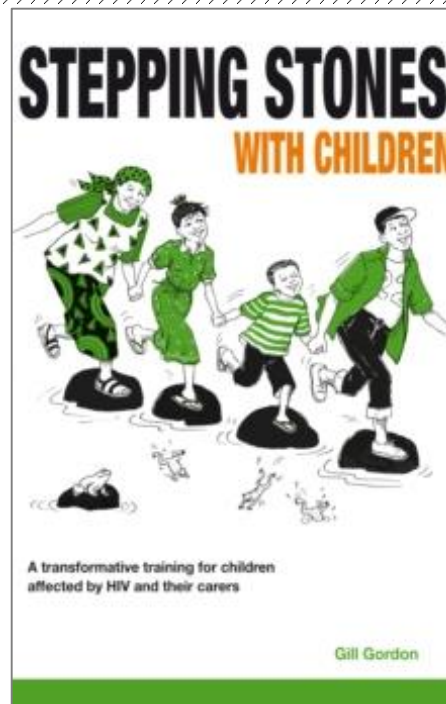


## Handouts for *Stepping Stones with Children*



This *Handout for Stepping Stones with Children* is to be used with the *Stepping Stones with Children* training manual published by Practical Action Publishing, 2016.

You can download this handout for free for use with this training manual from the [www.stepsstonesfeedback.org](http://www.stepsstonesfeedback.org) website.

On this website there are also many other resources to support you with this training manual and the original *Stepping Stones* training manual.

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## **SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

### **1. Talking about stories**

Children and caregivers often cannot talk easily or openly if they are being abused, or their child is being abused. Stories about sexual abuse can help us to think about and discuss it. This will support us to recognize child sexual abuse, and protect children even if they are not able to speak about it.

#### ***The story of Miriam***

Miriam is a 6-year-old girl who is very unhappy. She has a cousin who lives in her house. He is 17 years old. This cousin touches her on her breasts and vagina, and she has to touch him on his penis. He tells her that if she doesn't agree, he will do things that scare her, and this makes her cry. Her cousin gives her sweets to make her feel a little better. He tells her: 'This is our special secret. Don't tell anybody.' Miriam wonders if she is doing something wrong. She doesn't want to keep this secret and wants her cousin to stop, but she is too scared to tell anybody.

#### ***Questions:***

How does her cousin have power over Miriam?

What could she do?

What could her friends and other relatives do?

What other stories about sexual abuse do you know? Use them to explore the issue, and what to do, with your children or friends.

### **2. Possible signs that a child is being sexually abused:**

- shows a sudden change in behaviour that can't be explained;
- bursts into tears easily;
- wants lots of attention;
- is too affectionate, or knowledgeable in a sexual way not suited to their age;
- suddenly draws sexually explicit pictures;
- has medical problems, such as chronic itching, pain in the genitals or when urinating, symptoms of STI or pregnancy, and trouble walking or sitting;
- signs of physical abuse, such as bruises, but refuses to talk about them;
- changes in possessions and the availability of money;
- personality changes, such as anxious, clingy, angry, hostile or withdrawn;
- fear of returning home or having caregiver contacted;
- attitude to school and performance at school changes;
- younger behaviour patterns, such as thumb-sucking or bringing out old toys;
- sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating;
- inability to concentrate;
- child shows lack of trust in, or fear of, someone they know well; for instance, not wanting to be alone with a child minder for no obvious reason;

- starts to lie or steal;
- wets the bed, and has bad dreams in the day or night;
- becomes worried about clothing being removed, or physical activities;
- tries to be 'ultra-good' or perfect; overreacts to criticism;
- non-verbal signs such as silence, slamming doors and coming home late;
- signs of depression, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away, taking drug overdoses, anorexia, and frequent washing of self or clothes.

