to risk of re-offending, will guide treatment targets
 - Also take into consideration individualized needs not related to reoffending risk
 - Takes **responsivity** factors, factors that impact youth's response to treatment, into consideration
 - Learning problems, psychiatric issues, bio-social factors, etc.

Viewed as most relevant dynamic risk factors for treatment focus

- Attitudes and Justification Supportive of Offending
- Emotional Management
- Social Competence/Relationship skills
- Ability to Establish Peer Relations
- Health Sexuality
- General Self-Management Skills
- Family Education/Functioning
- Sexual Deviation or Sexual Preoccupation (if applicable)
 - Only applicable to a small subset of abusive youth
- Development of Positive Life Goals

Abusive Sibling: Areas of Focus

- Adolescent Issues
- Learning about Sexual Abuse
- Healthy Sexuality
- Thinking and Thoughts
- Choices
- Risk and Prevention
- Healthy Life
- Reunification Issues & Considerations
- Individual issues as clinically needed

Family

- Family Involvement
 - While this is an important aspect of treatment, it does not stand alone
 - Addresses family dynamics
 - Provides education about adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior
 - Educates and helps parents understand impact on victim and how to support victim
 - Development of safety plans, recognizing risk, avoidance strategies, approach goals

Family: Some Guidelines

Bennett and Marshall

- Assess potential role of family and parent factors in the adolescent's behavior
- Provide support as parent's struggle with emotional trauma surrounding the offending behavior
- Provide parents with information to help them respond and cope more effectively with the sexual offense
- Address constraining influences in the family's functioning
- Emphasize strengths and positives and build on these in promoting change

Family: Some Guidelines

Bennett and Marshall

- Maintain a present-oriented and problem-focused approach to stressors confronted by parents
- Structure treatment for completion of weekly tasks and assignments
- Integrate procedures for evaluation of individual progress and program successes and constraints

Some Goals of Family Work

- Increased healthy involvement in adolescent's treatment
- Increased understanding of issues and safety guidelines
- Identification and reinforcement of strengths
- Development of skills
- Increased knowledge in understanding youth's needs
- Increase healthy functioning within family
- Development of working relationship between family and treatment provider
- Increased ability to discuss tough topic including about the abuse and its impact
- Increased ability to realistically look at situations
- Recognition that there is hope and that things can change

Other Siblings

- Don't forget the other siblings in the family
- Do they need
 - Someone to talk to
 - Someone to explain what is going on
- They may not be involved in treatment on a regular basis, but some intervention or therapeutic meetings may be beneficial
- If the abusive sibling remains in the home or returns home, then the siblings need to be involved in some type of session so they understand what is going on, what the abusive sibling's rules are, etc.

*“Offenders’ success means
no more victims.
We want them to succeed.”*

*Patty Wetterling
Child Advocate*

Stay Or Go?

Abusive Sibling: Adolescent or Child?

- Often the focus of discussion about stay or go, reconciliation and reunification is about when the abusive sibling is an adolescent.
- It is not as common that the sexually abusive sibling is 12 or younger and being considered for removal from the home. However at times 12 and younger may need to be removed for safety and best interest of victim.
- For our discussion we will focus on abusive siblings who are adolescents and blend in discussion about situations with children 12 or younger as appropriate.

Stay or Go?

- Top considerations:
 - Safety, well-being of victim
 - Impact on the victim
 - Safety, well-being of other children or vulnerable person(s) in the home

Stay or Go?

- Some professionals support leaving the sexually abusive youth in the home if there is an “adequate safety plan” in place
- Others support removal of the sexually abusive youth for at least some period of time while the situation is fully assessed, even if the parents can provide an “adequate” safety plan.
- Do you initially have all the information needed to determine if it is both “safe” for the sexually abusive youth to remain in the home and in the victim’s best interest?

Stay or Go?

- Is an “adequate safety plan” enough or is more needed for the sexually abusive youth and victim to remain together?
 - Physical and sexual safety is one aspect of what needs to be considered.
 - Safety also includes emotional considerations and well being.
- Sometimes acting in the victim’s best interest means making a decision that may be unpopular and may appear to have, or has, a negative impact on the victim and the family.
- The reality is that removal of the abusive sibling impacts the victim and the family, but decisions need to be made based on safety and best interest of the victim.

