

day 4

- 12-12.20
 - welcome and questions and discussion from day 3
- 12.20-13.20
 - how to support families when the child has been abused?
 - 13.20-13.40 Break
- 13.40-15
 - what are the main elements in helping an abused child
 - basic communication skills (who)
 - emotional regulation: basic tools
 - breathing , relaxation, safe place exercises

What are the main elements in helping an abused child

For a child who has been sexually abused, the main forms of help and support it needs are:

1. To be safe. Safety includes physical, relational and emotional safety.
2. To obtain help to regulate feelings, attention and relations.
3. To have its story validated and confirmed.
4. Help to make clear who is responsible (thereby reducing shame and guilt).
5. Help to process the trauma-story, and to make its life-story coherent, in words, drawings or play.
6. Help to (re-)start normal development. This implies help to:
 - Play and symbolise.
 - Acquire body-awareness, balance and boundaries.
 - Socialise, take turns, share, regulate distance and closeness, etc. (see developmental model)
7. Help to learn and master skills. Feeling of competence and self-agency

Safety comes and goes

PHYSICAL SAFETY

EMOTIONAL SAFETY

RELATIONAL SAFETY

advices about different kinds of safety

- **Physical safety.** Consider the level of safety in the community when it comes to risk of being exposed to sexual abuse. Help caregivers to make sure that the child lives in an environment where it can be protected. How can security be maximised even in unsafe environments. Help caregivers to be aware of who they bring close to the child, and their responsibility to protect the child.
- **Emotional safety.** Though the child may be safe physically, it may feel unsafe inside. Caregivers should be available and sensitive to signals the child gives and help the child recognise what being safe inside feels like.
- **Relational safety.** A child who has been sexually abused will mistrust others, and it is often difficult to restore trust. Respecting the child's need to regulate distance and establish its personal space is crucial. Children exposed to abuse can easily feel invaded. Be aware of physical distance, and intimacy. Be particularly sensitive when it comes to physical touch; respect the child's need for personal space. Some children who have been abused can misinterpret actions as sexual and confuse intimacy with sexuality. Some children will invite sexual contact with other children or adults, putting themselves and others at risk of sexual abuse. It is important to protect the children in question and others from new abusive situations, and to manage potentially risky situations (children playing together, going to bed).

Helping a child to regulate using SOS

- **S** Stop and take a few deep breaths.
- **O** Orient. Check your surroundings. Where are you? What do you see? What do you hear?
- **S** Seek help. Is someone nearby who can support or comfort you?





Regulate yourself before you try to regulate the child

- Try to be in the moment.
- Monitor your level of arousal.
- Take a deep breath.
- Reflect: what need is the child expressing at this moment?
- Meet the child's need.
- Take responsibility. You are the adult.



Routine and Rythm

- Trauma is often associated with chaos and loss of control
- Routines to support felt safety
- Establishment of predictability;
- Routines will naturally shift across time
- Routines and rhythms support modulation and mastery
- Repetition is an important way that all people gain skill.





Routines and repetition

- What is the natural rhythm of the day? How do you support that rhythm?
- Are some areas of the child's life chaotic? Can their unpredictability be reduced?
- What areas are most challenging? Mealtimes, transitions, bedtime? How can you give structure to those situations?
- Support families to develop new routines after transitions, particularly when children move to new homes.

Sensory stimulation



- Children with developmental trauma can become hypersensitive or hyposensitive for sensory stimulation
- Frequent sensory stimulation helps children to remain in their window of tolerance
- “If you want to change a network in the brain you need to activate the same network”
- Some children who have been sexually abused lose contact with their bodies; they no longer feel grounded. Physical activities can help them reconnect to their bodies, learn how their bodies function and feel, re-experience joy and comfort.
- For children who have symptoms of dissociation, sensory stimulation can return their body to the present. It is important to find activities that the child enjoys and can integrate in daily life. For example, take small breaks for physical activity during the school day. This benefits all children but is particularly important for children who are struggling to regulate their bodies.

Regulating Sensory Strategies

- Sound: listening to music, headphones to drown out noise, noise machines
- Touch: Hugs, weighted blankets, soft pillows, stuffed animals, cool stones, things to fiddle with, chewable jewelry
- Smell: lotions, air fresheners
- Taste: gum or hard candy to suck on
- Sight: picture of safe people, favorite places, minimizing visual stimulation



[Ukrainian girl sings to crowded bomb shelter | WNT - YouTube](#)

Regulating activities (middle childhood)

- Breathing Technique: Have children raise arms. Breathe in as arms go up; breathe out as arms come down. See how slowly they can move their arms up and down
- Imagery: Have children imagine taking a deep breath and blowing out birthday candles, have them smell flowers and blow a dandelion puff.



