

Therapeutic Work With Non-Offending Parents in Sexual Abuse Cases

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Professional Disclosure

I, Cynthia L. King, MSSA, LCSW, does not have a financial interest/other relationship with any manufacturer of any commercial product.

Indirect Transmission of Sexual Abuse

Mom's husband and paramours: 24-42%



Faller, 1988

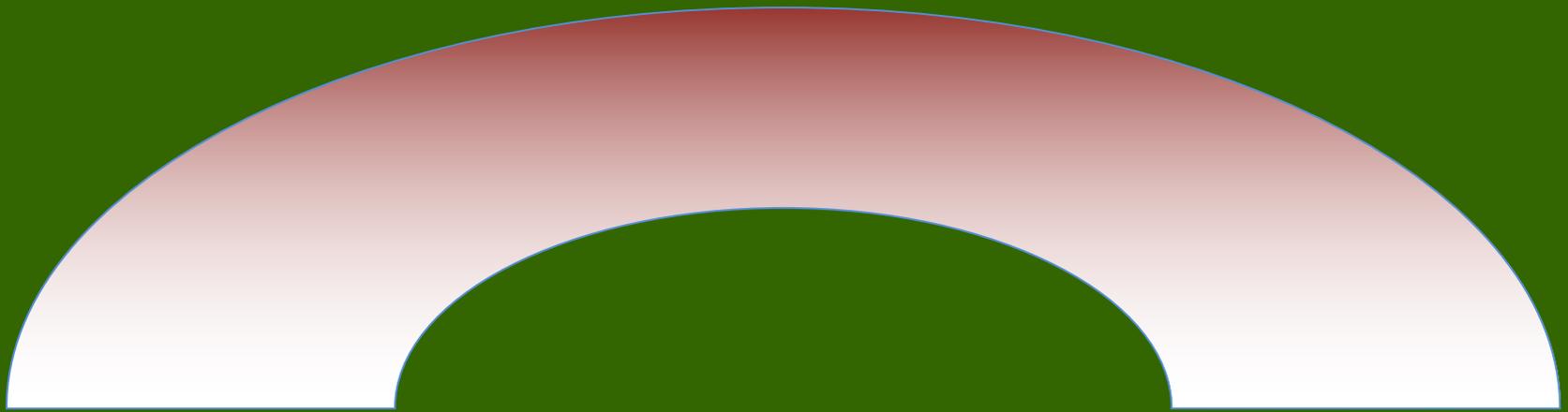
NOP Failure Influenced By:

- ❖ Past or current physical abuse
- ❖ Past or current domestic violence
- ❖ Poor parenting in family of origin
- ❖ Mental health issues
- ❖ Absence of supportive partner

Breckenridge , 2006



Continuum Of Non-Offending Parents



**DIDN'T
KNOW**

KNEW

C. King, 2006

Research: Non-offending Mothers (NOMs)



Most believe their child's allegation
(Elliot & Carnes, '01)



57% took action to separate from the perpetrator
(Heriot, '96)



82% took some form of action to protect their
children (Gomes-Schwartz, '90)

Most Likely to Believe When...

- ❖ Child sexual victim less than 12 years old
- ❖ Child victim did not have history of physical abuse
- ❖ Sexual abuse did not include intercourse
- ❖ Offender did not abuse substances

Sirlest Franke, 1989

Defining the Non-Offending Parent

Role of the Non-Offending
Parent in Sexual Abusive Families

“Soother of the Waters”



Power of the Non-Offending Parent
in the Sexually Abusive Family

“Hub of Communication”

NOP Reactions to Child Sexual Abuse

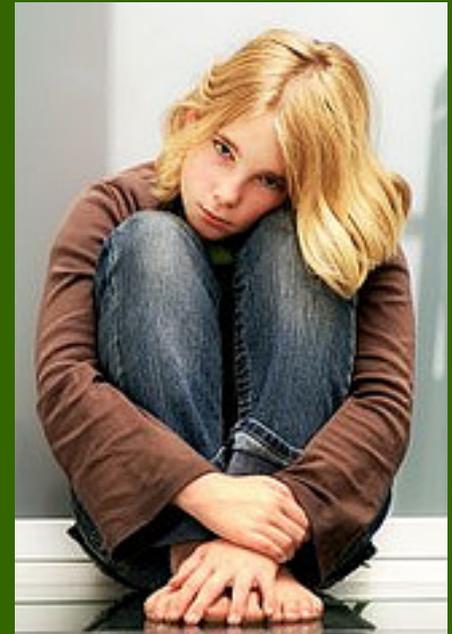
- ❖ Reactions vary widely but most believe part of the allegation (56-84%)
- ❖ Between 2/3 and 3/4 acted protectively in the early aftermath after disclosure
- ❖ Researched variables related to “belief” of NOP are still largely unknown
- ❖ NOP experience substantial personal distress following disclosure

