

# Talking to Children Who Have Experienced Abuse

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**ONE IN 10** CHILDREN  
WILL BE SEXUALLY ABUSED  
BEFORE AGE 18



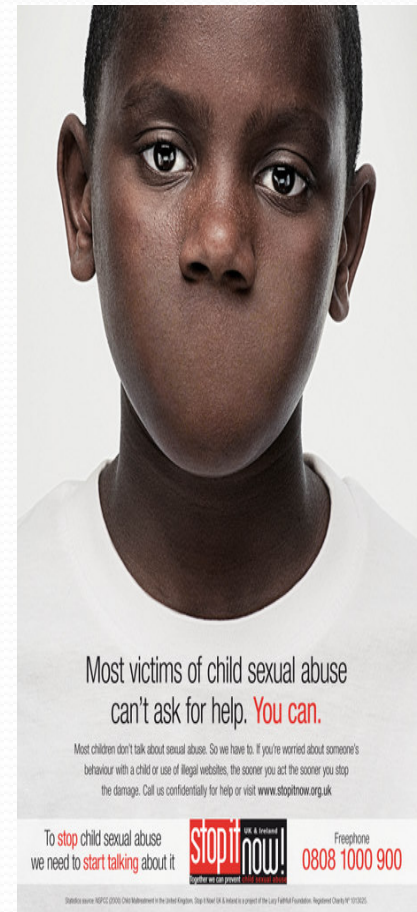
90%

OF CHILD  
SEXUAL  
ABUSE  
VICTIMS  
**KNOW  
THEIR  
ABUSER**



# Why Children Don't Tell

- Secrecy
- Stigmatization
- Fear they won't be believed
- Don't know it's wrong
- Threats or bribes
- Fear of consequences



# GROOMING

- “A process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child’s compliance and maintaining the child’s secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to strength the offender’s abusive pattern, as it may be used as a means of justifying or denying their actions” (S. Craven et al, 2006)

# Stages of Grooming

- Self Grooming
- Grooming the Environment and significant others
- Grooming the child
  - Physical Grooming
  - Emotional Grooming

# How Children Tell

- Indirect Hints: “I always get scared at night”
- Disguised Disclosures: “I know someone who is being touched in a bad way.”
- Disclosures with strings attached: “I have a problem, but if I tell you, you have to promise not to tell.”
- Accidental Disclosures





ONLY **4-8%** OF

**CHILD  
SEXUAL  
ABUSE  
REPORTS ARE  
FABRICATED**



# When a Child Discloses:

## What to do...

- Reassure the child- “you did the right thing by telling me”
- Listen calmly and openly
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication
- Write down the facts in child’s words

## What not to do....

- Interrogate or quiz the child
- Question whether or not they are telling the truth
- Place responsibility on the child
  - “why didn’t you stop him/her?”
  - “what did you do to make this happen?”
- Make promises you can not keep

**A report was made....**

NOW WHAT?

# What Happens After the Report?

- The report is screened by DFCS
  - Screened out—no investigation
  - Investigation opened
- DFCS may notify Law Enforcement if deemed necessary when investigation is opened (and vice versa)
- Law enforcement or DFCS call CAC to schedule a forensic interview

# Forensic Interview at CAC

- Origin of CAC
  - Began in 1985 in Alabama
  - The team is brought to the child
- Repetitive interviews were proving to be a problem when prosecuting sexual abuse cases
- Modeled on the simple but powerful concept of coordination between community agencies and professionals involved in the intervention

# Purpose of Forensic Interview

A forensic interview is a neutral, fact-finding interaction conducted by a specially trained interviewer using a multidisciplinary approach in response to allegations of all

\*child first doctrine



# Multidisciplinary team

- Child Advocacy Center
  - Forensic Interviewer
  - Therapist
  - Victim Advocate
- Law Enforcement & GBI
- Department of Family and Children Services
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Medical Provider
- Rape Crisis
- District Attorney Office
- CASA?