Regulating Strategies

- Gross Motor Activities
- Small trampolines
- Opportunities to run / jump / play / Exercise balls / yoga balls
- Balance beams
- Five-minute dance party

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDIfD1WFXeo>





Down regulating

- Stress balls
- Glitter cream
- Stuffed animals
- Pleasant smell
- Magic rocks
- Grounding stone

Up regulating

- Play «I spy» tuning in to things in the environment
- Have children describe what they see (name 10 things)
- Rub hands with glitter cream
- Butterfly self-hugs (arms crossed across chest)
- Squeeze a stress ball

Reflection

What activities calm or stimulate a child you know?

What activities in your social environment have calming or stimulating effects?



Helping families



Parents may have different reactions to the abuse of the child



Parents are not one person, they are two different persons. Very often they disagree on child rearing

It is therefore quite usual that they react different to the child who are exposed to sexual abuse.

They might have different role in child rearing

The father more often react with anger and the mother with blaming herself

It is important to have this in mind when you as a helper shall support the parents.

How to support parents of abused children

Feelings:

- Guilt/Blame
- Shame
- Anger
- Grief



Research has consistently shown that supportive and empowered caregivers play a major role in lessening the negative impacts of trauma on children and in promoting healing and recovery.



Discovering that a child has been sexually abused is shocking and traumatic experience for parents and caregivers which impacts both on their sense of self as a parent and as a person.



Guilt/Blame

- It is common to think 'why did you go there?' or 'why didn't you tell me?' or 'I've told you never to let anyone touch you'.
- *"I really felt I had failed as a mother. It's my job to keep her safe. I should have realized something was happening to her."*



- The reality is that we can never protect our children from everything.
- The only real blame for sexual assault lies with the offender. Nothing any victim EVER does makes them responsible for sexual assault. Any child can at any time be tricked, bribed, threatened or forced into a sexually assaultive situation.



Shame/stigma

- Shame/Stigma is a powerful and painful feeling that most people experience when sexual assault touches their lives.
- How will I face the world?



Anger

- Anger is a normal reaction to child sexual assault. It is healthy to be angry if you and those you love are hurt. Expression of that anger is not healthy if it hurts you and other people.
- Most parents feel like damaging the offender but most do not do so realizing the further damage they could do to their child and themselves.



Grief

- The sexual assault of a child evokes deep feelings of loss and sadness.
- It is a kind of mourning for the loss of childhood and innocence, loss of trust and the ability to trust in the future, grief for the relationship if the abuser was someone they loved



How to respond the right way?

- Responding on the child's need
- Being available
- Not treating them as victim
- Making the environment as normal as they can
- Find someone to talk to about their feelings
- Working on things we can control



- It can be helpful for parents to try and pinpoint exactly what they feel guilty about. In this way they can apportion blame where it belongs - with the offender.
- "I wish I had noticed that Jane did not like going to my brother's house" or "I wish I had not thought that Tom's bedwetting was about starting school"



- Shame thrives in silence when you believe you are the only one. The best way to fight it is for you and your child to talk and to challenge the silence.
- Discuss and decide with the child who in the family and immediate environment should be told what has happened.



Children can only benefit from love and physical affection from adults they trust after sexual assault. They need to relearn good healthy touch that makes them feel loved regardless of what has happened to them.

Find ways to express that anger safely.

"We went over to the dam and spent a while throwing bigger and bigger stones into the water, shouting as we did it. We ended up having fun as well as getting rid of some of the anger."



Key points

Main messages to caregiver

You are the most important person in your child's life- be the protective shield

- Rebuild basic trust in the child

Your reaction to the trauma is crucial

- The child looks to the parent to get the meaning

The child does not forget

- Even if no words, the memory stays in the body and in the inner pictures and can easily be triggered

Your child has not had sex

- It was the adult's sexual desire and need for power that was acting, not the child's

Your child is not damaged for life

- If helped, wounds will heal

This does not define your child's identity

- Both you and the child need to see the whole identity, not only a victim

Be absolutely clear where the responsibility lies

- The child has no guilt, no sin

Convey hope and trust in the future, show the child you love her/him

