

**Office of Training and Professional Development**

# **Sexual Abuse Training For Adoptive Parents**

**Adapted From "Preparing For Success," IDCFS, July, 1993.**

## **Handouts**

**Illinois Department of Children and Family Services**



## HANDOUT 1

### WHAT EXACTLY IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Researchers and counselors in the field of child sexual abuse can help us understand exactly what child sexual abuse is. If you grasp the nature and range of abuse likely to have been inflicted upon your child, you can begin to understand your child's experiences more fully. Below are three different definitions.

**We know that the “bottom line” is that anything an adult does intentionally to arouse the child's sexual feeling is abuse and can be very traumatic for the child.**

In a brochure published by the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse entitled *Talking about Child Sexual Abuse*, child abuse is defined as:

*...sexual contact between a child and adult or older child for the sexual gratification of the offender. It includes physical contact such as handling of the child's or the offender's genitals or breasts, oral sex, or attempted or actual penetration of the child's vagina or rectum; and non-physical contact such as forcing a child to look at the offender's genitals, exposure of a child's genitals, talking to a child in a sexually explicit manner, peeping at a child in the bath or while he or she is undressing (voyeurism) or exploiting a child through pornography or prostitution.*

In the book, *Understanding Abusive Families* written by James Garbarino, child sexual abuse is defined as:

*...contacts or interactions between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person when the perpetrator is in a position of power or control over the victim.*

In the book, *The Common Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents* written by Ruth and Henry Kempe, child sexual abuse is defined as:

*...the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities that they not fully comprehend to which they are unable to give informed consent, or that violate the social taboos of family roles.*

## HANDOUT 1 (CONT'D)

**Remember**, you cannot rely on the child to define abuse. That is the job of adults. Dr. Wayne Duehn in his publication *Beyond Sexual Abuse: The Healing Power of Adoptive Families* notes:

*We know the “bottom line” is that anything an adult does intentionally to arouse the child’s sexual felling is abuse and can be very traumatic for the child... There is a commonly mistaken notion that only certain sexual acts qualify as abuse. Some people, for example, think that real sexual abuse has occurred only if intercourse has taken place. They breathe a sigh of relief if the facts reveal that “only fondling has taken place, or exposure to pornography, or watching adults engage in sexual activities. This is a limited view of sexuality and sexual abuse.*

Observe and listen to your child so you are able to detect the clues they may give you that abuse has occurred.

## **HANDOUT 2**

### **WHAT DO STUDIES AND REPORTS REVEAL ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?**

Parents who take the time to understand the facts about child sexual abuse may be able to use that knowledge to assist their sexually abused child more effectively than parents who do not. Presently, there two ways of estimating how often child sexual abuse occurs and how it harms that child or teen. Information can be gathered from 1) scientific studies which are based on talks with children or adults about their experiences and 2) from reports made to child abuse hotlines. Using these sources researchers estimate that:

1. 33% or one of every three girls is exposed to sexual abuse before age eighteen;
2. 20% or one of every five boys is exposed to sexual abuse before age eighteen;
3. girls report that males are the abusers 80% of the time, but some girls report that they were abused by women, and so do some boys;
4. most sexually abused children are abused by persons they live with or persons known to them; danger from strangers is real, but not as common as the danger they face from people they know; one researcher found that 75% of all reported sexual abuse is committed by someone the child knows or trusts;
5. children are not always physically hurt during a sexual assault; it is often the psychological aftermath that is the most painful;
6. adult sexual abusers sometimes bribe, threaten, lie, or pay money to their child victims;
7. many children try to tell and are not believed, some keep it a secret for many years; some children are physically hurt or killed as a result of sexual abuse, but thousands survive the abuse; many children report that their abuser told them not to tell anyone about what happened;
8. sexual abuse is oftentimes progressive in nature; the abuse occurs in the context of a relationship and develops over time from sexual language to sexual touching to sexual intercourse;

## HANDOUT 2 (CONT'D)

**Most sexually abused children are abused by persons they live with or persons known to them; danger from strangers is real, but not as common as the danger they face from people they know**