# What's Next

## Child Advocacy Center:

- Disclosure
- Non-Disclosure
- Inconclusive
- Referrals
  - Therapy
  - Medical

## ● Department of Family and Children Services:

- Substantiated
- Unsubstantiated
- Services in the home
- Safety Resource
- Removal of Child
- Close

# What's next

## Law Enforcement:

- Arrest
- Non-Arrest
- Sent to DA office
- Close

## District Attorney's Office:

- Decline to prosecute
- Present to Grand Jury
  - No Bill
  - True Bill (Indict)
    - Court



# Understanding Forensic Interviews

# ChildFirst Forensic Interviewing

- Rapport
- Transition to Topic of concern
- Exploring Details
- Closure

# Rapport

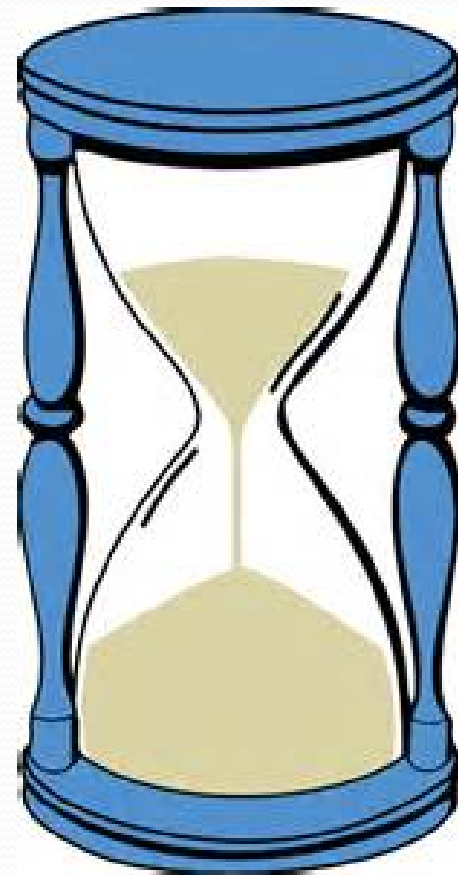
- RAPPOR, RAPPOR, RAPPOR
- Get the child comfortable talking to you
- Understand the way child communicate
  - What questions work and what questions don't
- Narrative Practice
  - Acclimate the child to the way you ask questions and what types of questions you ask

# Transition to Topic of Concern

- “Do you know why you are here today”
- “Do you have any problems anywhere”
- “Have you ever been to the hospital”
- Anatomy Identification
- Touch Inquiry

# Questioning Process

- Open ended/Free Recall
  - “Tell me about that”
- Focused recall
  - “Tell me about the last time”
- Multiple choice
  - “Were you standing up or sitting down or *something else*”
- Yes/No



## Guidelines for Age-Appropriate Interview Questions\*



This is only a general guideline. Each child's capacity will vary depending on his/her unique circumstances and developmental level.

\*Adapted from:

Walker-Perry, N. & Wrightsman, L.S. (1991). *The child witness*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Saywitz, K. (1994 March). Questioning child witnesses. *Violence Update*, 4(7), 3-8.

# Check for alternative hypothesis

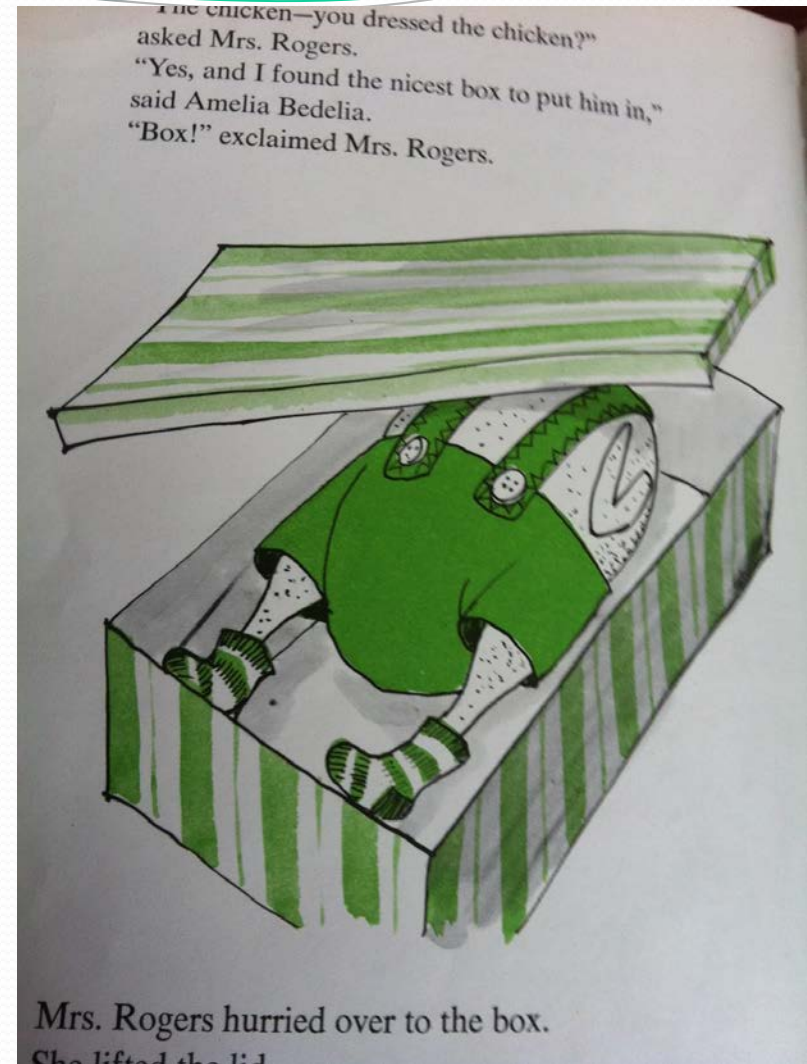
- “Did he do anything else to your pee pee”
- “Did anyone else ever do anything to your pee pee”
- “Did you ever do anything to his ding dong”
- “Did anything come out of his pee pee”
- “Did anyone tell you what to say today?”
- “Is there anything you aren’t suppose to tell me”

