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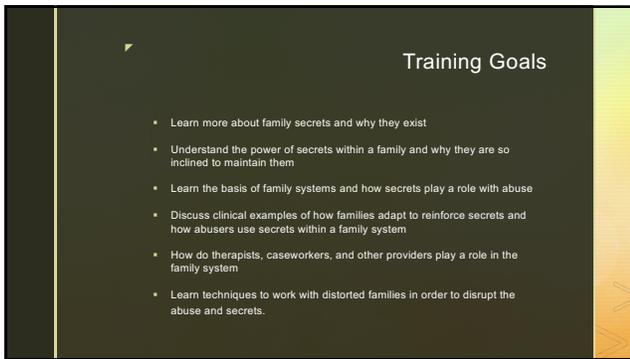
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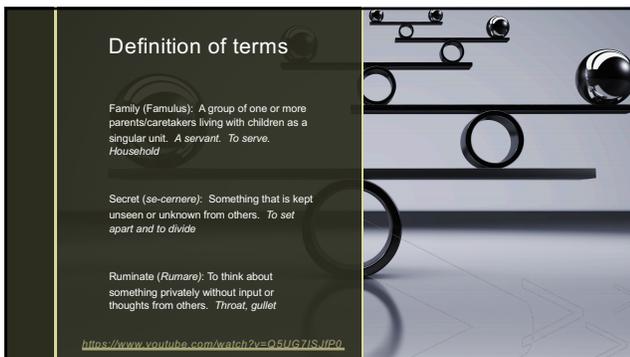
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**Statistics**

- 3.9 million child abuse referrals in 2020 involving 7.1 million children
  - 470,297 victims of neglect
  - 101,961 physically abused
  - 57,963 victims of sexual abuse
  - 39,652 victims of psychological maltreatment
- Five children die every day due to child abuse
  - 50-60% of maltreatment fatalities are not recorded

American SPCC, 2021



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**Statistics**

- Abused children are more likely to experience risky sexual behavior
  - 25% more likely to experience teen pregnancy
- 80% of adult abused children have at least one psychological disorder
- 1/3 of all child maltreatment involve substance use
- 2/3 of people in substance use treatment report childhood abuse
- Adults who were neglected as children have a 43% higher likelihood of dying early

American SPCC, 2021



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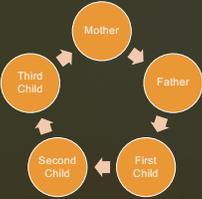
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**Understanding Families**

- Non-linear in nature
- Constantly changing
- Change through the life cycle
- Systems based
- Circular causality – Actions are related through a series of repeating cycles



Nichols, 2010

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### Understanding Our Roles in Families

- Why are we there?
- Who is the identified client? Why?
- We may seek to understand things through the view of our referral or client, but they are part of this family
- Our involvement likely changes families in some way
  - Acceptance, creating barriers,

Nichols, 2010

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### Secrets and their function

According to Oxford: something that is kept or meant to be kept unknown or unseen by others.

- The goal is concealment
- Prevents people from sharing freely and acting naturally
- It's hard to get that secret out of your mind
- 3 categories: taboos, rule violations and conventional secrets.
- Function: bonding, evaluation, maintenance, privacy, defense or communication problems.

Epstein, 2019

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- "The bad news is that when people share their secrets with us we feel like we have to guard them."
- Secrets are motivated by fear and shame.
  - Elicit further feelings of helplessness and inability to make amends.
  - "When people confide in us, we take it as an act of intimacy that can bring us closer."
  - The fear and shame can be elicited through direct threats of harm of violence. The fear can also be of losing a person, situation, family being angry with them, something being taken from them etc.
- Secrets can be held by an individual person, two people or an entire family.

Vangelisti, A.L. & Caughlin, 1997

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- Secrets protect the offender-person demanding the secret be kept.
- Offender can often make the victim feel that what happened, abuse, assault, is a secret. Or emphasize the fear and shame associated with telling.
  - There is significant societal fear and shame that society displays towards victims and people telling their secrets or "snitching".

