

8.7 Case studies on enhancing safety and facilitating support for survivors of child sexual abuse

Objective:

Participants will apply knowledge learned about enhancing safety for survivors of child sexual abuse

Time:

30 minutes

Suggested resources:

Case studies on the slide, or print out of case studies

Facilitators notes:

Options:

Print out the case study and questions (without the answers) and provide to small groups for discussion

Place the case study and questions on a powerpoint for a larger group discussion

Case study

Grace, is a 14 year old girl. She comes to your clinic with her mother and stepfather. The mother tells you that she wants to you examine the daughter to determine whether she is a virgin. Grace is looking down at the ground, she is crying. You ask the parents to step outside, so that you can speak to Grace alone. The mother is hesitant, but you insist. You inform her that Grace will be safe with you. After helping her feel safe and comfortable, Grace tells you that the stepfather has been forcing her to have sex with him over the past 6 months. The last incident was 2 days ago. She has never told her mother. She discloses that her menses are 2 weeks late.

Question 1: What are the potential risks and safety concerns that Grace faces (if any)?

Question 2: What can you do to promote Grace's safety?

Bring all participants back together for a discussion.

Question 1: Possible answers

Possible answers:

- Ongoing, continued sexual abuse from her step-father
- Punishment or further abuse by her step-father and/or mother for disclosing abuse
- Her mother may not believe her or be able to protect her from her step-father
- Withdrawal from her family and community, being rejected from her home
- Dropping out of school, being socially marginalized and excluded
- Unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, STIs, HIV, hepatitis B
- Family separation
- Self-blame, guilt, shame, stigma, psychological consequences, anxiety, depression

Question 2: Possible answers:

- Consider the guiding principles of the best interest, safety, privacy and confidentiality, evolving capacity of Grace.
Involve your managers, do not deal with this on your own. Call an NGO worker or colleague for confidential advice for an “anonymous” case.
- Consider telling the mother about the abuse. Ask Grace if she would like to tell her mother, how she thinks her mother will react and discuss the different possibilities. Grace has the evolving capacity to understand information, understand her risks, communicate her wishes. You could speak to the mother together with Grace, speak to the mother alone if Grace gives permission. You may decide that the risks to her safety are too great, and you may decide not to speak to the mother. When you speak with her mother, consider her willingness and ability to protect Grace.
- Do not tell the step-father that you know about the abuse. This could be dangerous. Instead you should find another reason, together with Grace, to tell the step-father that she was at the clinic that promotes her best interest and safety.
- Safety plan with Grace (and potentially her mother) for what she can do to prevent and/or minimize future abuse from her stepfather and what safety resources are available to her
- Consider sending Grace to live with family members or to a children’s shelter. Find out from Grace where she can be the most safe. It might be together with her mother at home and the step-father being asked to leave by family members, the community leader or the police, it might be Grace and her mother going together to stay with family, it might be Grace alone going to stay with family, it might be getting the child protection services.
- Consider calling the police or child protection services.
 - If you are required to report to the police or child protection by law, you must tell Grace this before speaking with Grace and then before speaking with the officials. If you are required to, try to ensure her safety and best interest in the process, keep her involved.
 - If you are not required to inform the police or child protection services, then ask Grace what she wants. Base your decision on her evolving capacity to make decisions, safety and best interest. If she wants to report to the police, support her to do so.
 - If her mother is unable or unwilling to protect her from the abuse and there is no other safe, supportive family she can stay with, you may need to call the child protection services, or a UN agency or INGO involved in child protection (such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International).