

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

WHY IS IT DIFFICULT FOR A CHILD TO TELL (DISCLOSE) ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

It is an almost universal reaction that adults have when discussing the subject of child abuse or neglect – is questioning how a child can allow an adult to molest or abuse him/her. Dr. Roland Summit, noted psychiatrist and authority on the impact of child sexual abuse on the victim, has identified five reasons children don't tell:

Secrecy

Secrecy is a necessary condition for a person to be sexually abused. It is through secrecy that the child is both intimidated and comforted. The abuser will often state to the child, "This is our secret;" or "If you tell someone, I'll kill you;" or even, "I will kill your parents." A clear message is given that if others find out, something bad will happen. On the other hand, the child is led to believe that if no one finds out, everything will be alright.

The average child, according to Dr. Summit, never asks and never tells. Based on surveys of adult survivors, the majority never told anyone during their childhood. They feared blame and retaliation.

Helplessness

In this society, adults are given inherent power over children. In these "power" relationships the child has no power to dissent, particularly if the abuser is one to whom the child must look for food, clothing and shelter.

Most adults are uncomfortable with the fact that a child is three times more likely to be molested by a trusted adult, than by a stranger. That trusted adult usually has a degree of authority over the child.

IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act provides this definition of child abuse:

Child abuse and neglect means the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen.

Some incidences of child abuse and neglect are easily recognized:

- an infant left alone in a hot car
- a three-year-old with multiple facial bruises
- a child who is repeatedly locked out of the house for long periods of time

Child abuse is usually not an isolated event, but is a pattern of behavior that an adult uses in interacting with a child. It usually occurs behind closed doors, and is obscured by clothing. Child abuse is often attributed to "accidents," and is usually denied or concealed by the victim. Abusive behavior generally increases in severity and frequency and may be exhibited on a regular or sporadic basis.

Most persons are capable of abuse under conditions of excessive stress.
Many adult abusers have been victims of abuse.

FOUR AREAS OF MALTREATMENT

- Neglect (ei: poor supervision; lack of attention to basic needs)
- Physical abuse (ei: hurtful actions)
- Emotional abuse (ei: verbal, psychological abuse)
- Sexual abuse (ei: inappropriate interest in children, exploitation)

Possible Characteristics of An Abuser

- ❑ Poor self-concept
- ❑ Passive marital relationship
- ❑ Marital difficulties
- ❑ Fear of authority
- ❑ Lack skills to meet own emotional needs
- ❑ Undue fear of spoiling a child
- ❑ Unreasonable expectations of a child
- ❑ Rigidity or compulsiveness
- ❑ Acceptance of violence as a means of communication
- ❑ Poor emotional control, impulsivity
- ❑ Emotional dependency on abusive adult - to the point that he/she will not intervene nor protect other family members from an abusive adult