

Addressing Sexual Abuse of Youth in Custody

Module 12: Managing Vulnerable Youth in Custody

Objectives

- Understand who vulnerable youth are
- Understand factors that create vulnerability
- Understand how vulnerabilities present in youth in custodial settings

Vulnerable Youth Are:

- Children
- Previously Victimized
- Little experience with institutionalization
- Developmentally Disabled
- Mentally ill
- Hearing Impaired
- Limited Language Ability
- Gay and Transgendered
- Substance Abusers

Consider Being a Kid...

- Different communication styles
- Maturity level (emotional, physical)
- Language development
- Social development
- Nature vs. Nurture

Working with Youth

- **Be aware of child's developmental level**
- **Be aware of special legal issues**
- **Be aware of prior victimizations**

Special Considerations: Previously Victimized

- PTSD
- Low self-esteem
- Mistrust
- Emotional pain

Special Considerations: Previously Victimized

- “Victim” pattern in lifestyle and relationship choices
- Distorted view of self, relationships & reality
- Past histories of institutional abuse
- Personality disorders-maladaptive patterns of interacting

Special Considerations: Developmental Disabilities

- Wants to please people in authority
- Relies on authority figures for the solution
- Level of understanding varies widely
- Real memory gaps

Special Considerations: Developmental Disabilities

- **Avoid lengthy complex, 2-part questions or directions**
- **Determine language ability**
- **Short attention span**
- **Quick to take blame**
- **Take into consideration origin of behavioral outbursts**

Special Considerations: Mentally ill

- Individuals with DSM Diagnosis
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Schizophrenia
 - Bipolar Disorder

Special Considerations: Mentally ill

- Make sure the child feels safe
- Provide information about specific mental illnesses and their behavioral manifestations.
- Take into account medication cycles

Special Considerations: Mentally ill

- Be aware of your body language
- Be aware of child's body language
- Inconsistencies in story may not = lying
- Do not underestimate the child
- Take your time

Special Considerations: Hearing Impairments

- A certified sign language interpreter (ADA)
- Give the interpreter time to establish rapport and trust
- Ensure the interpreter is comfortable with environment
- Speak directly to the child – not the interpreter

Special Considerations: Limited Language Ability

- Use vocabulary and sentences that are at the child's level of cognitive and language development
- Avoid lengthy complex, 2-part questions or directions
- Speak slowly and allow sufficient wait time

Special Considerations: Gay and Transgendered

- Special consideration should be given to the safety of these children
- Use gender identifiers as the youth indicates.
- Use gender neutral language. (ex: youth or resident instead of girlfriend or boyfriend)
- Avoid judging and inappropriate remarks

Special Considerations: Substance Abusers

- Heightened sense of general fear
- Emotional reaction may not match the behavioral reaction
- Lack of trust
- Be aware of medical history
- Utilize your resources for addiction prevention and recovery programs (Certified)

Additional Resources:

- Child Advocacy Centers
- Rape Crisis Centers*
- Comprehensive Care Centers
- Private Mental Health Providers
- Carefully reviewed on-line sources