Grief is most commonly reported feeling by NOP.



Why Is The Non-Offending Parent Driving Me Crazy?

- ❖ Vacillating Tendency
- ❖ Unsure of Who/What to Believe
- ❖ Divided Loyalties
- ❖ Lack of Resources
- ❖ Poor History of Decision-Making Skills
- ❖ Own Personal Issues



“Defining failure to protect in terms of women’s behavior may be an error in attribution, which is affected by an underlying bias.”

Kaufman Kantor & Litte, 2003



Denial serves as an unconscious defense mechanism



that protects the NOP from overwhelming feelings associated with their child's trauma.

NOP are often angry at the child for failure to protect or disclose the abuse, particularly if they did not physically resist or “**broke the rules.**”



Turner, et al., 2012
Rogers, Davies & Cottom, 2010

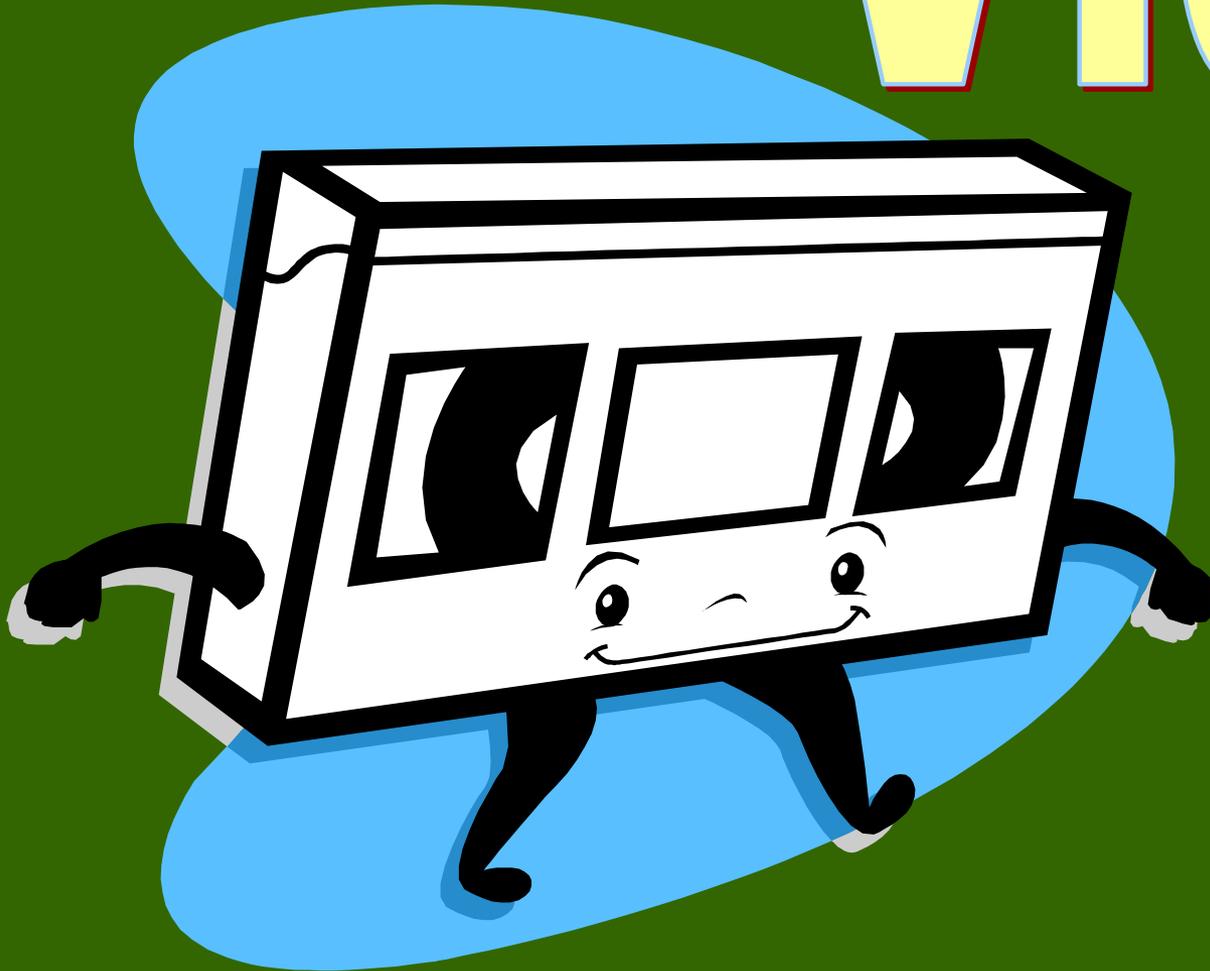
Non-Offending Parents “Costs”

