

Understanding Small Voices



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Small Voices...

- ❑ *The devil came when I was on the potty and squeezed my pee-pee out. . . Know something. . . God was asleep when it happened Paula age 4*
- ❑ *He put a pencil in my bottom. . Sarah age 4*
- ❑ *Snakes came out of my bottom. They were big and small.. . Jordan age 3*
- ❑ *He put his finger in my butt hole. He did it harder and harder. . . Sally age 4*
- ❑ *Carlos did it . . . followed pointing at stepdad's penis and mouth and then went to toilet and made gagging and retching noises.. . . Juan, age 3 1/2*



Children do not communicate like adults
but we still expect them to...



Classifications of Young Children

- Infancy
- Very Young Children (18-36 months)
- Young Children (3-5 years)



Studies of language development are generally of white middle class children

Disagreement regarding actual age of acquisition



Infancy

- Physical signs
- Eyewitness account
- May react to physical presence
 - Child screams when abuser enters hospital room



Very Young Children (18-36 months)

- Behavior is their language
- Most vulnerable group
 - Greatest need of protection
- Short attention span
- Unintelligible speech



Very Young Children (continued)

- Are unable to talk about their experiences in language necessary for documentation
 - Limited language (capable of simple words and sentences, and identifying simple pictures)
- Inability to report concepts (who, what, where)



Remember:

For very young children behavior is their
language



Questions for Caregivers

- Sexualized behaviors
- Signs of anxiety
- Fears
- Play behavior



Evaluators want to know:

- ❑ Where are the data?
- ❑ Child Behavior Checklist
- ❑ Child Sexual Behavior Inventory
- ❑ Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children
- ❑ Developmental history
- ❑ Risk factors



What to Do?

- Court-ordered plan
- Emphasis on child's safety
- Buying time
- Monitor over time
- Adjust time and contact as safe

Young Children (3-5 years)

- ❑ Are in a transition and in process of acquiring interview skills
- ❑ Significant jump from age 3 to 4
- ❑ Highly imaginative
- ❑ Answers focused questions
- ❑ Correct use of pronouns (4 ½ to 5 ½)
- ❑ Comparisons (bigger, smaller)
- ❑ Generally have a good working vocabulary
- ❑ Generally can tell: who, what, where

Young Children (continued)

- ❑ Are unable to tell: how many, when, how many times
- ❑ Have difficulty with questions focusing on: beginning, middle, end
- ❑ Concrete telling only what is important to them e.g. "He peed in my mouth"
- ❑ Not strong with spontaneous narrative
- ❑ Speak disjointedly, fragmented style
- ❑ Assess for: "show me" (generally by the age of 4)
- ❑ Understand concept of truth/ lie (5) unable to define words
- ❑ Keep child focused on the topic
 - Ex. *"Now we will talk about..."*

Must Recognize

- ❑ No perfect interview
- ❑ Rapport building is critical in understanding the child's development and how he/she communicates
- ❑ Not the number of interviews but the number of interviewers
- ❑ How did child disclose? (Spontaneous vs. nod of head)

Must Recognize (continued)

- ❑ Elements of fantasy do not discount a child's disclosure of sexual abuse
- ❑ Assess for suggestibility – use strategies to assess
- ❑ Child needs memory triggers i.e. dolls, photographs
- ❑ Use of scaffolding (more questions, more props)

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Thank you Sandra Hewitt