Treatment Strategies to Address Problematic Sexual Behavior

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Did you know?

- Sexualized behavior is more frequent in sexually abused children than in other clinical populations.
- Reports range from in 7 - 41% of all sexually abused children display sexually inappropriate behaviors.

Sexually Reactive Children

- Though there is no rigid profile of the sexually reactive child, there are some characteristics that are found most often in these children
- Children with sexual behavior problems experience complex negative emotions stemming from sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse, neglect, and/or other trauma
Sexually Reactive Behaviors

- Reflect age-inappropriate knowledge about sex and sexual behaviors. It usually is a re-enactment of experienced inappropriate sexual contact or exposure to adult sexual activities/media.

Context

- Developmental Stage
- Media Influences
- Balanced interests
- Family Roles / Boundaries
- Gender Roles
- Hormones
- Secrecy

Cultural Considerations

- Spirituality
- Sexuality
- Gender roles
- Taboo subjects

Cultural Considerations

- Assess need for modifications to clinical interventions to address different beliefs
- Assess potential barriers
  - Beliefs about sex/sexual orientation
  - Beliefs about behavioral management
  - Beliefs about mental health and treatment
Family Influences

- Highlight importance of modeling healthy coping skills
- Establish the powerful parental influence in improving child behavior problems
- Increase positive attention to child’s strengths and pro-social behaviors Address the immediate needs of parents

Family Influences (continued)

- Primary caregiver/parent is the central therapeutic agent for change
- Establish caregiver/parent as an expert on their child
- Emphasize strengths and the power behind the collaborative relationship
- Concept of “Team Captain”

Common Family Themes

- Inappropriate self-blame and guilt
- Inappropriate child blame
- Over protectiveness
- Over permissiveness

Therapeutic Stance

- Empathic but direct.
- Eliminate secrecy.
- Educator
- Confronter
- Narrator
- Mentor
- Alter ego
Community Networking

- Highlight the benefit and need of a response across the systems
- Help distinguish the different roles of those working with the family
- Educate the family about how to access and utilize systems to help their family

Community Networking (continued)

- Help the family decrease isolation
- Ensure that family is connected to the needed community resources and support
- Increase the child’s positive social relationships and social supports

What is Healthy Sexuality?

Children’s natural and healthy sexual exploration is an information gathering process. Children use their bodies as a map. There is a natural curiosity to explore and children will often compare their bodies to others which can be in the form of looking or touching.

What is Considered Problematic?

- Interferes with the child’s social or cognitive development;
- Occurs with coercion, intimidation or force;
- Occurs at a high frequency;
- Is associated with emotional distress;
- Occurs between children of significantly different ages or developmental abilities; and
- Repeatedly occurs in secrecy after adult intervention
Problematic Sexual Behaviors (continued)

- Has a knowledge of sex that is beyond their age level.
- Appears to have little or no age-appropriate fear of strangers.
- Has no sense of boundaries, modesty, or privacy where their personal physical space is concerned.
- Often acts in a flirtatious or promiscuous ways that are not age-appropriate.

Problematic Sexual Behaviors (continued)

- Lack of normal play relationships.
- Behavior exists between children of varying ages and developmental levels.
- Preoccupation with sexual themes.
- Behavior that continues despite knowledge that it is inappropriate and problematic.
- Behavior that makes adults and children feel uncomfortable in child's presence.

Problematic Sexual Behaviors (continued)

- Behavior that increases and/or becomes more intense.
- Behavior that leads to feelings of shame, guilt and anxiety.
- Sexualizing none sexual things.
- Behavior that causes emotional or physical pain to self or others.
- May justify behavior with distorted logic.
- Behaviors may include bribery manipulation or threats.

Safety

Sometimes this is all that a compromised family can do!
Aim of Intervention
- Helping children gain insight into their own behavior
- Increasing children's ability to observe and appreciate other people's feelings, needs, and rights
- Helping children understand their needs and values and develop their own goals and internal resources

Aim of Intervention (continued)
- Identify and assist parent's and children to see problems
- Teach Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution Skills
- Foster open discussion- NO SECRETS
- Increasing children's ability to meet their needs in socially appropriate ways

Areas of Primary Focus
- Safety/Contracting
- Body Awareness/Boundaries
- Building Empathy
- Triggers/Impulse Control
- Identification of Feelings
- Strengthening Attachments

Tips for Reducing Sexualized Behaviors in Children
- Separate the behavior from the child
- Define the behavior clearly
- Careful wording of all verbalizations
- Use of common language
- Safety Contracting
Tips for Reducing Sexualized Behaviors in Children (continued)

- Use verbal reminders and cues to help the child modify the behavior
- Encourage the child to come to an identified adult at home, school and the community if he or she feels the desire to engage in problematic sexual behaviors

Tips for Reducing Sexualized Behaviors in Children (continued)

- Offer alternatives
- Supervision and early intervention
- Weekly review with caregiver, therapist and child to discuss progress in decreasing sexualized behavior

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