# How Children Think

- Thinking is egocentric
  - Child does not realize other's thoughts or ideas
  - Child assumes you know what they know
- TIPS for talking to children
  - Remind child you don't know
    - "I don't know her. Who is Sally?"
    - "I've never played that game. What do you do when you play that game?" (NOT "how do you play that game")



Children are  
concrete  
thinkers



# How Children Communicate

- Communication appears disorganized
  - Child does not begin at the beginning
  - Child does not end at the end
  - Child leaves out parts
- TIPS for talking to children
  - Focus the child as best as possible
  - “What is the first thing that happened” “Then what happened”

# How Children Communicate

- Explaining is a complex task
  - Very young children can't answer, "How do you know?"
  - They don't understand causation
  - Sequencing can be difficult
- TIPS for talking to children
  - Help child "explain"
    - "You said your clothes were on and you said the sticky stuff got on your tummy. Tell me more about that. (no response)  
When the sticky stuff was on your tummy, were your clothes on?"

# How Children Communicate

- Self-monitoring is poor
  - Child may use multiple names for body parts
  - Child may change whom or what they are talking about without signal
  - Child may leave out parts of narrative
- TIPS for talking to children
  - Frame the question then ask
  - “When he touched you with his pee pee, did anything come out of it” NOT “Did anything come out of his pee pee”

Adapted from ChildFirst Forensic Interview Training

# Beware of hard words

- Words that seem simple but are not
  - Touch
  - House
  - Daddy/mommy
- Avoid multisyllabic words
- Avoid quantifiers
  - A few, some, several, many, most
- Medical or legal terminology
- Use names instead of pronouns

In or On??

# How many times?

One time or more than one time

# Completeness of disclosure?

Partner Activity



# Fantastical elements

- Never assume child is making something up because you don't understand
- Child may be repeating what she was told by perpetrator
  - “let's pretend we're in Disney world”
- Child may be using only words she has for the unknown
  - “He touched me with a pink snake”
  - “It happened in the jungle”
- Child may be right
  - “Then a bird flew on my head”

# Tips to avoid suggestibility

- Reduce appearance of authority
- Avoid assumptive, misleading and coercive questions
- Avoid use of “play” and “pretend” when questioning
- Ask developmentally appropriate questions
- Use child’s language for things
- Avoid making the child think answers are right and wrong

# Tips continued

- Encourage the child to admit if they do not know the answer.
- Tell them not to guess
- Avoid using tag questions
  - “he touched you, didn’t he”
  - “that was on your private, right?”
- **NEVER ASSUME THINGS!**

# What Your Role Is

- If you are a mandated reporter it is your legal obligation to report your suspicions to your local county DFCS office within 24 hours or to your organization or agency's designated reporter.
- What is the policy at your CASA program for when a child makes a new allegation?
- It is NOT your role to investigate injuries or anything the child has told you!!

QUESTIONS?

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