First Responders - How to Talk to Children
Training Objectives

- Review current statistics on Child Sexual Abuse
- Understand the role of First Responder in Child abuse investigations
- Understand what a Forensic Interview is and how it is used in the Investigation Process
- Gain awareness of the disclosure process for child victims of sexual abuse
- Obtain basic knowledge of the Forensic Interview Process
Facts about Child Sexual Abuse…

- 1 in 10 children are sexually abused by their 18th birthday
- 1 in 5 children are solicited sexually on the internet
- Nearly 70% of ALL reported sexual assaults occur to children ages 17 and under
- Foster Children are 10 times more likely to be sexually abused than children that live with both biological parents.
- Highest risk: Children living with a single parent who has a live-in partner are 20 times more likely to be victims than children living with both biological parents
- Most Child Victims NEVER Report
Child Molesters—Who are They?

Approximately 70% of sexual offenders of children have between 1 and 9 victims

20% have 10 to 40 victims

Serial Child Molesters may have as may as 400 victims in their lifetimes

Question: Where Are They?
Child Molesters- Who are they?

- 30% of children who are sexually abused are abused by family members
- 60% are abused by people the family trusts
- More than 90% of children who are sexually abused know their abusers
- 40% are abused by older or larger children
- People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else
First Responders

Law Enforcement Officers &
Child Protection Investigators
First Responders

Depending upon a community’s resources and protocol, a Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) and/or Child Protection Investigator (CPI) will most often be the First Responder to a scene where there is an allegation of child sexual abuse.

It is important that the LEO and CPI have a clear understanding of how to properly evaluate the situation and conduct the initial investigative interview.

The Fires Responder’s Role is CRITICAL to the rest of the investigation.
First Responders Role

- Address **Safety** and immediate needs of the victim
- CPI’s are there to specifically address these concerns
- LEO collects Evidence
- Conduct **minimal facts** interview
  - Speak to:
    - The Reporting Adult
    - The Witnesses
    - The Victim
- **Document** Statements
First Responder-
What to do for a reliable interview:

- Use a **consistent** interview protocol and be able to explain it.
- **Record** the questions you ask as well as the answer.
- Try to record the child’s **affect** and **nonverbal cues** (i.e. crying, laughing, flat).
- Use an interview location that is the least intimidating. Include all who are present for the interview in your documentation.
- **DON’T go further** than you need to
Lending Credibility to your First Responder Interview

- Written documentation will reinforce your memory, allow information to be conveyed to others and increase accuracy in your testimony.
- Unless documented, details will diminish and accuracy will suffer.
- Testimony based solely on memory may be ruled inadmissible due to unreliability.
- Paraphrased statements may be ruled inadmissible as content.
Children’s Advocacy Centers

Forensic Interviews
The Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC)

- Provides a **neutral and child friendly** environment
- **The professionals understand the needs of** the child who has been traumatized
- **The number of interviews a child must undergo are reduced**
- **Decisions are made by a team of professionals**
- **Puts Children and Families First**
Forensic Interviewers

- Specially trained to conduct interviews of children in a non-leading/non-suggestive fashion
- Knowledgeable in the areas of child development, linguistics, disclosure process, PTSD, and Memory/Suggestibility issues
- Follow a standardized protocol
Forensic Interview:

- A structured conversation with a child intended to elicit detailed information about a possible event or events that the Child has experienced or witnessed.

The Purpose:
Obtain Information, Assess for Safety, Corroborate/Refute allegations
Forensic Interview

- Non-Judgmental
- Truth Seeking/Legally Sound
- Without Preconceptions
- Non-Interpretive
- Non-Coercive; Neutral in Tone
- Accurate, Credible, Complete Information
- Precise Documentation
THE CAC Forensic Interview

WHO initiates interviews?
WHAT is the Multidisciplinary Team?
WHEN should a Forensic Interview take place?
WHERE do Forensic Interviews take place?
HOW do children get to the CAC?
WHY the CAC?
Considerations

Corroboration/Evidence

Language

Child Development

Disclosure Process
In roughly 80-90% of child sexual abuse cases, there is no physical evidence. The child’s interview may be the primary evidence that crime was committed.
Considerations-Language

- **Language** is shaped by experience
- Children pick up the words in their vocabularies from:
  - What they see, hear, and experience around them and
  - Listening to how those words are put together in sentences.

