Specialized Training: Investigating Sexual Abuse in Correctional Settings
Notification of Curriculum Utilization
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The enclosed Specialized Training: Investigating Sexual Abuse in Correctional Settings curriculum was developed by The Moss Group, Inc. (TMG) as part of contract deliverables for the National PREA Resource Center (PRC), a cooperative agreement between the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The PREA standards served as the basis for the curriculum’s content and development with the goal of the Specialized Training: Investigating Sexual Abuse in Correctional Settings curriculum to satisfy specific PREA standard requirements.

It is recommended that the Specialized Training: Investigating Sexual Abuse in Correctional Settings curriculum be reviewed in its entirety before choosing which modules to use. Any alterations to the original materials must be acknowledged during their presentation or requires removal of the PRC and TMG logos.

BJA is currently undergoing a comprehensive review of the enclosed curriculum for official approval at which point the BJA logo may be added.

Note: Utilization of the enclosed curriculum, either in part or whole, does not guarantee that an auditor will find a facility “meets standard”. Rather, an auditor will take into consideration the curriculum used as part of their overall determination of compliance.
Module 7: Interviewing Juvenile Sexual Abuse Victims

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Module 7: Objectives

1. Identify techniques for interviewing juveniles during investigations of sexual abuse in confinement settings.
Goal of a Juvenile Forensic Interview

- Obtain a statement from a child in a developmentally-sensitive, unbiased, and truth-seeking manner that will support accurate and fair decision-making in the criminal justice and child welfare systems.
Sex is complex

Views
Belief
System
Personal
Values
Culture

Upbringing
Lifestyle
Exposure
Automatic
Understanding Your Subjects

In order to be prepared to interview juvenile victims or suspects you must understand
• pathways
• thought processes
• level of cognitive maturity
Many children come into the criminal justice system after having been physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused.

Children who have been sexually abused by a family member are often enveloped into a secret life...they are good at keeping secrets.
Many of your youth are coming to you...

- From single-parent households without strong male role models
- Having been a witness to abuse and chemical use
- With coping mechanisms developed to survive in their environment. These may include:
  - Lying
  - Stealing
  - Manipulating
Delayed Reporting

There are many reasons these children may not report, including:
• They don’t understand that it is wrong due to their histories of abuse.
• Fear of retaliation.
• Self-blame or guilt.
• Embarrassment.
• Lack of verbal capacity.
• Issue of obedience to adults.
Youths may feel guilty if reporting could cause their loved one (abuser) to go to jail.

Boys in particular may feel ashamed
- Expectation that men should fight and take control.
- Concern that abuse will “make them” homosexual.
Youth must **feel safe** before they will want to talk about the abuse.

*This is why many victims don't report abuse until later in life and why some cases are never reported.*
Children With Past Victimization

Tend to have...

• Low self-esteem
• Mistrust
  – Especially of authority
• Emotional pain
• Distorted view of self, relationships & reality
  – Worthless, nobody cares, “I am ugly”
Forensic Interview

Two Overriding Features

• Hypothesis Testing
  • Rather than hypothesis-confirming
  • Rule out as many interpretations as possible

• Youth-Centered Approach
  • Youth determine the vocabulary and content of conversation as much as possible
  • Avoid projecting adult interpretations onto events
Essential Interview Techniques

- Confidentiality
- Rapport Building
- Create Safe Setting
- Genuineness & Authenticity
- Active Listening
- Effective Questioning
- Paraphrasing, Summarizing & Clarifying
- Non-verbal Actions

- Response time
- Limited amount of interviews
- Interview Teams
- Avoid judging, attacking, condescending, denial
- Avoid offering pity
- Avoid beginning with preconceived outcome
- Truth Finding
Interviewing

**AVOID**

- Wearing a uniform
- Having a gun visible
- Expressing surprise, disgust, disbelief, other emotional reactions
- Touching the youth
- Staring
- Sitting uncomfortably close
Interviewing

**DO NOT**

- Use bathroom breaks or drinks as reinforcements for cooperation
- Suggest feelings/responses to the youth
- Make promises
Interviewing

**AVOID**

- Encouragement directly linked to talking about the abuse

- Asking why youth behaved in a certain way

- Correcting youth’s behavior during the interview unless necessary
  - When necessary, explain correction
Interviewing

