



IMPACT ISSUES FOR ABUSED CHILDREN

TRUST

Children naturally trust adults but when abuse has taken place the capacity for trust is also damaged. Work on building trust between child/non abusing parent but remember it is a long process and will take a great deal of patience and understanding.

LOW SELF ESTEEM

Low self-esteem has a knock on effect for the victims of any kind of abuse and building up self-esteem is one of the most effective ways of helping a victim recover. Unfortunately it is also one of the most difficult things to do. When a victim displays low self esteem and negative attitudes towards themselves try and build on the positive aspects of their personalities / abilities.

GUILT/SELF BLAME 'DAMAGED GOODS'

Remember a child does not see things with an adult perception and many children through the careful grooming of abuser feel that they were to blame for what happened to them and feel damaged and unlovable because of this.

CONFUSION

Children may well experience confusion in many areas of their life as a result of abuse. Confusion over who they can trust, what the 'rules' are. I.e. What is expected of them and feel confused because some parts of the abuse may have given them pleasure on a physical level and this perhaps more than anything else can be hard to deal with and easy for abuser to build on to increase his power over the abused. How many times has an abused child been told "But you enjoyed it."

FEAR

Fear is a very powerful emotion and the child may have experience many kinds of fear. Fear is often used to subjugate the child. "If you tell, no-one will believe you", "If you tell I'll hurt Mummy/brothers or sisters", "Do this for me and I'll leave your brothers/sisters alone", "If you tell the family will be spilt up, you will be taken away, I'll go to prison" even "you will be taken away if you tell", "Mummy knows what we do".

REPPRESSED ANGER

A difficult aspect of child behaviour in the abused child is the repressed anger. The child may not know why or with whom it is angry and this can lead to extreme forms of behaviour. Violent mood swings are often the result of repressed anger. Give the child an outlet for the anger, try to channel it. For example work out a programme when I am angry I can... Give the child permission to be angry and express that anger in a safe way. Be prepared for the anger to be directed at the non-abusing parent. Children often assume the parent is all-

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powerful and must have known about the abuse. Tiny incidents which have meant nothing to the parent may assume gigantic proportions in the eyes of the child who, may have thought that it was enough to alert the non-abusing parent to what was going on.

POWERLESSNESS

A child may feel that they have no power in their lives and no control if not handled with sensitivity an adult can unwittingly add to this. Because the instinct to protect is so strong there may be a tendency for the "mother knows best" attitude to be dominant and not to take the opinion of the child into account. Allow that the child may know best how to protect him/herself.

PSEUDO MATURITY

A victim of abuse may exhibit signs of being much older than they are. This is a common defence mechanism but under the veneer of maturity is a very lost and frightened child so; do not be surprised if suddenly the 'mature' child suddenly seems much younger than their years.

EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS AT THEIR PACE

Although we may consider discussing the abuse to be part of the healing process it is important to allow the child to go at his/her own pace. This will not only vary from child to child but also on what a child can cope with at any given time. Respect their decision not to discuss express how they are feeling. If you can to this you will be doing the child a valuable service by giving them some control over their life.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

If a child is going to talk about what has happened to them then they need a safe environment in which to do so. A place they feel comfortable and safe, a place they feel free to talk and a place where they feel that they can have some control over what happens. In a counselling situation it is vital that a child can feel free to say as much or as little is appropriate to them on the day.

EMPOWERMENT

This is one of the most important factors in recovering from abuse and helping a child to take some control in their life will enable them to star on the long road to recovery. This should not be confused with letting a child have all his/her own way because of what has happened. Abuse is traumatic and its effects are long term but the damage can be limited. Place the blame fairly and squarely where it belongs – on the abuser. Reassure the child that it was not their fault and that the responsibility lies with the abuser. He was the person with the power!

RESPECT RESISTANCE

If a child resists counselling or won't talk about the abuse – accept this. It is a defence mechanism and you may not 'know what's best!'.

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