

# TOP TEN Things Caregivers Need to Know About Treatment For Youth with Problematic Sexual Behavior

By Sheryl Overby MS NCC LIMHP

## 1. You are not alone, you are not the cause.

Realizing that your child has a sexual behavior problem can be one of the most difficult things a parent can face. Sibling sexual abuse occurs 5 times more often than adult/child incest. Sadly, this puts a parent in the almost unbearable situation of trying to meet the needs of both children. There are many factors related to the cause of childhood sexual behaviors; and caregivers may have some degree of responsibility with some of those factors. But, your child is also responsible for his/her behavior. Figuring it all out is tough, attending a class with others in your situation may be very helpful. For more information visit [www.NCSBY.org](http://www.NCSBY.org)



## 2. Your child depends on you to face the truth.



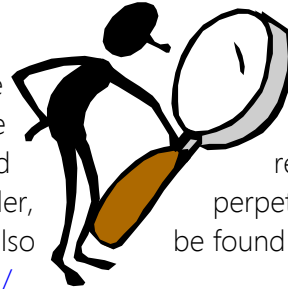
I'm guessing a part of you wants to avoid this whole subject or just can't believe that what you have heard is true. There may also be a part of you that is very concerned. The first step is to get a thorough evaluation by a professional. Some behaviors maybe considered natural and healthy, but others are coercive or abusive. Perhaps something else has happened that you are not aware of. Most families need a neutral party, outside of the family, to help investigate the complex and embarrassing subject of sexual behavior in children. Even if it never happens again, without some type of intervention, your child may suffer long term *emotional* consequences. It's hard, but you CAN handle the truth.

## 3. Talking about sexuality with a child or youth is awkward.

Some caregivers get very nervous knowing that their child will be in treatment talking about sexual things. Talk to your child's therapist. You can work out a plan in which your family's values can still be implemented in the area of sexuality, even if your child has sexual behavior problems. However, you must be willing to talk to your child in a healthy way that does not create more feelings of shame for past behavior. The best place to start is to get a good book for sex education. Research has shown that talking about healthy sexuality and sexual respect actually REDUCES the chance of premature or inappropriate sexual behavior in the future.

#### 4. A good therapist is hard to find.

There are hundreds of therapists and just as many theories about the provide treatment. Certainly, a key component is finding someone feel comfortable with. A good clue that a therapist has NOT had be if they use old terminology such as: adolescent sex offender, molester. More information about choosing a good therapist can also the National Child Traumatic Stress Network <http://www.nctsnet.org/>



best way to you respect and recent training will perpetrator/perp, or be found on the website for

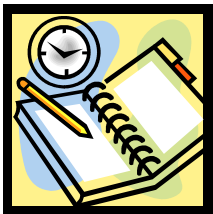
#### 5. Treatment works better if the caregivers are involved.

Research has shown that the number one thing that helps kids succeed in treatment is their caregivers' involvement. Youth with caregiver support are more likely to admit their mistake plus learn new behaviors and skills faster. Caregivers should partner with the therapist to help develop treatment strategies and participate in sessions. Other expectations of parents include: reading materials, talking about issues at home, implementing safety plans, changing the home environment if needed and providing the recommended amount of supervision.



#### 6. It takes a long time to figure out the whole story.

It is very difficult to figure out the whole story; one must consider individual, family and environmental factors. Some children have so much shame from their behavior, that it delays their progress. My experience has been



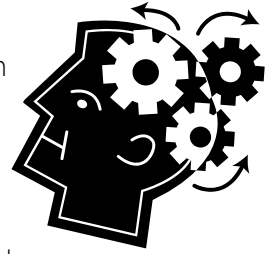
that IF there are deeply hidden secrets, it takes months before they come out. A child must first feel emotionally and physically safe in therapy AND at home. Consequently, the treatment process can be long, usually 6 to 9 months of weekly sessions, and you will probably feel like quitting before treatment is over. The benefit of sticking with it is knowing that you have done all you can to help your child have sexual respect and healthy sexuality during adolescence and adulthood.

#### 7. The story usually gets complicated and messy.

There is always more than one reason **why** a youth has acted out sexually. The entire list of "vulnerability factors" totals approximately 75 items. Even if a youth was sexually abused at a younger age, there are other elements that contribute to the problem. Your therapist will help identify the factors that make a child vulnerable to having inappropriate sexual behaviors and problem solve ways to help. There are lots of things caregivers can do. Sexual behavior in children (before puberty) is different than in teens or adults due to the lack of hormones, i.e. there is no hormonal based "sex drive". However, children can be VERY compelled to initiate or participate in adult like sexual behaviors; it's complicated.

## 8. It takes more than just saying you are sorry.

Your child will need an individualized treatment plan after the evaluation. Plus, if a youth has been a victim of sexual abuse, those issues are also a part of therapy. All kids need to take responsibility for their problem behavior, but I believe more is needed to provide complete healing. Repairing their mistake by intentionally doing something positive reduces unhealthy shame for the behavior. It takes some creativity and courage, but effective reparation can be very powerful. Other components of successful treatment include: sex education, body ownership skills, following the privacy rules, improving peer relationships and self-control strategies.



## 9. Balanced supervision is your new best friend.

Remember to stay balanced with don't *pretend* that this problem child is very likely to need some even a long time. Second, try not to be again, and thus, never allow participation in age appropriate activities. Third, if your child does have another incident, be *prepared*; it is difficult to change a behavior that is so physically rewarding. Your therapist can help you know how to react to your child if you find them in another unhealthy sexual situation.



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## 10. The story is still unfinished; there is hope for the future.

Just because your child has problems with sexual behavior now, does not mean they will have problems as an older teen or adult. Research has shown that the earlier a child gets treatment, the better. Statistically, a 7 yr. old child will have a 4-5 % chance and a 15 year old child will have a 9-13% chance of having sexual behavior problems in the future. Some families have been traumatized for generations. However, with lots of hard work, even families impacted by sibling incest can reunify and be grateful for their "new kind of normal". Restoring the generations to



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If you would like to talk to me about my concepts for treatment or how to cope with unhealthy sexual behavior in your family, please contact me by phone at 402-592-0328.