9. boys and girls are sexually abused more frequently by heterosexual men than by homosexual men; but the danger from men, regardless of their sexual preferences, is real; anyone interested in children, personally or professionally, could be interested for the wrong reasons;
10. children rarely lie about sexual abuse;
11. some children are very negatively affected by the abuse of another child, like a brother or sister;
12. not all children hate the people who abused them; they may feel very mixed up about their feelings of being abused;
13. some children do not resist sexual abuse because they don't know it's wrong or because it feels good to them at the time; if a child or teen did not resist abuse, that child's reactions and feelings may differ from those of children who did; they too deserve to have their feelings respected;
14. What bothers children varies; a child's reaction to molestation varies based upon factors we are not clear about. The following factors are thought to have a more negative impact upon a child victim of sexual abuse as noted in McNamara and McNamara, *Adoption and Sexually Abused Child*:

The abuse takes place frequently over a long span of time;

The abuser uses excessive force during the abuse;

The abuser penetrates the child (especially for boys);

The abuser tortures the child;

The abuser engages in ritualistic abuse and/or Satanism;

## **HANDOUT 2 (CONT'D)**

There is a big age difference between the child and the abuser;

The abuser is a trusted adult or in a close relationship with the child;

The abuser harmed a child who was emotionally fragile, physically or mentally handicapped, or emotionally under age six at the time of the abuse;

The family rejects or ridicules the child's feelings; disclosure is not accepted by the family; the family is disrupted or dissension is stirred by the disclosure; the child is rejected or abandoned by the family;

The child fears for his or her life during the abuse/attack.

## **HANDOUT 3**

### **PREPARING EMOTIONALLY FOR A SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD**

#### **WHAT CAN WE DO TO EMOTIONALLY PREPARE OURSELVES FOR THE ADOPTION EXPERIENCE?**

It will probably be helpful to think about your emotional self and your past experiences as part of your personal readiness plan for adopting a sexually abused child. This doesn't mean you have to go into psychotherapy or over analyze your past and present life for barriers. You should, however, take a personal inventory of your feeling about parenting, adoption and child sexual abuse in the context of your own experiences as a child and as an adult. Try to answer the following kinds of questions about yourself.

*How do I really feel about being a parent?*

*What kind of parents did I have? How do I feel about the way I was raised?*

*How do I really feel about the adoption?*

*Have I accepted all of my positive and negative feelings? Have I dealt with loss of the fantasy of a biological child?*

*How do my childhood experiences affect my day-to-day life?*

*How do I relate emotionally to people?*

*Where did I learn about emotional relationships?*

*Do I have a satisfying emotional relationship with my spouse and my immediate family?*

*Have I had a personal trauma which is unresolved?*

Use the information in this section of the handbook to think about your feelings. Talk about your feelings with your spouse. Adopting a child is emotionally intense. During times like this a sort of "emotional flooding" may occur. You may remember parts of your childhood and get in touch with feelings you thought were resolved long ago. You may also experience new feelings and discover new things about yourself. These are normal reactions.

## **HANDOUT 4**

### **WILL OUR MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP BE AFFECTED?**

Any adopted child is bound to upset the balance between a husband and wife when he first joins the family. Sexually abused children can further challenge a marriage since they come from families where marital relationships are usually either confused or non-existent.

In many instances, sexually abused children have assumed the role of sexual (and sometimes emotional) partner to one of their parents. They may not be used to parents who act as a “team” and may manipulate one against the other. Being aware of this fact will help parents overcome feelings of jealousy, rejection, or anger when a child gets in the way of their intimacy or shows more attention to one parent than the other.

### **HOW CAN WE STRENGTHEN OUR MARITAL RELATIONSHIP AS ADOPTIVE PARENTS?**

It is important for you to keep open the lines of husband/wife communication. If one person feels uncomfortable with the way the relationship has been going, then this should be discussed.

Also, in your effort to give attention to your child, do not forget to set aside time alone with your spouse. Your child will learn his or her role in the family more easily if the adult relationship between mother and father is clearly defined.

The Illinois study found that successful adoptive couples seem to be in a relationship where both individuals:

1. have a strong ability to establish structure,
2. have stable values,
3. have a need to appear responsible and dependable,
4. Experience some dissatisfaction and disappointment with the child, yet do not perceive the child as a source of marital difficulty.