Vangelisti 1994

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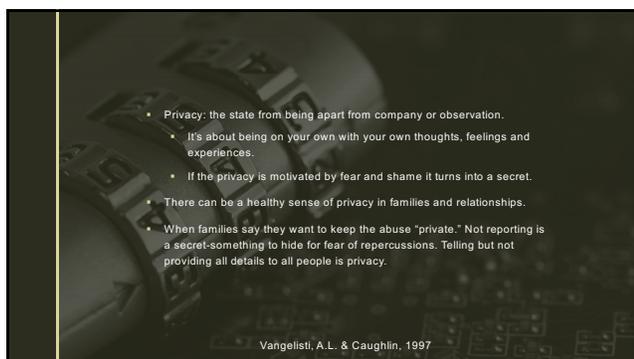
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- Privacy: the state from being apart from company or observation.
  - It's about being on your own with your own thoughts, feelings and experiences.
  - If the privacy is motivated by fear and shame it turns into a secret.
- There can be a healthy sense of privacy in families and relationships.
- When families say they want to keep the abuse "private." Not reporting is a secret-something to hide for fear of repercussions. Telling but not providing all details to all people is privacy.

Vangelisti, A.L. & Caughlin, 1997

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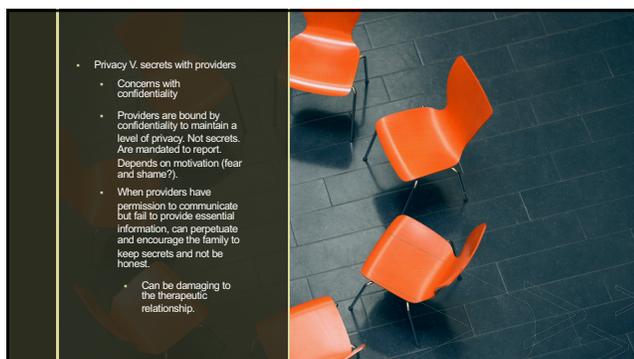
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- Privacy v. secrets with providers
  - Concerns with confidentiality
  - Providers are bound by confidentiality to maintain a level of privacy. Not secrets. Are mandated to report. Depends on motivation (fear and shame?).
  - When providers have permission to communicate but fail to provide essential information, can perpetuate and encourage the family to keep secrets and not be honest.
    - Can be damaging to the therapeutic relationship.

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**Four Classifications of Family Secrets**

- Loss Events
  - Bereavement/loss
  - Accidents/disability
  - Severe illness
  - Infidelity
- Economic Events
  - Loss of job/bankruptcy
  - Disinherited or disowned by the family
- Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Shameful or Embarrassing Events

Termini, 2018



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**Family Secret: Abuse**

- Physical, Sexual, or Emotional Abuse
- Singular or chronic in nature
- Could be secretive within the family or out in the open for all members
- Including nuclear family or extended family

- Symptoms
  - Somatic/Conversion Disorders
  - OCD and Obsessive Ideation
  - Dissociation
  - Psychosis
  - Aggression
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Self-injury/ideation

Termini, 2018

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**Family Secret: Shame/Embarrassment**

- Bearing shame or embarrassment about something
- Illegitimate children
- Homosexuality/affairs
- Mental illness
- Imprisonment/legal involvement
- Divorce

- Symptoms
  - Aggressive/antisocial behaviors
  - Substance use
  - Clumsiness
  - Self-punitive behaviors
  - Increased psychological symptoms

Termini, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvWRMAU6V-c>

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**Understanding the Overlap**

- These Dynamics are not mutually exclusive.
- Classified under certain beliefs such as Taboo, rule violations
- Specific secret types that reinforce these beliefs (abuse, shame, loss).

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graph TD
    SA[Sexual Abuse] --> T[Taboo]
    SA --> RV[Rule Violation]
    T --> AS[Abuse Secret]
    T --> SS[Shame Secret]
    RV --> SS
    RV --> LE[Loss Event]
  
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**Family Secrets Changing Over Time**

- Sexual Abuse**
- Embarrassment**
  - Investigation process
  - People finding out
  - Secrets exposed!
- Loss Events**
  - Abuser removed from the home
  - Families separated/diving differently
  - Supervised visits
  - Disrupted relationships
- Economic Events**
  - Disrupted income
  - Barriers for legal representation
  - Therapy

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**Passing Secrets Within an Extended Family**

- Toxic generational secrets
  - The Family Crypt
- The family climate and dance that reinforce the secrets
- If the secret is not addressed, it can create redundancies or repetitions of past traumas and actions
- Secrets can shape intergenerational loyalties
- Anniversary Syndrome

