CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE IN NEW MEXICO: FACT, FICTION, & MOVING FORWARD

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• Identify facts, myths, and current trends in childhood sexual abuse

• Understand the impact of childhood sexual abuse on children and families in New Mexico

• Explore ways to initiate change and create progress in addressing childhood sexual abuse in our state
MYTH

MOST KIDS ARE SEXUALLY ABUSED BY A STRANGER
Most children know and trust at least one person who sexually abused them.
SEXUAL ABUSE
ALLEGATIONS IN DIVORCE
CASES ARE USUALLY FALSE

MYTH
SEXUAL ABUSE RATES HAVE DECLINED SINCE THE 1990’S
SEXUAL ABUSE FACTS & STATS
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• 1 in 10
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• # of children sexually abused before they turn 18
• 42 million
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• # of children sexually abused before they turn 18
• # of survivors of child sexual abuse in the United States
• 90
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• # of children sexually abused before they turn 18
• # of survivors of child sexual abuse in the United States
• % of children who know their abuser
• 47
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• # of children sexually abused before they turn 18
• # of survivors of child sexual abuse in the United States
• % of children who know their abuser
• % of decline in sexual abuse cases from 1993-2006
• 4-8
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• # of children sexually abused before they turn 18
• # of survivors of child sexual abuse in the United States
• % of children who know their abuser
• % of decline in sexual abuse cases from 1993-2006
• % of sexual abuse allegations that are false
SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS

• 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before they are 18
• There are 42 million survivors of sexual abuse in the United States
• 90% of abused children know their abuser
• Identified incidents of child sexual abuse decreased 47% from 1993 to 2006
• Only 4%-8% of sexual abuse allegations are false
I’D KNOW A SEXUAL ABUSER BY LOOKING AT THEM

MYTH
PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN ARE PEDOPHILES

MYTH
FACT

ADOLESCENTS WHO CAUSE SEXUAL MISTAKES ARE DIFFERENT THAN ADULT SEX OFFENDERS
ADULT AND ADOLESCENT OFFENDERS
SEX OFFENDERS & ADOLESCENTS WHO CAUSE SEXUAL HARM

• Perpetrators look and act like everyone else
• Situational offender v. preferential offender
• Adolescents who engage in sexually abusive behaviors are categorically different than adults who sexually offend
• Treatment for adults and adolescents is specialized
• Sex offender registration may provide false sense of safety
MYTH

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE FEEL RIGHT AWAY
MEDICAL EVIDENCE IN SEXUAL ABUSE CASES IS RARE
FACT

BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE OUTSIDE A FACILITATORS TO DISCLOSURE

STAR
DISCLOSURES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

• Victims often delay disclosure or fail to disclose altogether

• Disclosure of sexual abuse is a process rather than a single event

• Children do not give one detailed, clear account of abuse

• Disclosures generally unfold gradually

• Children typically “test” reactions and present the abuse in a series of “hints”
Why kids don’t tell...

I don’t want to get them in trouble.

No one will believe me.

I promised to keep this a secret.

I’m too ashamed.

I’m going to be taken away from my home.

People will look at me differently.

I’m scared.

It’s my fault.

He said he’d kill me if I told.

She said she’d hurt my little brother.

I should have fought harder or screamed louder.
MYTH

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE GROW UP TO BE ABUSERS
TRAUMA-FOCUSED TREATMENT IS THE MOST SUPPORTED APPROACH FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE.
MYTH

Children who exhibit bed-wetting, nightmares, and sexual behavior have been sexually abused.
THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE
IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE

• Short- & long-term consequences of sexual abuse are well-documented but the association is not straightforward

• Child sexual abuse is a non-specific risk factor

• Impacts diverse range of domains including mental health, behavioral, interpersonal, educational, physical health & brain development

(Cashmore & Shackle, 2013)
IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE

• Males experience more externalizing problems whereas females struggle with internalizing problems.

• Strongest links include depression, alcohol & substance abuse, eating disorders for women survivors, and anxiety-related disorders for male survivors.

• Re-victimization of survivors has also been demonstrated.

(Cashmore & Shackle, 2013)
SEXUAL ABUSE IN NEW MEXICO
SEXUAL ABUSE IN NEW MEXICO

• New Mexico ranks 50th in overall child wellbeing
• Reporting costs can be high for New Mexicans
• Patriarchal family structure
• Machismo beliefs
• Religious barriers
• Collectivist cultures may place the value of family reputation over the needs of the victim (Sawrikar & Katz, 2017)
MOVING FORWARD
MOVING FORWARD

• Ultimate goal is to prevent childhood sexual abuse

• Requires a socio-ecological approach

• Interplay of individual, relationships, community, & societal

• Factors at one level influence factors at another level

• Act across multiple levels simultaneously
MOVING FORWARD

• Know the facts

• Shift prevention from children to adults

• Talk about sexual abuse

• Create opportunities for victims to disclose

• Be willing to intervene
MOVING FORWARD

• One of the most important protective factors is support from the family and the wider social environment

• Enhance social supports

• Report, report, report

• Know your community resources
DID WE COVER OUR LEARNING OBJECTIVES?
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
THANK-YOU

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