Separation

- Impact of separation
 - Basics:
 - Who is where, maintaining contact, school
 - Explaining to others why a child has left the home
 - Emotionally
 - View of family
 - For the future

Other Siblings

- When there are other siblings in the home who are not victims
 - Safety is a priority
 - Impact on siblings
- Can the sexually abusive youth have contact with the other non-victim siblings
 - Must take into consideration message this gives the victim
 - Look at impact
 - Age of other siblings

Reconciliation & Reunification

Reconciliation & Reunification

- Reconcile
 - "to make friendly again; to settle; bring into harmony" Websters
 - Process of supporting families healing emotional wounds caused by harmful behaviors Adapted from Schladale 2007
- Reunification
 - "to unify again after being divided" Websters
 - Unify again after being divided; physical rejoining of family members with a youth who has been removed from the home Adapted from Schladale 2007

From Different Perspectives

- The role the person is in can impact his/her perspective and view of reconciliation and reunification
 - Parent
 - Court
 - Victim Therapist
 - Abusive Sibling Therapist
 - _____
 - _____

Why Consider Reconciliation or Reunification?

- Sibling relationships are important across the lifespan.
- The abuse and hurt by the sibling doesn't negate the other aspects and components of the sibling relationship that are viewed as positive and healthy.
- Children often want a relationship with their sibling who abused them.
- In some situations it is appropriate, healthy and safe to rebuild the sibling relationship even if the abusive youth does not return home to live.
- Decisions should be made on individual cases not as a broad sweeping policy.

Sibling Relationships

- "One of the most important and enduring relational environments in the life of a family,"
Monahan
- "Most children grow up with siblings. The time they spend together in their early years is often greater than the time they spend with their parents. This relationship often lasts for a lifetime, longer than most marriages and parent-child relationships."
Dunn

Often Possible & Positive

- Rebuilding and rejoining a family takes time and can be a challenging process, but in many cases the challenge is well worth the positive outcome.
- The outcome involves a family willing and motivated to work and skilled professionals to guide them through the process
- The reunification process evolves through assessment, treatment planning, family engagement and clarification

(Warsh, Pine, & Maluccio)

The Decision to Reunite

- "Although it is important to preserve and restore families, it is most important to keep children safe."
(Thomas)
- Reunification isn't appropriate in all cases; however, in many cases families can safely be reunited with the sexually abusive youth returning to the home.

Successful Reconciliation & Reunification

- Community and those in it deserve to be safe
 - Everyone should be safe physically, emotionally and sexually
- Safety is assessed on an ongoing basis with appropriate responses and adjustments when there is change
- Recognizes the complexities the situation
- Reconciliation and reunification is a process that warrants careful consideration and requires patience.

Successful Reconciliation & Reunification

- Based on best practices
- Collaborative approach, Teamwork
- Multidisciplinary communication
- Follows best practices
- Providers have training/supervision in reconciliation and reunification
- Recognition of the challenges
- Addresses responsivity issues
 - Factors impacting victim, abusive sibling and family's response to interventions
- Utilizes strengths and protective factors
- Support system

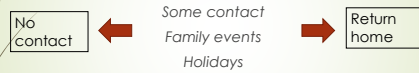
Some Barriers

- Pressure placed on victim by themselves, parents or others
 - May not be aware they are placing pressure
- Parents
 - Feel torn and pulled in different directions.
 - How do they support both the victim and the abusive sibling as well as keeping the family intact
 - Parental ambivalence, mixed feelings
 - Are afraid, concerned that it won't be safe and impact on the victim or other children
 - Overwhelmed by restrictions and responsibilities

Some Barriers

- Parent's functioning and level of stability
- Parent's commitment and follow through
- Professionals identify lack of training and limited research related to reunification and sibling sexual abuse as a barrier
- Teams don't always work collaboratively and team members may have different goals or agendas
- Confusion about team member's roles

It's Not All or Nothing



Re-Engagement: An Alternative Descriptor

- The terms reconciliation and reunification
 - are often inter-changed
 - mean different things to different people
 - it is often assumed that reunification means living together
- Re-Engagement is an alternative descriptor word
 - more general
 - can avoid assumptions
 - can be defined for the individual family situation
- It isn't about the term, but the family, and others involved, understanding what it means

Reconciliation & Reunification Considerations

Teaming Together Reminder

- Respect for different perspectives
- Collaborate with other professionals who are involved
 - Treatment provider communication is crucial, but remember to involve the other professionals who are involved in the case
 - Probation
 - State Agency, etc.
- Involve the parental unit in discussion as needed and as appropriate
 - Some discussion may only involve the professionals