- ❖ Psychological stress
- ❖ Losses or changes in income
- ❖ Losses or changes in relationships with family and friends
- ❖ Employment disruption
- ❖ Dependence on government programs
- ❖ Change of residence



Elliott, and Carnes, C. "Reactions of non-offending parents to the sexual abuse of their child: A review of the literature." *Child Maltreatment* (2001). 6(4), 314-331.

Video



Belief vs. Support



Increasing ↑ parental support
available to a child following
disclosure → improves child's short
and long term adjustment.



Conte & Schuerman, 1987
Wyatt & Mickey, 1988

Lack of Support Can Result In...



- ❖ Removal of child
(Elliot and Briere, 1994)
- ❖ Placement in foster care
(Everson, et. Al., 1989)
- ❖ Lower prosecution rate
(Cross, De Vost and Whitcomb, 1999)

Absence of Maternal Support

- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Behavioral Problems
- ❖ Depression



Green, 1993

Belief and Support of Mom Achieved When..

- ❖ Mother aged 21 or older at birth of first child
- ❖ Offender not current sexual partner of mom
- ❖ No prior knowledge that child was being abused
- ❖ No sexualized behaviour by child



Pintello and Zurvain, 2001

Non-Offending Mothers

❖ Reaction

❖ Behavior

❖ Level of Support



Are Important!!

NOM's Pivotal Role

Mothers are pivotal in child sexual abuse cases – their support is vital to the future safety of their children



Mother's Impact on Child's Mental Health

- ❖ Mother's depression promotes PTSD
- ❖ Child's view of mother as rejecting rather than accepting, promotes PTSD
- ❖ Child's view of mother as guilty and anxiety producing, promotes PTSD



Deblinger, Steer and
Lippmann, 1999

Non-offending mothers report that they do **NOT** receive the type or level of support that they need from police, caseworkers or counselors



Allagia, Michalski and Vine, 1999

NOP Anger at “The System”

- ❖ Struggle with re-traumatizing their child
- ❖ Perpetrator not being charged or found not guilty.



Why?



- ❖ Lack of help following disclosure when they were in crisis
- ❖ Services difficult to access and were time-limited
- ❖ Services did not provide assistance in child management strategies
- ❖ Lack of communication with child welfare and law enforcement

NOP experience significant emotional distress, posttraumatic symptomatology and grief symptomatology on average 2 years post-disclosure.

Elliott & Carnes, 2001

Deblinge, 1996



NOP Want

❖ Someone to listen objectively

❖ Not Blaming !!!



Working With The Non-Offending Parent

- ❖ Help the non-offending parent remain calm, focused on the needs of the child, and objectively examine the evidence as it emerges. (Supervisors can assist Child Welfare Professionals in adopting an empathetic and non-judgmental attitude with the non-offending parent.)



