Child Abuse Assessment Centers

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Main Points

- Impact of sexual victimization on children
- Child abuse assessment center core purpose
- Core services
- Other services
- Outcomes
- When is it appropriate to refer?
- Questions

Frame of Reference

- Attorney
- Mediator
- Consultant
- Children & Families Commission Director
- Child Abuse Assessment Center CEO
- Mother
- Nana

Impact of Childhood Sexual Victimization

- Toxic shame: negative feelings associated with the belief that there is something fundamentally wrong with me
  - Arises from chronic loss or trauma
  - Can result in greater need for attention or attention-seeking behavior
  - Can increase risk of becoming a victim
  - Can lead to self-destructive behaviors
- Toxic stress: negative effect on brain development
  - Impaired connection of brain circuits
  - Damaged hippocampus from sustained high levels of cortisol
  - Smaller brain size in extreme cases

Impact of Childhood Sexual Victimization

- Physical long term chronic disease
  - Heart disease
  - Liver disease
  - COPD
  - Diabetes
  - Obesity
- Emotional long term effects
  - Decreased self-esteem (compounded when not believed)
  - Depression and anxiety disorders
  - Suicidal risks
  - Antisocial and delinquent behaviors
  - Substance abuse and dependence

Impact of Sexual Victimization

- Behavioral effects
  - Poor educational achievement
  - Higher risk of running away
  - Greater risk of committing property offenses, domestic violence, or felony assaults
  - Higher likelihood of initiating drug use and experiencing addiction
  - More likely to have 30 or more sexual partners, engage in sexual intercourse earlier
  - More likely to become pregnant before age 18

Child Abuse Assessment Center Core Purpose

- Improve the coordinated community response to child abuse
- Reduce the harm and discomfort to children and their families
- Improve quality and consistency of evidence to assist legal process
- First center was established in Huntsville, Alabama in 1985
- Liberty House in Salem opened in 1999

Child Abuse Assessment Centers

- Child-friendly environment
- Video recording equipment
- Resources for multidisciplinary team members and for the community
- The goal of a CAC evaluation is to provide high quality assessment services to children and their caregivers without creating secondary trauma.

Child Abuse Assessment Centers

- Stated differently, assessment centers are designed to improve child abuse investigations and protective services by providing comprehensive services and simultaneously reducing stress on children and their families.

Statewide

- Multidisciplinary teams
  - *ORS 418.747 County team for investigation*
- Assessment centers
  - 20 in the State of Oregon
- Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers
  - http://www.childabuseintervention.org/

Multidisciplinary Team Members

- District Attorney
- Victim's Assistance
- DHS
- Law enforcement agencies
- Assessment Center (CAC)
- County Health Dept
- Mental Health representatives
- School Districts
- CASA
- Other

Multidisciplinary Team Activities

- Establish a county protocol
- Meet to review protocol compliance and coordinate services
- Training of service providers in child abuse investigations
- Case review
- Child Fatality Review

Nationwide

- National Children's Alliance
- http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/
- National accrediting body for Child Abuse Assessment Centers

Assessment Center Services

- Intake/Triage
- Coordination with agencies
- Evaluation
- Follow-up
- Mental health services (at some centers)
- Staff participates in legal proceedings when needed

Center Evaluation

- Collect and review available information about the concerns (LEA and DHS reports, parent information)
- Take a careful history from parent or caregiver
- History (interview) with child if developmentally able
- Physical exam
  - Address medical needs
  - Provide reassurance as appropriate
  - Photodocumentation
- Support for parents
- Referrals for mental health or mental health services on-site

What is Unique?

- See only one child/family at a time (sometimes siblings come in together)
- Services provided at no cost to the family
- Staff committed to objectivity and neutrality
- The appointment might take up to four hours
- The appointment goes at the child's pace, and the team listens carefully; if the child is needing to end the visit, we end the visit
- Best practice dictates <u>not</u> doing repeated interviews

Child-friendly environment

Medical Exam

- Head - to – toe checkup
- Colposcope (magnification and lighting)
- Importance of training
- Photodocumentation
- Oregon Medical Guidelines
  - www.doj.state.or.us/victims/pdf/ormedicalguidelines.pdf

Medical history from the child

- Why are you here to see me?
- How does it feel?
- Tell me everything that hurts
- What happened?
- Where were you?
- Who was there?
- When did it happen? (for older children)
- Have you been hurt before?
- If more information is needed: “And then what?” or “Tell me more about that.”

