Real Treatment with Real Kids:
Treating Children who have been Sexually Abused

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In my world…

• Not always possible to squeeze a real kid into a set schedule…
• Grace.
• Raped teen who won’t tell.
• A year later, Talia tells about brother
• 2 boys at school .. Moved away
• No symptoms, big concerns.
• Kids with NO symptoms.

What this presentation is, and isn’t…

• Not as didactic as some might want it to be or that they might be used to
• Based on evidence based, Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
• Highly incorporates the use of the therapeutic relationship as well as theory
• More than anything, it is about Attitude
Is there only one way?

- TF-CBT
- Play Therapy
- Sand Tray
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- PCIT (Parent Child Interaction Therapy)

- WHAT DOES NOT WORK IS…

Objectives:

- To share with you ideas on ways to approach the issue of sexual abuse and help children work through abuse
- Ideas on how to engage children and parents in moving forward
- Addressing the secret thoughts that can negatively affect healing

It all fits together into a fabric

- Statistics
- Didactic is only one piece
Sexual Abuse Treatment
For Children

- Ideas on how to approach the issue and help children work through abuse… Most children do not ask for treatment…

- Therapy as an art, based on a foundation of evidence based research and guidelines.

The Effects of Trauma on Brain Development

- Evidence that abuse can cause changes in the brain…

- Bessel van der Kolk (Boston) and Bruce Perry, M.D. (Texas) have done research and written many articles and books on this and while this is new work, fear/stress releases cortisol, which can lead to developmental and cognitive delays.

Most abnormalities - Left hemisphere which is where language and logical thought reside. Martin Teicher and his colleagues (The Neurobiology of Child Abuse (2002). Scientific American, March. Pp. 68-75) at McLean's hospital in Boston, did research that found abuse survivors were 2x's as likely to have abnormal EEG readings, associated with both aggression and self-destructive behavior.
Hope.

• The brain is flexible, and impacted by the events and environment it encounters.
• Meditation, controlled breathing, relaxation, positive visualizations, the power of intention, all create physiological responses that are helpful.
• What explains resilient children?
• Do you know of people who have recovered?
• If we don’t have hope, then what are we doing?

Myths about Sexual abuse

• Children are usually abused by strangers
• Children will show symptoms
• Children will be afraid or avoid the perpetrator
• Sexual abuse is only in certain socio-economic groups, educational levels, etc.
• This is the worst thing that can happen to a child.

Sexual Abuse Statistics

• One out of every 4-5 girls by age 18
• One out of every 6-7 boys
• Only one in ten will ever tell...
Adult Survivors....
It is not enough to have the abuse stop.
It is not enough to tell.

- Self-esteem issues
- Substance abuse/use
- Body Issues

- Eating disorders
- Trust issues
- Sexual dysfunction
- Self mutilation
- Sexuality issues
- Weight issues
- Issues may arise in being able to keep their children safe

ROAD RUTS

- The path of least resistance
What it takes to keep going...  
With a smile... 

• Attitude is so important  
• Keep your focus narrow - Compartmentalize  
• Act, be silly, be fun/have fun  
• Let your creativity flourish  
• Be yourself and more

What I hear from parents...  

• No one I know could possibly do that/  
• I never leave them with anyone other than family...  
• My child would tell me if something happens because we have a close relationship and I always tell them they can tell me anything!!!

Not the Usual Suspects  

• Mom  
• Babysitter  
• Coach  
• Aunt  
• Minister  
• Physician
**PARENTING HELP**

- Important to connect with the parents
- Sessions alone with them
- Dealing with their guilt
- Attitude is so important - theirs and yours
  - Is this the worst thing that can happen/a “worst nightmare”?
- Boxes and Boundaries... EMDR Containers
- Reassure them and keep them informed
- Symptom help/ changing it up

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Our beliefs and reactions can create a reality that may not be real...

- Issues? Their own SA history?
- Virginity?
- Ruined for life?
- Will need therapy for life?
- Will never be safe again? Defensive driving.
- Will grow up and abuse others?