Self-Motivating Statements When Interviewing

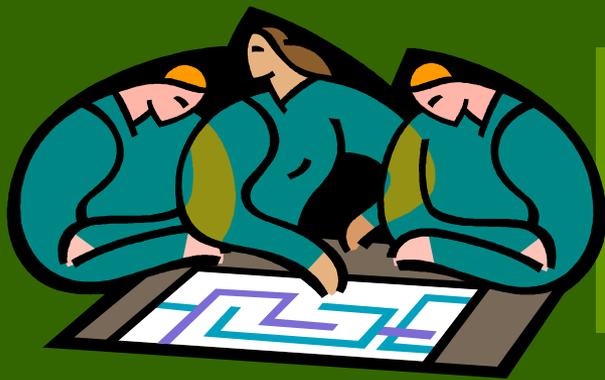
- ❖ **Problem Recognition** (What makes you think there is a problem?)
- ❖ **Concern About the Problem** (What do you think will happen if a change doesn't occur?)
- ❖ **Intention to Change** (What's going to have to change in your family?)
- ❖ **Optimism** (What do you think would work better if you made changes in your family?)

Miller & Rollnick, 2002

Listening Objectively

Reflective listening – create supportive atmosphere by using simple reflects





Working With The Non-Offending Parent

- ❖ Devise interventions that quickly and effectively improve a parent's ability to provide his/her child with strong and consistent support and protection. (This is both a casework and therapeutic goal.)
- ❖ Address a non-offending parent's own psychological symptoms.

Case Management Work With the Non-Offending Parent

- ❖ Reducing the level of stress for the non-offending parent (referral to a support group may be helpful).
- ❖ Helping the non-offending parent to support the child victim to ensure safety and well-being.



Case Management Work With the Non-Offending Parent

- ❖ Home visits where the child welfare professional models appropriate caregiver-child interaction.
- ❖ Providing literature to the non-offending parent on child sexual abuse assistance with financial or other concrete services.

Change Model for NOP

- ❖ **Precontemplation** – Individual lacks awareness. (*TASK: Raise client's consciousness about sexual abuse.*)
- ❖ **Contemplation** – Individual begins to consider there is a problem; not yet ready for action. (*TASK: Discuss advantages of changing and challenge beliefs that maintain S.A. factors.*)

Change Model for NOP

- ❖ **Action** – NOP takes strong measure of action to support perpetrator. (*TASK: Assist NOP with cognitive re-structuring and develop healthy coping mechanisms.*)
- ❖ **Maintenance** – Consistent change for 6 months.
- ❖ **Relapse** (Option)

Parenting Patterns That Can Further Traumatize a Sexually Abused Child

- ❖ **Withdrawn** (Don't meet child's needs)
- ❖ **Overprotective** (Preoccupied with thought that it will happen again)
- ❖ **Frightening** (Constantly probing child for information)



Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001

Intervention

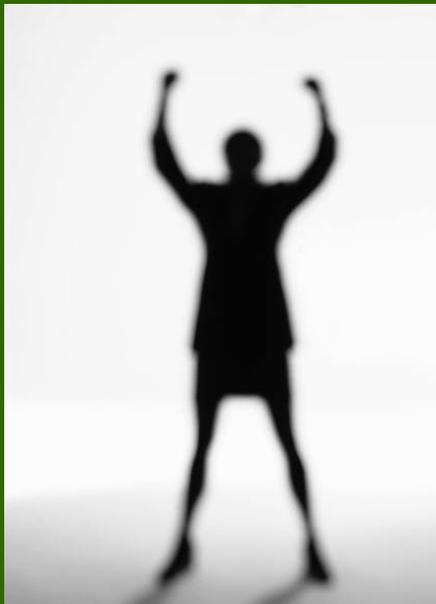
- ❖ Healthy Emotional Responses
- ❖ Develop Communication Skills
- ❖ Develop Assertiveness Skills
- ❖ Interact with Legal System
- ❖ Address Own History of Victimization
- ❖ Understand Dynamics of Sexual Abuse



Intervention

Family Advocates

- ❖ Support Person from Initial Investigation Through Life of the Case



Treatment needs to include parent – focused interventions



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How Does it Feel?

