Forgotten Victims: Non-Abused Siblings of Sexual Abuse Victims
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Overview
- How does a disclosure of sexual abuse impact a family?
- What are the effects of a sexual abuse disclosure on siblings?
- What is the rationale for including siblings in treatment?
- How do we include siblings in treatment and what modalities exist?

Case Study
How Are Siblings Impacted?

- Relational loss
- Environmental changes
- Resentment/split loyalty
- Economic impacts
- Parental stress
- Emotional effects
- Victimization

Navigating Loss

- If perpetrator is a parent/caregiver, the siblings may experience a severed relationship with that parent/caregiver
- If perpetrator is a step-parent, the siblings may lose the relationship with the step-family
- Relocation may be required which could involve a change of schools, change of neighborhood, and change of extracurricular activities
- Economic stress may result in a lifestyle change for the family

Clinical Symptoms

- Emotional: may present with subclinical symptoms of distress
  - Anger
  - Confusion
  - Guilt
  - Ambivalence
  - Fear
  - Anxiety
  - Sadness
Clinical Symptoms

- Behaviors: will often lead parent/caregiver to seek treatment for sibling
  - Aggressiveness toward parent/caregiver or other siblings
  - Increased levels of defiance and noncompliance
  - Strong protectiveness of sibling
  - School difficulties
  - Withdrawal and isolation

Why Should Siblings Be Included in Treatment?

- Sibling safety
- Dysfunctional family patterns
- Case publicity/court involvement/media attention
- Prevent future victimization
- Learn coping skills
- Provide opportunity for disclosure
- Allows the non-offending family members the opportunity to heal together

Treatment Modalities

- Family Learning Program
  - Outpatient
  - Groups for non-offending caregiver, siblings, and victim
  - Groups are held simultaneously
- Topics
  - Prevention: defining body parts, defining sexual abuse, good touch/bad touch, red flags, secrets, and tricks
  - Personal rights, space and boundaries
  - Age appropriate sexuality
  - Assertiveness, conflict resolution, and anger management
Treatment Modalities (Individual)
- The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (United Kingdom)
  - Individual treatment for sibling
  - Siblings were referred by parents for treatment when sibling who was abused was receiving treatment
  - Play therapy, use of workbooks, videos
  - Not standardized
- Recovery for Children and Parents Program
  - Designed for families experiencing extrafamilial abuse
  - Group treatment for parents and victimized child
  - Individual sessions as needed for non-abused siblings
  - Siblings may be included periodically in family sessions

Treatment Modalities
- Project SAFE: Sibling Group Treatment
  - Short term group treatment for non-abused, non-offending siblings of sexually abused youth
  - 6-week group that runs concurrently with 12-week group for sexually abused children and their non-offending caregiver
- Session Titles
  - Welcome and feelings
  - Learning about our bodies
  - My family and offenders
  - Learning to cope with my feelings
  - Standing up for your rights
  - Good-bye

Resources