The Illinois study concluded that the response of the parents, not the behavior of the children, is the main determinant of the successful adoption. The presence and degree of agency support and prior child rearing experience are factors that enhance success and satisfaction. The essential personality traits for successful parents are: reliability and self-confidence, responsibility, sociability, warmth, self discipline, organization, tolerance for conflict supported by confidence in problem-solving, and communication abilities.



## HANDOUT 5

### THE SENTENCE COMPLETION EXERCISE

What I already know about child sexual abuse I learned

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When I think about a child who has been sexually abused I feel

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My family taught me \_\_\_\_\_ about sex

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and now \_\_\_\_\_

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My feelings about child sexual abuse come from \_\_\_\_\_

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I am sure that my emotions will

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I have many questions about my own ability to handle this, but the one that is the most important is:

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I have had a personal or family experience related to child sexual abuse and I

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I have not had a personal or family experience related to child sexual abuse but I still think

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I will never forget how I felt when

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The strength I can offer a child who has been sexually abused will come from

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It is not fear that is in my way; it is

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## **HANDOUT 5 (CONT'D)**

My commitment to overcoming my own barriers is

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I know that I need to

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## **HANDOUT 6**

### **WHAT ABOUT DAY-TO-DAY LIVING**

Give the child choices about how to decorate his or her bedroom. Make it as welcoming as possible, but leave major decisions such as the color of the walls or the pictures on the walls for the child or teen to make.

Make sure that writing materials are always available to the older child. Writing or keeping a diary/journal can be a healing process.

- Everyone should knock before entering bedrooms.
- Do not walk around your home nude or partially clothed.
- Make sure your child dresses appropriately for his or her age
- Do not make your child kiss relatives or other friends hello or goodbye unless she wants to.
- Because sexually abused children sometimes have nightmares, make sure that they are comfortable with the lighting in the bedroom.
- If you have pets, make sure the child knows the rules about caring for the pet. At first, do not leave your child alone with the pet until you determine how they will relate to each other.
- Because sexually abused children are sometimes self destructive, keep matches and lighters away from their reach.
- School-aged children should take responsibility for washing, dressing and using the toilet by themselves.
- Provide consistent supervision and randomly check in on your child's activities. Know where and with whom your children are at all times.
- Especially if a child has a touching problem, do not plan to let your child sleep in the same bed with other children or adults at any time. Children of the opposite sex who are past infancy should not share bedrooms. Children should not share a room or a bed with adults.
- Do not stop touching or being loving toward each other, but curtail over stimulating sexual behaviors in view of the child or teen. Parents should not have intercourse when the child is in the room, even if the child is asleep.
- Other children in your home or those who come to visit you often should be told that the sexually abused child might do inappropriate things because of "past hurts." Tell them what to do if this happens, how not to become involved, and that it is important to tell adults.
- Remove sexual stimuli from the child's environment. Avoid magazines with explicit sexual content. Even those which are considered easy reading can sometimes portray erotic or overly sexualized images which could upset your child.

## **HANDOUT 6 (CONT'D)**

- Avoid television shows and music with sexual content. Cable television in the home is not advised unless closely supervised. Music purchases (tapes, CDs) should be monitored.
- All bathroom activities must be done separately from other children. Respect for privacy should be observed at all times. Even young children should not bathe or use the toilet together, especially if one of them has a touching problem.

## HANDOUT 7

### THE SAFE KIDS BILL OF RIGHTS

My body is my personal property. Nobody can touch it without my permission. Nobody can touch my private parts except me.

I can say “NO” to unwanted touch, attention, or gifts, even from a grownup.

I can ask adults I trust for information, in words I can understand, about my body, sex, and touching.

I can be happy, sad, angry, afraid, confused, or uncomfortable, and I can share these feelings with others.

I can protect myself by saying “NO” when I think I might be in danger. I can leave, run, yell, or break a secret to avoid danger. I can trust my funny feelings when I feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

I have the right to ask for support and help from the grownups I trust. I have the right to be protected.

I have the right to be loved, even if I make mistakes or bad things happen to me.