Medical Assessment

- Careful assessment of the injury
- Assessment for other injuries (general exam with attention to skin, musculoskeletal, other)
- Does the child require imaging or labwork?
- Is a referral needed? (LH, other specialist)

Center Forensic Interviews

- Application of scientific methods and techniques to the investigation of crime
- Oregon Interviewing Guidelines
  - http://www.doj.state.or.us/victims/pdf/oregon_interviewing_guidelines.pdf
- National Protocols:

  APSAC, Cornerhouse (RATAC Protocol), NCAC, NICHD

- Training: OCFIT (sponsored by the Oregon Network)

Family services

- Support
- Information about the system and what to expect
- Identify resources (mental health, other) and help make referrals
- Education

Community Education and Prevention

- Schools
- Health Fairs
- Tours
- Darkness to Light

Karly Sheehan

- Three-year-old died in 2005
- Result of abuse by mother's boyfriend
- DHS had interviewed twice and concluded that her injuries were not the result of child abuse

Karly's Law

HB 3328, 2007

Karly's Law ORS 419B.022 through 419B.024

- If suspicious physical injuries are observed during the course of an investigation DMP must conduct a medical assessment within 48 hours
- Purpose is to cast a wider safety net
- Creates specific requirements in certain cases (listed injuries) of suspicious physical injury
- Investigators (LEA/DHS) must:
  - Immediately photograph injuries
  - Ensure child has a medical evaluate on within 48 hrs
  - Counties must name a Designated Medical Provider (DMP)

Karly's Law injuries

- Burns or scalds
- Extensive bruising or abrasions on any part of the body
- Bruising, swelling or abrasions on the head, neck or face
- Fractures of any bone in a child under the age of three
- Multiple fractures in a child of any age
- Dislocations, soft tissue swelling or moderate to severe cuts
- Loss of the ability to walk or move normally (for developmental age)
- Unconsciousness
- Multiple injuries of different types
- Injuries causing serious or protracted disfigurement or impairment
- Any other injury that threatens the well-being of a child

What is required of community providers?

- Evaluate within 48 hours
- Medical history (document who gave the history, who was present when history given, using open-ended questions)
- Medical exam
- Documentation: chart notes, (photodocumentation)
- Referrals when needed
- Send information along to DMP

What is the role of the DMP?

- Helps with triage
- May provide medical services and photodocumentation
- May review medical services provided by others and suggest further care
- Works together with agencies to resolve the concerns
- Presents medical information in legal proceedings

Outcomes – CAC Assessment

- Children get the help they need with fewer appointments and more coordination
- Fewer interviews = less trauma
- Greater support for the family

  (this is important, because if children perceive parental distress they will be less likely to tell; so family support is crucial)

Practical Outcomes

- Assists DHS in making safety plan
- Separates child from perpetrator, stopping the abuse
- Provides neutral, objective and skilled assessment
- Evidence, assistance for law enforcement
- Develops recommendations for follow-up mental health and other services for child and non-offending caregivers
- Prevents abuse since offenders typically have more than one victim
- Provides comprehensive report for MDT partners

Legal Outcomes

- Better legal outcomes
- Higher likelihood of charges filed
- More charges filed
- Greater numbers of pleas
- Greater numbers of convictions

Long-term Outcomes

- Child sexual abuse can produce long term negative effects for the victim
- Correlation between CSA and psychological issues
- "This bad thing happened to me; therefore, I must be bad"
- Studies suggest that sexual victimization may have a less impairing effect if victims are believed and if measures are taken to reduce the feelings of guilt

Long-term Outcomes

- Research reveals that positive outcomes are associated with early detection and treatment
- Sexually abused children if not identified, diagnosed and treated frequently surface 7-10 years later in the legal system as runaways, delinquents, or prostituted children

Long-term Outcomes

- Children seen at a CAC are seen by professionals with extensive training & experience
- Begin the journey to a place where the abuse no longer controls the victim
- The individual can engage actively in the life he or she wants to live

Long-term Outcomes

- At Liberty House, follow-up mental health support for the children is recommended in over 95% of the cases
- Trauma-informed therapy
- Cognitive-behavioral approaches have been reported to reduce the impact of CSA

Additional Thoughts

- When to refer to an assessment center?
- If a child was seen at an assessment center, how to ensure the recommendations are being followed?
- Be aware of the pervasive threat of bullying – whether a child is bullied for being a victim or because his/her parent is in jail for being a sex offender, the bullying is always destructive
- Moving expenses? This was brought up in a staff interview

Additional Thoughts

- Our local current community needs assessment is showing that law enforcement agencies are being inundated with child sex abuse cases
- Anecdotally, we believe we are seeing more sibling offender cases
- We are concerned that treatment capacity is full
- Your involvement is crucial

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Liberty House
A Child Abuse Assessment Center

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