Children and adults DO NOT speak the “same” language.
In Their Words…

- Pee pee
- boobs
- chest
- bottom
- back private
- booty
- Pocket book
- ding dong
- puchina
- front-butt
- stick
- Licked my coochie
- messin with me
- Hunching me
- Rub my privacy
- Frank & Beans
- Fingering me
- Kitty-cat
- wee wee
- hose
- Doing it
Considerations: Typical Developmental Ability

Age of Child

- 3
  - Who
  - What
- 4 thru 6
  - Who
  - What
  - Where
- 7 thru 8
  - Who
  - What
  - Where
  - When
- 9 thru 10
  - Who
  - What
  - Where
  - When
  - Structure
- 11 thru 12
  - Who
  - What
  - Where
  - When
  - Structure
  - Context
Responding to a Child’s Disclosure

FACT: False reports of child sexual abuse made by children are RARE.

- It is estimated that only 4 to 8% of child sexual abuse reports are fabricated
- Most of the fabricated reports are made by adults involved in custody disputes or by adolescents
Understanding Disclosure

Children find it difficult to disclose sexual abuse

Reasons may include:
- Embarrassment
- Secrecy, shame, and stigma surrounding sexual abuse
- Children are warned by the abuser not to tell
- Children blame themselves for the abuse
- Children are protective of the abuser and others affected by the abuse
- The abuse is hard to describe (sexual terminology)
Purposeful vs. Accidental Disclosure

Children who **purposefully/intentionally disclose** are more likely to give a detailed account of the abuse and can be motivated for a variety of reasons.

Children who **accidentally disclose** often make an incomplete initial disclosure and future disclosures may be similarly incomplete.
Things to Note Regarding Disclosures/Statements of the Child

- Who did the child disclose to first? Next?
- What questions did you ask to elicit the response is crucial to document.
- What was the reporter’s reaction?
- What kind of detail does the child provide?
  - Sensory detail
- What is the nature of the language used?
Interview Protocol

CornerHouse
CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol

Most widely trained protocol in the United States

Person Centered

Forensically Sound

Semi-Structured
CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol

- Build Rapport
- Seek Information
- Explore Statements
- End Respectfully
Rapport

“getting familiar”

- Probably the most important part of the interview
- Orienting to the Process
- Narrative Practice
- Establishes a Comfort Level
- Assesses Level of Communication
- Ascertains Child’s Competency
Seek Information

- Provides opportunity to report
- May incorporate interview tools
  - Anatomical Diagrams
  - Touch Inquiry
Seek- Information
Anatomical Diagrams
Explore Statements

“Tell me everything about that”

- Allow the child to tell the details of his/her experience
- Explore alternatives explanations/additional maltreatment
- Invitation and Inquiry
  - Encourage narrative
  - Follow-up & Clarifying Questions
End Respectfully

“Thanks for talking to me”

- Educate the on personal safety
- Provide person-centered end to the interview
Non-First Responders

What do you do if a Child Discloses Abuse to you?
DON’T Overreact …this may cause:
- Shutting down
- Recantation
- Changes in the story to match your questions
- Even more feeling’s of guilt in the victim

DO be Supportive & Non-Judgmental
- Believe them and let them know
- Thank them for telling you
- Let them know it’s NOT their fault

Listen…DO NOT Investigate
- Be Honest- What you’ll do with the information, don’t make promises you can’t keep, what they can expect after reporting
One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide.

As he walked he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, "I'm saving these starfish, Sir".

The old man chuckled aloud, "Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, "It made a difference to that one!"
Resources

- Children’s Advocacy Center: www.fljud13.org/CourtPrograms/ChildrensJusticeCenter/ChildrensAdvocacyCenter.aspx
- Mary Lee’s House: www.maryleeshouse.org
- Florida Department of Children & Families: www.myflflfamilies.com
- Darkness to Light: www.d2l.org
- National Children’s Advocacy Center: www.nationalcac.org
- Champions for Children- Kids on the Block: www.championsforchildrentampabay.org/services/kids-on-the-block
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: www.missingkids.com
Support
Children's Advocacy Centers Across Florida