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**What I do with Parents/Caregivers**

- Symptom ideas…
- Immediate relief…
- Apologies and forgiveness
- Giving permission to tell more
- Checking in appointments

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Therapy

- Attitude
- Relationship
- Humor and fun while exploring the sad and angry and confusing feelings
- Try new things
- Practicing coping skills/safe spaces/relaxation

TALKING ABOUT THE ABUSE
Preparation for working with the child..

- Parent REASSURANCES!!!
- If they haven't told it all yet..
- If they remember more later...
- Remember, If the parent is convinced that this will ruin their child's life, they are right.
GOOD INTENTIONS
AND BAD ADVICE

• Parents do their best –
• Naming body parts (yikes!) nostrils
• What we tell kids about preventing abuse
• Good Touch and Bad Touch
• The secret guilt that kids hang onto and why..

ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING..

ALMOST....

• Swimming pools and Monks Robes
• This is ONE thing that will happen
  in a long lifetime of things happening
• It SHOULD NOT define anyone's life
• The goal.. The narrative is just a book on the shelf...
Being a Child should be a safe thing to be!

Childhood should be a safety zone...
The myth of therapy....
FIELD OF DREAMS
• When they are ready, they will talk?
• How to set up the playing field
• I approach it head on... This is how..
• Learning how to dance with spiders

Techniques to help kids talk
• Parent telling, child filling in the blanks
• Fill in the blanks
• Triptychs
• Play, Metaphor, Laughter
• Art
• Worst and best things that have happened
METAPHORS AND SEMANTICS

• The use of Metaphor –
• Let's eat browies
• EMDR trains
• The bottle story
• Watch the words… positive and clear
• Touch, hurt
• Giving Options and help

EXPOSING THE SECRET THOUGHTS

• It is my fault because I did not tell (and my parents will be mad at me and disappointed if they find out)
• It felt good… (onions and tickling)
• I did what they did.. or worse (so I won't tell that part)

• Magic Wands and Tiaras
• Battle Ship
• Uno
• Drawing
• Cards
• M and M's
MAGIC and HUMOR!!

- Ice Cream Graphs - Many uses!
- Magic Rocks
- Force fields
- Monster spray
- Paper Dolls and Band-aids
- Play therapy
What is the Truth? The need for early intervention... Another path..
More thought errors

• I could have/should have stopped it.
• I am damaged.
• I am not a virgin anymore.
• Does this mean I am gay?
• Could I be pregnant?
• Is there something still in my body?

More secret thoughts..

• Sometimes kids have exhibited sexual behaviors with other children...
• Some behaviors are developmentally appropriate, some are not. (Tony Cavanugh Johnson)
• Present this to the child/parent and offer ideas to prevent acting out that may exacerbate the problems.

STAYING SAFER

It takes practice..

• School fire drills...
• Malls, Locked Houses, and Fire Drills
• Empowerment to speak and to act
• PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE
PRACTICE

• “I don’t like it when you _(do that). Please stop.” or “You need to stop”
• “I’m not really comfortable with you doing that and I want you to stop”.
• Can the parents do this?

TAKING BACK THEIR LIVES

• Not letting the perpetrator win
• Boxes and Boundaries
• Letters and Pictures
• The use of the toilet
• Touching a face

MAKING SENSE OF SYMPTOMS

• OF COURSE YOU DO THAT…..
• THAT MAKES PERFECT SENSE
• No victims… No survivors
• Predicting need for check-ins later
Completion, for now….

• Collages
• Triptych
• Vision Board
• 150 page blank book
• Scrapbook of work done
• A letter from Medical person and a letter from me!
• The narrative….

WHAT GOOD CAN COME OF THIS?

• Looking for a Silver lining
• Stronger
• Smarter
• Better able to help others
• Better able to prevent other things from happening

Thank you all for your work and dedication…

• PLEASE fill out the evaluation form..
• Thanks you!
PREDICTING THE FUTURE

In the future, my crystal ball...