Nichols, 2010 & Termini, 2018

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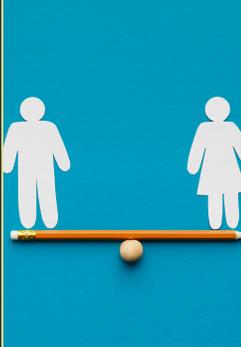
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**Factors that play a Role in Inducing Change**

- Triggering Event
- Instability (imbalanced power dynamics)
- Shame
- Guilt
- Understanding the role of the secrets
- Understanding alliances and the need to disrupt/form new ones



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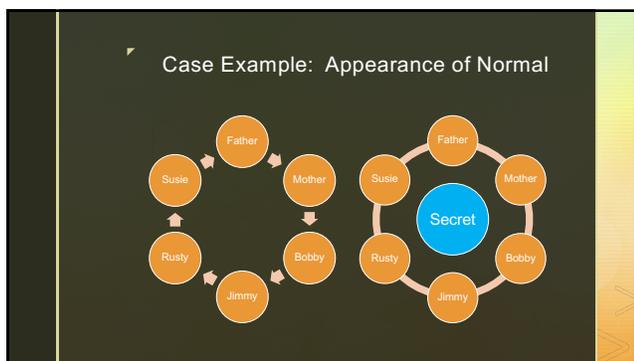
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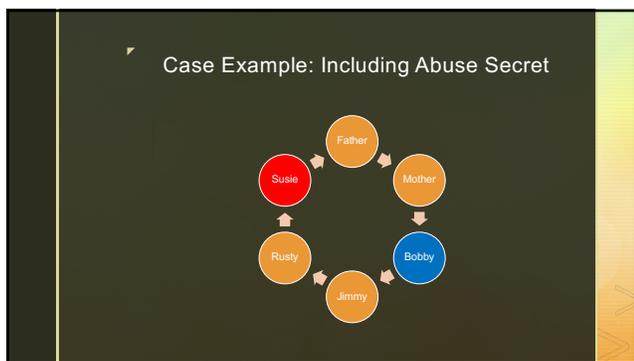
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### Investigator's Role in the Family

- Externally referred
  - OCYS incident
  - Police report
  - Custody/Court involvement
- Briefer relationship
- Determine if maltreatment or another issue occurred
- May have an immediate impact on the family system/dynamic
- Role leads to separation of family, treatment, other involvement
- Viewed by the family as disrupting the secrets

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### Effective Interventions for Investigators

- Be mindful how the family sees you.
  - Intrusive, disrupting the dynamic and secrets
  - An extension of an outside influence
  - A savior, source of hope
- Be mindful of the allegations and how the family system may protect these
- Talk to other children or parents
- Avoid asking "why" questions or accusational nature. Ask "how" questions

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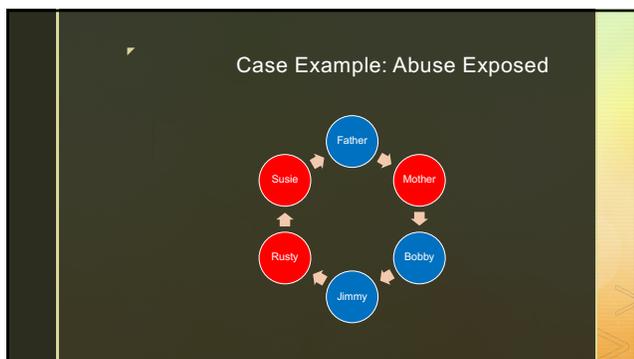
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### Offender Therapist's Role within the Family

- Offender appears to be the primary client, but victim, family, and society are too
- Put emphasis on the offender to progress, not the victim
- Puts less stress and pressure on the victim
- Bridges contact with Courts/caseworkers about case updates
- When appropriate, works with victim's therapist or other therapists in the family to guide treatment
- Participate in reunification if therapeutically appropriate



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### Effective Interventions for Offender Therapist

- BOUNDARIES! Focus on treating the offender's behavior. It is not our job to advocate for an offender to see the victim or changes to custody
- You must rely and utilize collateral sources and investigations
- Offender may still be focused on preserving the secret
- Focus on accountability and risk – Don't get distracted by other factors that the offender brings up. You can address them later
- Utilize transparency. Your role, your treatment, confidentiality, and expectations
- Motivational interviewing. Identify resistance. Roll with it

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### Victim Therapist's Role in the Family

- Be mindful of your role and expectations
  - Not just for you, but what are the child's expectations, especially within their family
- Conflict because the therapist is creating new secrets through talking with the victim
- Works with other therapists involved in the family to dispel secrets and minimize misleading information
- Works with client to determine readiness for reunification if appropriate and can be the guiding part of the reunification process