- Acknowledge youth if he/she becomes upset, embarrassed, or scared
- Avoid extensive comments about feelings
Forensic Interview

Phased Approach

• Each step has a purpose
  • Environment
  • Roles
  • Instructions
  • Empowerment

• Minimize suggestively
  • Free Narrative
  • Follow-up/Clarification
Forensic Interview

Phased Approach

• Preparation
• Introduction and Rapport Building
• Ground Rules
• Practice Interview
• Free Narrative-Topic Introduction
• Question/Clarification (follow-up)
• Closure
Interview Phases

**Phase 1: Preparation**

- Gather background information
  - Name, age, sex, relevant developmental or cultural considerations
  - Interests or hobbies
  - Relevant medical treatments or conditions
  - Events related to the allegation
  - Content of recent sex education or abuse prevention programs
  - Any information on what the youth calls various body parts
  - Nature of allegation and circumstances
  - Possible misunderstanding
  - Possible motives for false allegations

- Consider whether to use physical evidence (if applicable)
Phase 1: Preparation

Cultural Considerations

• If the youth is from a different culture, do some research in advance of the interview

• Some cultures
  • discourage youth from looking authority figures in the eye
  • discourage correcting or contradicting an adult.

• Youth from these cultures may be more likely to answer multiple choice or yes-no questions, even when they are uncertain
Developmental Considerations

Children vary in...
- cognitive ability
- language
- memory

- attention spans,
- social skills and
- emotional maturity

*It’s essential for the interviewer to understand the different stages of child development and develop an appropriate interview environment, activities, and questions accordingly.*
Adolescent Development

Age 12: Declaration of Independence

- Adolescent bounces between childhood and adulthood, being
  - irresponsible and responsible,
  - testing parental authority and then depending on it.
- Focused on social life, friends, school.
- May be preoccupied with own attractiveness, continue friendships with same sex
- Learning to respect the rights and needs of others.
Adolescent Development

Age 14: The Age of Rapid Change

The five "I's"

- Impulsive
- Intense
- Idealistic
- Immediate
- Indestructible
Adolescent Development

Age 14: The Age of Rapid Change

The six "M's":
- Moody
- Messy
- Monosyllabic
- “Mouthy”
- Money-oriented
- ME-centered
Adolescent Development

Age 14: The Age of Rapid Change

- Development of parental conflicts as
  - the peer group begins to serve as the adolescent's reference for their standards of behavior.
  - the maturing teen struggles against being treated like a child
Adolescent Development

Age 16: Friends, Clothes, Music, More!

• "Who am I?"
  • Questions about identity
  • Development of values, beliefs, clearer sense of self
• Continued struggle around independence
  • Testing of rules
  • Questioning of authority.
  • May become extremely opinionated and challenging
Age 16: Friends, Clothes, Music, More!

Risk: Depression

- Feelings of sadness and depression should not be dismissed as "normal" moodiness during this period.
- Situational losses can lead to depression and even suicide.
- A 2009 national survey found that during the 12 months before the survey:
  - 17.4% of female and 10.5% of male high school students considered suicide
  - 8.1% of female and 4.6% of male high school students attempted suicide

Phase 1: Preparation

**Limited Language Ability**

- Use vocabulary and sentences that are at the individual’s level of cognitive and language development

- Ask one question at a time; avoid lengthy complex, multiple-part questions

- Speak slowly and allow sufficient wait time

- Consider the use of anatomically correct dolls
Phase 1: Preparation

Developmental Considerations

• Each child will have a different attention span and a different way he/she communicates

• No matter how tough or street savvy your youth may be, they are still kids
Profile: Developmentally Disabled

- Wants to please people in authority
- Relies on authority figures for the solution
- Watches clues from interviewer; wants to be friends; wants to please
- Real memory gaps
- Quick to take blame

- Short attention span
- Allow person to use their own words
- Do not ask leading questions
- Use concrete ideas (who, what, when, where, how)
- Beware of vocabulary (anatomically correct dolls)
Interview Phases

Phase 1: Preparation

• Generate alternate hypotheses and hypothesis-seeking questions

• Prepare—
  • Questions to test alternative hypotheses about how allegations arose
  • Questions to test alternative interpretations of details stated in allegation
Interview Phases