Providers Involved (Reminder)

- Providers meet licensing requirements
- Provider for victim has specialized training and/or experience related to victims of sexual abuse
- Provider for the abusive sibling has specialized training and/or experience related to sexually abusive youth
- Both knowledgeable about family systems and dynamics
- Training, experience and/or supervision in reconciliation and reunification process including the steps preceding the face-to-face sessions
- Providers need to communicate and discuss readiness for session, purpose and goal of session

Reconciliation/Clarification

- Promotes the healing process
- Express feelings
- Communicate
- Session in the best interest of the victim, but also assists in the abusive sibling's treatment

General-Basic

- Session should be supported by both the victim and abusive sibling's treatment provider
- Best if professional working with the sexually abusive youth and professional working with the victim are both involved in the session
- The abusive sibling's therapist and the victim's therapist need to talk about the goal of the session, what the victim wants out of the session, questions that the victim would like answered, discuss abusive sibling's preparation for session, etc.

General-Basic

- Assessment of strengths and vulnerabilities
 - Individual, family and community
- Parent/Caregiver prepared to support and encourage children throughout the process
- Treatment progress and therapeutic change in individuals, parental unit and family
- Develop plan for response to risk behavior
- Monitoring and Supervision
- Plan that supports a successful outcome
 - If reconciliation and reunification are appropriate, then the plan should ensure safety & be prepared to address concerns while promoting a healthy outcome

Some Basic Points

- Re-establish communication and familial relationships
- Process and cope with the sexual abuse
- Development of a safety plan for emotional and physical safety of the victim and family
- Family is re-constructed
- Family dynamics are altered

Listen

Adapted from Rich 2003

- Listen to the:
 - Feelings
 - Thoughts
 - Experiences
- Listen to the:
 - Wishes
 - Needs
 - Fears
 - Hopes
 - Concerns

3 Core Considerations

3 Core Considerations

- The Victim
- The Sexually Abusive Youth
- The Parental/Caregiver Unit

The Victim

- Decisions are made in the best interest of the victim
- Decisions are not made for convenience
- Decisions aren't made because other people are "ready" and "want" this
- Remember a victim may verbalize that they want their brother or sister home, but look further
 - Words matter, but also listen to behaviors and more

The Victim

- Interested in having contact
- Ready for contact
- Reduction in any abuse related symptoms
- Able to talk with therapist or parent about feelings, thoughts, etc.
- Clear about sexually abusive youth's responsibility

Adapted from Silovsky and Widdifield 2010

The Sexually Abusive Youth

- Where the adolescent is within his/her treatment
- Making consistent progress in treatment
- Progress related to sexually abusive behaviors
- Behavioral and psychological stability
- Responsibility for abusive behavior
- Involvement in development of safety plan
- Recognizes, agrees to and has ability to abide by rules
- Recognizes and acknowledges impact on family, siblings, etc.

The Parental/Caregiver Unit

- The parental/caregiver unit's involvement and progress in treatment is a crucial component of the reunification process.
- This includes, but is not limited to:
 - their recognition of the impact of abuse,
 - the risk that is present and
 - their willingness and ability do what is necessary for safety.

*NOTE: *Willingness and ability aren't the same thing*

Parental/Caregiver Unit

- Understand and agree to responsibility
- Know details about the sexually abusive behavior
- Provide support for both the victim and the sexually abusive youth
- Able to discuss the sex abuse, concerns, responsibilities with the therapist
- Involved in developing safety plan and identifying supervision needs
- Able to talk to sibling who was abused, sibling who engaged in sexually abusive behavior and other children in the home about the rules, guidelines, etc., as needed

Adapted from Silovsky and Widdifield 2010

Reality

- The sibling who was abused and the abusive sibling may not be ready for contact at the same time.
 - This is processed in therapy as needed.
- Remember that both individuals' readiness and if the victim wants to communicate or have contact with the abusive sibling needs to be taken into consideration.
- The victim's well-being, best interest and safety are priorities.

Some Things to Think About & Discuss

Contact Before Session?

- What about non face to face communication before there is a formal session?
 - Victim is asking to talk to sibling when he/she calls home
 - Victim wants to send something or a message to sibling when parents visit him/her
 - Birthdays, holidays
- Can there be letters (not therapeutic letter), calls, messages, cards?