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### Effective Interventions for the Victim Therapist

- Clearly define roles and maintain transparency
- Boundaries. This may be the first healthy relationship that victim has had.
- Professional boundaries when working with other providers
- Supervision and peer supervision about secret keeping
- Do not put pressure on yourself to uncover secrets immediately, meet your client where they are at
- Do not co-sign on secrets. If you uncover one, that does not mean there aren't many more

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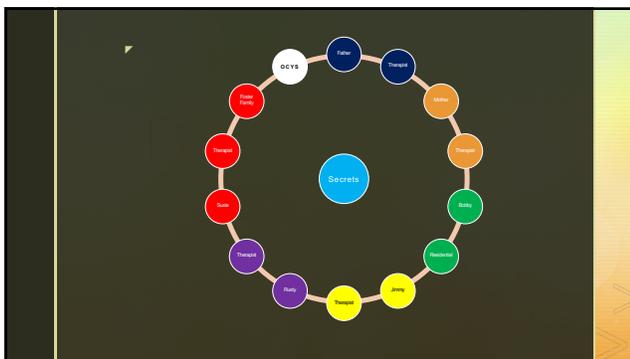
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### Role of the Non-Offending Parent Therapist

- Provides treatment for parent not associated with the abuse
- Most cases of abuse there are other family members who are aware, particularly in emotional maltreatment and child torture
- Therapist evaluates the NOP's role in the family and how they contribute or reinforce the secrets and dynamics within

Cabbigat, & Kangas 2018

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### Effective Interventions for the Non-Offending Parent Therapist

- Continue to explore secrets within the home
- Do not focus solely on the abuse. Process the family dynamic that contributed to the abuse
  - What was this parent's role?
  - How did this become part of the family dynamic?
  - What role did this parent play in maintaining the secrets that camouflaged the abuse

Cabbigat & Kangas 2018

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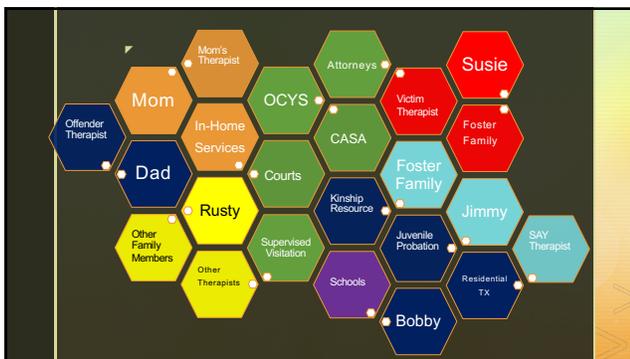
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### Returning to Homeostasis

- The base functioning for a family
- This may change throughout the process, but many families seek this
  - Familiar and usual ways of functioning
- It is up to us to understand this and disrupt it where necessary
  - Reunification without addressing this will likely return the family to many of the previous dynamics

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**Things to Keep in Mind when Working with Families**

- All families exist in their own homeostasis, even if it is not healthy or doesn't appear to be a traditional family system.
- Families will go to great lengths to maintain this homeostasis.
- All families maintain some secrets and they may serve different purposes
- In our different roles we do join the family in some way. Be mindful of this and maintain boundaries
  - Supervision with others about boundaries
- Most families need to see a purpose for their homeostasis to be disrupted. Process this with them

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**Things to Keep in Mind when Working with Families**

- Many secrets are layered – just because you have solved one does not mean that you are done
- Ask Circular Questions. Process the roles the family of a whole plays in maintaining secrets
- Avoid asking "Why" questions. Focus on the "How."
- Acknowledge your role. "I'm here in my office. I know I can read about your family or hear what you say, but I know that's not the same as what you have been through...."
- Have conversations about your conversations. Summarize for the client often allows them to disclose even more, or highlights inconsistencies in their self-report.
- Communicate regularly with other providers working with families. Obtain releases or have a Court order granting providers contact.

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**Closing Thoughts**

- Secrets can be ingrained in families and difficult to discover and work through.
- Secrets can be frustrating to uncover and work through. If you address them head on, you will likely be met with resistance. Instead, work around them.
  - Focus on the purpose of the secret
  - Focus on the family members that protect it and how your client sees each of them.
- Never rely solely on one person's account of things, there are several dynamics from multiple people that contribute to the secrets within a family.

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