



## Protective Parenting Program

Sexual abuse is devastating, not only for the victim, but for the victim's family. Most often, the perpetrator is a family member, either a sibling or a parent figure. What is left after disclosure is a family that is suffering from confusion, trauma, denial, and stigma. The victim could be struggling with trauma. The siblings could be struggling with loss. The dynamics of the family have been profoundly changed by the abuse and abuser, both to hide and accommodate the sexual abuse and to prevent discovery and disclosure. The dynamics and issues created by the abuse can compromise the family's functioning and future care for the victim.

The non-offending parent is particularly impacted by the sexual abuse. Not only does that parent (typically the mother) have to face the disorienting news that her child has been abused, she has to face the loss of another loved one (spouse, paramour, or child). The relationship between the child and the parent is likely compromised or at least changed by the abuse, as are the commitment and loyalties that were created by the offender. The non-offending parent likely struggles with guilt, shame, confusion, denial, or misunderstanding about abuse and abusers. There are also legitimate issues regarding how the abuse happened in the home, how the family was not aware of the abuse, and how the offender has manipulated the perceptions. All of these are factors in the failure to protect the victim.

While some parents are capable of immediately understanding and acting upon the fractures and violations of the family, coming quickly to the aid of the victim and acting in protective ways, others struggle to understand the abuser, the victim, trauma, and their own role in the family. Often offenders will choose families with pre-existing vulnerabilities for a victim. These are the individuals who are typically referred to services through Agencies, primarily child protective agencies. These individuals might deny the abuse, disbelieve the victim, be victims of the offender themselves, remain committed to abuser, or lack the knowledge or skills to parent in a family impacted by trauma and loss. Finally, it is important to understand these issues in the context of an important fact – ***failure to be believed and supported by a parent is a significant source of trauma for victims, contributing to the development of lasting symptoms.*** This can sometimes be greater than the impact of the abuse itself.

Our Protective Parenting Program is designed to provide information and skills for parents whose children have been sexually abused. Our goal is first reunification of

non-offending parents and their children to a family environment that decreases vulnerability and increases skills to deal with trauma and the special needs of these families. Our services include evaluation, treatment, and reunification therapy.

### ***Protective Parenting Capacity Evaluations***

Typically, an individual referred for this type of evaluation is an individual who is struggling to act in the best interests of the victim, whether it be by disbelieving the victim, protecting the perpetrator, or being impacted by her own issues that impede her functioning. The purpose of the Protective Parenting Capacity evaluation is to assess the following:

- Client's beliefs, values, and understanding of sexual abuse
- Support for and attachment to the victim
- Alignment towards the perpetrator
- Parenting skills and deficits
- Presence of other characterological, mental health, substance abuse, or trauma issues that impact functioning.

The evaluation might include psychological testing, including personality testing, testing for risk of child abuse, and testing for parenting issues, like stress or relationship features. An evaluation can be more or less comprehensive, depending on the referral questions. For example, an evaluation simply addressing the treatment needs of the individual will be less comprehensive than an evaluation to address psychological, cognitive, character, or mental health concerns. The evaluation can last between 2 – 6 hours.

### ***Protective Parenting Treatment***

The Protective Parenting Treatment program includes both individual and group therapy. It is not time limited, but typically lasts between 1 – 2 years, depending on the client's functioning and progress. The program is appropriate for any individual requiring support or information following sexual abuse in the family. There are currently two 2 hour groups available, one in the morning and one in the evening. Therapists will do their best to accommodate client schedules for individual counseling.

There are no specific exclusionary criteria for referrals. The client will have to be able to attend consistently. *Denial is not an exclusionary criterium.* The client should not have significant mental health instability, severe medical issues, an active substance abuse issues, or severe cognitive limitations that would hamper the ability to participate in any type of therapy. Additionally, the client will be expected to adhere to Agency recommendations, safety plans, and Protection From Abuse orders while in treatment.

The goals of treatment include:

- Addressing the issues of grief, loss, and shame involved
- Providing education regarding:
  - Types of abuse: Sexual, Physical, Psychological
  - Sexual abuse and its impact
  - Signs/Red flags of abuse in relationships and families
  - Trauma and the symptoms
  - Manipulations of abusers
  - Dynamics of sexual abuse in the family
  - Boundaries and boundary violations
  - Healthy relationships and intimacy
- Offering treatment and support for client's own trauma issues
- Addressing misinformation and beliefs and values that facilitate abuse
- Increasing parenting skills, including:
  - Appropriate expectations of children
  - Interventions and discipline effective at different developmental stages
  - Improving consistency and enforcement of boundaries
  - Understanding and responding to special needs of traumatized children
- Providing appropriate referrals for housing, employment issues, and other services

### ***Therapeutic Reunification Services***

If there has been a rupture of the parent-child relationship, whether it is emotional or through placement, we can offer therapeutically guided reunification. This process will attempt to reunify the parent and child in a way that will address the ruptures, the betrayal, the confusion, the anger, and the pain of the victim and parent. The treatment will also provide an opportunity for the non-offending parent to answer questions, express concerns or explanations, and offer solace and comfort to the victim. The therapy will assess the parenting needs of the victim, as well as seek to negotiate and resolve issues in the family. This treatment will offer support through the transition and return to home, or address the loss if the family does not reunify.