Therapeutic Letter Writing (Clarification Ownership, Responsibility Letter)

- Appears to be a common practice
- Some use it only with the abusive sibling; letter is not given to victim
- These letters often include:
 - Admitting to the sexually abusive behaviors
 - Taking responsibility for the abuse
 - Expressing awareness or acknowledging impact of abuse on the victim
 - Information about plan to ensure safety
 - Some may include abusive sibling apologizing (see slides on apology)

Therapeutic Letter Writing (Clarification, Ownership, Responsibility Letter)

- Typically the letter is reviewed by abusive sibling's therapist with the youth making changes based on therapist's input
 - The more input by therapist resulting in changes can raise concern about whose letter it really is when completed
- At times it is passed on to the victim's therapist for their knowledge or possible use with the victim
- At other times its use is restricted to a therapeutic tool with the abusive sibling

Therapeutic Letter Writing

- No matter what it is called, the use of therapeutic letter writing:
 - needs to have a clear purpose
 - its use needs to be determined based on the individual case
 - takes into consideration the abusive sibling's intellectual functioning and learning disabilities

Initial Session

- The first session involving the victim and the abusive sibling may be referred to differently and may have different goals depending on the situation.
 - Clarification Session
 - Apology Session
 - Ownership Session
 - Responsibility Session
 - Reconciliation Session

The First Session

- While the reconciliation/clarification session requires a high degree of preparation, the 1st session may not be very long
- Don't try to do too much in the first session, let it be what it is-a beginning.
 - Individuals involved are experiencing a variety of emotions and are only able to attend to a limited amount of information/processing
 - The victim's age can impact length of session
 - Length of time since the siblings have seen each other can easily lead to distractions
- The session, although at times brief, is often very emotional

The First Session

- The session should not occur unless it is in the victim's best interest and the victim, the sexually abusive youth and the parent(s) have demonstrated progress congruent with such a session (unless the parent(s)' involvement in the siblings' treatment and/or lives is contraindicated)
- Communication between the sexually abusive youth's treatment provider and the victim's treatment provider is important to ensure that questions the victim has are addressed

The Abusive Sibling & First Session (some content focus)

- Language used in session should be congruent with victim's age and developmental stage
- Taking responsibility
 - Needs and age of victim inform level of detail, etc.
- Clear message that it was not the victim's fault
- Rules for safety, emphasize applies to all children not just the victim
- What can do together (don't focus on just the don'ts, focus on the can dos).
 - How can abusive sibling still be a brother/sister; approach focus.
- Prepared to answer tough questions:
 - Why did you do it? Will you do it again? What's different?

Apology

- It is not unusual for providers to promote the use of an apology in the reconciliation session or refer to the session as an apology session.
- It is recommended that the inclusion of an apology be approached with caution and determined on a case by case basis
 - The inclusion of an apology should be based on the victim's and family's needs and what this means to them, not the providers' personal beliefs or opinions
- The concept of apology can take on unintended meaning and has different meanings to different people

Apology

- The victim's needs should guide if an apology occurs and how it is incorporated into the session
- At times there may be information from the victim's therapist that the victim wants the abusive sibling to apologize.
- At other times, the parent(s) wants to hear the youth apologize
 - If this is in contrast to the victim's needs, then this can occur in a separate session
- The degree of sincerity of the apology needs to be considered

Trust

- Parents often ask if they can "trust" the youth again.
- Safety is the first priority
- Don't put the youth in situation to "test"
- Distinguish between "trust" on general issues and need for safety plan related to sexually abusive behavior
- Youth needs to be involved in age appropriate activities and have approach goals
- The plan needs to communicate a belief in the youth's change and desire to maintain the healthy change.

Safety Plan

- Parent/Caregiver and abusive sibling involved in development of plan
 - Just handing a plan to the family decreases probability of their embracing it and taking ownership
- Victim input included also with involvement varying depending on age and developmental factors
- Victim's therapist has input to plan

Safety Plan

- The abusive youth is responsible for his/her behavior and adherence to the safety plan; however, the parent(s) or caregiver accepts responsibility for the implementation of the plan when they agree for the abusive youth to be around the victim or other vulnerable person(s) or in their home.
- The victim and other siblings will have their own responsibilities for their boundaries, communication, etc., but should not feel that they are responsible for the abusive youth's adherence to the plan or his/her behavior.