Phase 1: Preparation

Number of Interviewers
- One interviewer may increase rapport
- If more than one, seat other out of line of sight
- Second in supporting role
Interview Phases

Phase 1: Preparation

Recording

- Video Recording
  - Position camera so everyone in the room can be seen/heard
- If not recording, ensure accurate documentation—exact words spoken
Interview Phases

**Phase 1: Preparation**

Physical Setting

- Relaxing, uncluttered, neutral environment
- Do not imply the youth is in trouble
- DO NOT put a barrier between you and the interviewee
- If setting is not neutral, explain
- Away from traffic, noise, disruptions
- Turn off cell phone
Interview Phases

Phase 1: Preparation

Physical Setting
- Interview room should be prepared in advance of the interview
- Ensure interview does not interfere with the youth’s meal and that the youth has had a recent opportunity to use the restroom
Interview Phases

Phase 2: Introduction and Rapport

• Introduce yourself and explain your job

• Tell youth about recording (if applicable)

• Appear relaxed, friendly and interested

• Familiarize yourself with youth’s verbal skills and cognitive maturity

• Build rapport through open-ended questions
Activity
Interview Phases

Phase 3: Establish the Ground Rules

• Don’t guess at answers

• Ask youth to tell you if they don’t understand something

• Give youth permission to correct you if you make a mistake

• Tell the truth
Phase 4: Conduct a Practice Interview

- Only when interviewing younger youth
- Four general principles
  - Only open-ended prompts
  - Invite youth to be informative with comments
  - Encourage youth to talk with head nods and active listening
  - Reinforce ground rules
Interview Phases

Phase 5: Elicit a Free Narrative

- Raising the topic
  - Start with the least suggestive prompt that avoids mention of abuse or particular individuals
  - If this doesn’t work, be more specific—but avoid mentioning specific behavior or projecting adult interpretation onto the allegation
Activity
Phase 5: Elicit a Free Narrative

- Ask youth to provide a narrative description of the event:
  - Research shows children’s responses to open-ended prompts are longer and more detailed than responses to focused questions
  - Don’t feel the need to prompt—silence is a powerful tool
  - If youth becomes upset, acknowledge behavior and address but avoid extensive comment
  - Don’t interrupt to ask questions—revisit the question later in the interview
Interview Phases

Phase 5: Elicit a Free Narrative

- Ask youth to repeat comment if you have trouble hearing them
  - Do not try to guess what they said
- Be tolerant of pauses in the conversation
  - Appropriate to look away to give youth time to continue
Activity
Interview Phases

Phase 6: Question and Clarify

• Avoid jumping between topics
• Clarifying
  • Description of events
  • Identity of perpetrators
  • Whether allegations involve single or multiple events
  • Presence and identities of witnesses
  • Whether similar events have happened to other youth
  • Whether the youth told anyone about the event(s)
  • The time frame and location/venue
  • Alternative explanations for the allegations
Interview Phases

Phase 6: Question and Clarify

• Avoid leading questions

• Be sure that the statements made are unambiguous

• If youth refers to a person, ensure to clarify exactly who they are talking about

• If youth uses slang to refer to a body part, be sure to clarify

• Ask questions like “Is there anything else” or “Did I forget anything” before moving to a different topic
Phase 7: Close the Interview

- Ask if the youth has any questions
- Avoid making promises
- Chat about neutral topics for a while in order to end on a relaxed note
- Thank the youth for coming—but avoid thanking the youth for disclosing abuse
Activity
Common Behavior

Expect the following behavior during an interview:

• crying,
• fidgeting,
• becoming hyperactive,
• becoming angry,
• attempts to escape by changing the topic or going to the bathroom,
• withdrawal,
• become aggressive, or
• use avoidance or distracting tactics.
Interviewing

**Common Behavior**

Be aware what a youth is going through during these sorts of interviews.

– Guilt, self-blame, betrayal

Choose your language carefully. Are you using language that will enhance feelings of shame?
“Couldn’t you have stopped the abuse?” “Why did you let it go this far?”
Final Thoughts on Youth

Be aware of teens’ perception of the interviewer.

- Peer relationships are their first priority
- Watch for non-verbal communication.
  - Adolescents are not typically concrete thinkers
  - The inability to communicate does not = lie.
- Be aware of prior victimizations.
- Juveniles have little knowledge of their rights.
- Intimacy and sexuality is a major part of the development.