### **3. Reasons children might not want to talk about being sexually abused:**

- They don't know how to talk about it.
- They feel shame and guilt.
- They blame themselves.
- They don't know that child sexual abuse is wrong.
- They love the abuser and rely on them for attention, love, and support.
- They get pleasure from being chosen, touching, and intimacy.
- They need or want the money and gifts they are offered.
- They fear that the abuser might go to prison or leave the house.
- They fear that the abuser will act on their threats, or punish or kill them.
- They fear that the abuser might hurt someone else the child loves.
- They fear that the family will break up, with uncertain consequences.
- They fear that the partner of the abuser will hate them.
- They fear rejection, by their family and wider community.
- They think that no one would believe them.
- They fear spoiling their own reputation and chance of marriage later.
- They fear bringing shame on family although they are blameless.
- When they previously told someone, they were not taken seriously, they were punished or no action was taken. They felt more powerless and guilty.

### **4. Ways to help a child talk about sexual abuse**

- Talk when you have enough time in a comfortable and private place.
- Find a way of beginning the conversation in an open and caring way. For example: *'I love you and want to help you be happy. I wonder, is someone making you unhappy? Are you afraid of something? Whatever you say, I will not be angry with you. I just want to know what is troubling you, so I can protect and support you better.'*
- You may find it useful to use a doll and point to between its legs or chest, asking: 'Has anyone touched you there?' Never punish or threaten the child, or show shock, but ask in simple language whether their private parts hurt.
- Be alert to non-verbal communication: Often children will not say anything. Observe their facial expressions and body language. They may nod or look

startled. Allow them to remain silent. Do not force them to tell you if you see what you think is positive body language. Go on talking to them and allow them to talk when they are ready.

- Stay on your hub: It is important that you stay calm and in control of your emotions, even if the child tells you about abusive behaviour which makes you feel angry. Reassure them that they have done nothing wrong.
- Take action: Start protecting the child at once, before you know for sure the abuse has happened or the details. This will build trust and make it easier for them to talk.
- Follow up: Ask again about whatever made you concerned. If there was something your child said or did that made you concerned, ask about that. Ask in a non-judgemental way, and take care to avoid shaming your child as you ask questions. 'I' questions can be very helpful, for example: 'I'm concerned because I heard you say that you are not allowed to lock the bathroom door.'
- Discuss secrets and threats with your child, and how abusers use this to trap children. Talk about when it is okay not to keep a secret, even if they promised.
- Show understanding if the child prefers to talk to someone else. Talk about whom the child trusts and respects and who could help them with any problems.
- Build a trusting relationship. Let the child know it is okay to come to you if someone is making them uncomfortable. Keep any promises you make. If you tell your child that they can talk to you, make time for them when they do come.
- Give the child love and tell them that you and others will help and protect them.
- If appropriate, arrange for a medical check for injuries, infections and pregnancy.

## **5. Actions to prevent more abuse**

- Involve all family members and relevant people (for example, police, social services, school staff) in making a plan to protect the child from more abuse.
- Involve the abuser if he or she is a family member and still present in the child's life. This requires a skilled child protection worker to ensure the child's safety, if the abuser does not feel they have done wrong or may/does continue the abuse. Usually it requires that the abuser to move out of the family home for a time, and involves the police or community courts.
- In some communities, the abuser pays a fine for damaging the child and the matter is closed. In some, the abuser is obliged to marry the girl, even if she is below the age of consent. This violates her rights and continues the abuse.
- Ask each family member including children to discuss what they can do to protect the child and other children from further abuse. For example: 'What

would an auntie or uncle do to protect this child and others in the family from sexual abuse?’

- If necessary, contact the police and victim support unit, community support systems, and/or social services.
- If your child has told another adult, such as a teacher or school nurse, contact them. You may be able to work together to support your child.
- If the abuse may affect, or has affected, how your child behaves or performs at school, you may wish to liaise with school staff, if you think they will treat the information sensitively and confidentially.

## **6. Expressing and dealing with feelings:**

- Seek help from a counsellor for yourself and your child.
- Acknowledge that your child may have angry, sad or guilty feelings, even towards you. Stress that the abuse was not your child’s fault.
- Acknowledge that you may need support to deal with your own feelings. You may feel anger at the person who has abused your child, and perhaps guilt for not managing to protect the child in your care.