Safety Plan

- Safety plan should be individualized; based on the youth and his/her circumstances and situation
 - While plans in general may have several similar components, an *individualized* plan can increase the importance the plan is given by the parents
- Include approach focus not just avoidance
 - What can the family do together
 - Think approach in supporting a healthy sibling relationship; what can they do

Safety Plan

- Some Considerations
 - Layout of house
 - Physical contact
 - Computer, internet, social media, movies, music
 - Boundaries and privacy
 - Supervision (in-home and community)
 - Dress, attire
 - Issue of use of alarms, camera, motion detectors
 - How to recognize when youth is having problems
 - Youth's identified coping strategies
 - What to do, who to contact if there are concerns, questions, etc.

An FYI: Healthy Life Plan

- It is becoming more common for treatment providers to use some term related to healthy when developing a plan with the abusive youth
- A Healthy Life Plan incorporates safety plan, relapse prevention plan content, but ensures that there is a major focus on approach goals also
 - What the youth can do, involvement in activities that promote healthy adolescent development
 - Focus on skills youth has
- Safety plans may have several cannots, but we need to also have the can dos
- A healthy adolescent means decreased risk to reoffend

To Alarm or Not Alarm

- The use of motion detectors, door alarms, cameras is:
 - embraced by some,
 - others haven't heard of using them and
 - others point out that it may give a false sense of security
- Some key questions:
 - Would you recommend and/or agree for the youth to be in the home without the alarms? If no, why not?
 - Is the technology a core component of the safety plan or a back up to the safety plan that the youth and parental unit are responsible for?
 - What is your purpose in recommending alarm, etc.
- If the technology is the core component of plan, then this raises questions and concerns.

Keep in Mind

- The reunification process involves ongoing assessment and observation of the victim, the abusive sibling, other siblings and the family as a whole
- The family is moving towards increased healthy while they are healing
- Moving forward is a process that takes time
- Priority is best interest of victim and safety.
 - This is combined with meeting the needs of the abusive sibling and family also.

Full Reunification Isn't Always Possible

- There may be factors that prevent or interfere with adequate supervision and child protection
 - Disability
 - Psychiatric disorder
 - Substance abuse
 - Overwhelming stress
- Family not able to provide needed supervision and protection
- Other factors/situations that impact safety
- Family unable or unwilling to have youth return home

It Doesn't Always Work Out

- There are cases in which reconciliation and/or reunification aren't appropriate; this may be due to
 - the abusive sibling's level of disturbance, risk or lack of willingness to change
 - contact and level of involvement is contraindicated due to victim's lack of readiness, emotional difficulties, or negative impact on well-being
 - the parent(s) not being able or aren't willing to implement family safety plans, etc.
 - the presence of a level of family dysfunction and unsafe environment that negates either youth being in the home
- When it isn't possible for contact, it is important to ensure that needed support and guidance is provided as those impacted cope with the situation and the healing process continues.

Lingering Thoughts & Questions

Some Lingering Thoughts & Questions

- There will be lingering thoughts and questions
- Knowing when the family is "ready."
- Will the family continue to maintain changes made?
- I know recidivism rates are low, but I am still concerned.
- What happens after agencies and therapists are out of the picture?
- How do I know I am making the right recommendation?
- Why would a parent agree for the abusive youth to return home?
- Is it my fault if something happens?
- So what about when the situation doesn't fit neatly into the guidelines?
 - Reality can be different.

Summary Reminders

- Attention to victim's readiness and needs
- Start small and progress based on readiness, observation and individualized situation
- Interactions and feelings processed after each contact/visit
- Ongoing communication
 - Safety and stability with the victim
 - Other children in the home
 - Parents
 - Other professionals

Summary Reminders

- Healthy Plan/Safety Plan
- Ongoing assessment of situation and safety
- Identify and address behaviors that make victim or other children in the home feel uncomfortable or unsafe
- Have a plan for if the victim or others feel unsafe
 - Who do they tell, what happens with the information
- If safety is in question, assess the situation, take action
- If safety is compromised, stop contact until physical, sexual and emotional safety are restored.
- Plan for the future

Summary

- Our goal is to prevent victimization
- Victim's best interest and safety of children is priority
- Remember to take care of yourself; this work is tough for the provider also
- Families can heal, but healing takes time, effort and patience

RESOURCES

- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)
 - www.atsa.com
- Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM)
 - www.csom.org
- Safer Society
 - www.saferociety.org
- NEARI
 - www.nearipress.org
- National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth
 - www.ncsby.org
 - Site is back up, but not fully operational; parent resources section is active

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