❖ Material Objects



❖ Values/Beliefs



❖ People



Parental Benefits of Having a Child in Treatment

- ❖ Can process their own emotions (Anger, Guilt, Depression)
- ❖ Secondary trauma can be addressed which makes them better prepared to help their child

-and-



Parental Benefits of Having a Child in Treatment

- ❖ Navigate and cope with stressors following disclosure (separation from partner, loss of social support, legal proceedings)
- ❖ Psycho-educational can be provided



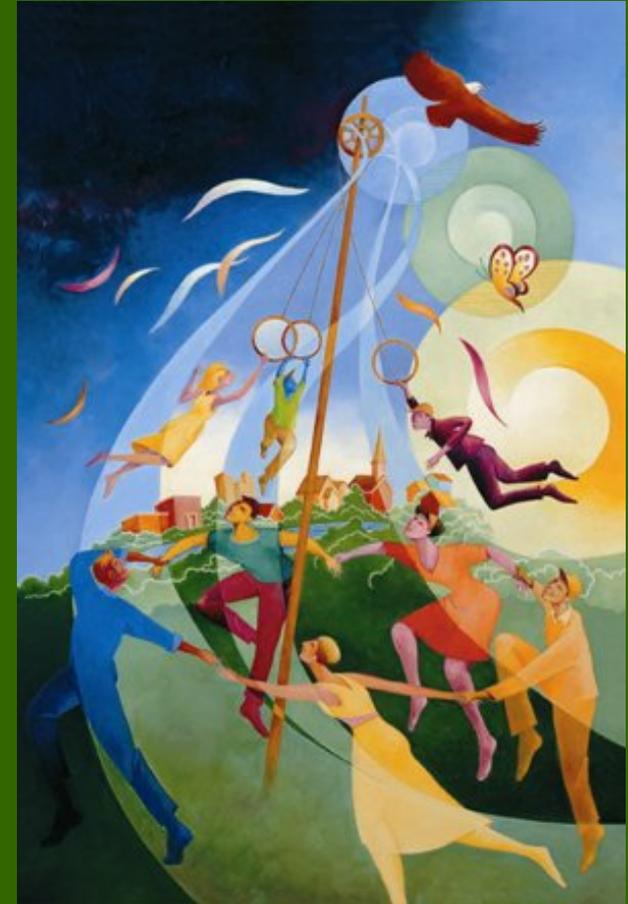
NOP Therapy (CBT)

- ❖ Management of behavioral issues (child's anxiety, conduct problems, sexually acting-out)
- ❖ Ignore certain behaviors
- ❖ Reinforce positive behaviors
- ❖ Punish certain behaviors



Therapeutic Work With The Non-Offending Parent

- ❖ Issues related to the sexual abuse.
- ❖ Issue related to the parent-victim relationship.
- ❖ Issues related to the offender (spouse).
- ❖ Other personal issues.



Countering Resistance of the NOP

Resistance

1. She's always lying.

Reframe

1. What kinds of things does she/he lie about?
Children usually lie to get out of trouble.



Countering Resistance of the NOP

Resistance

2. She just doesn't want to follow the rules.

Reframe

2. Sometimes it is hard to accept that something happened and it's easier to deny concerns.



Countering Resistance of the NOP

Resistance

3. She came on to him.

Reframe

3. Sometimes sexually-abused children “learn” how to interact with adults through sexual means.



Countering Resistance of the NOP

Resistance

4. I'm always with my child. He is never alone with him.

Reframe

4. You can't humanly be with your child all the time. It wouldn't be healthy.



Countering Resistance of the NOP

Resistance

5. He was drinking.



Reframe

5. It's good he recognizes he has a problem. He should go get treatment with this before you can trust him around your child again.

Additional Areas of Concern



- ❖ How to respond and manage the child who was victimized and sibling groups.
- ❖ Emphasize communication.
- ❖ Parenting skills (focusing on boundary establishment, rules in the family, power issues).
- ❖ Understanding sexual abuse.

Additional Areas of Concern (Cont.)

- ❖ Non-offending parents as victims of the offender's cognitive distortions.
- ❖ Dependency issues of the non-offending parent.
- ❖ Drug/Alcohol issues, if applicable.
- ❖ Non-offending parent's own victimization, if applicable.



Implications for Delivery of Treatment Services of NOP

- ❖ NOP is vital in treatment services provided to his/her child
- ❖ Sexual abuse is a subjective experience and therefore treatment should target both NOP and child's specific symptoms, concerns and strengths
- ❖ Target social supports of NOP

She's Worth It!!!!!!



Evaluation

