



YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEXUALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS

Information for parents and caregivers

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About the Therapeutic Services Program

The Therapeutic Services provides a therapeutic counselling service for:

- Children and young people who have been sexually abused
- Children who have displayed sexualised behaviours and
- Young people who have displayed sexually abusive behaviours.

Therapeutic Services supports the principle that children and young people's disclosures of sexual abuse should be listened to and believed.

The rights of the abused child or young person are always prioritised to ensure their safety and protection from further abuse.

Therapeutic Services is a child-focused service; it uses a systemic approach to the work that ensures the needs of all family members are being met.

Staff come from a number of different professions such as Psychologists, Social Workers, Art Therapists and there are generally both male and female counsellors available.

Who can Access our Service?

Young people who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviours are eligible for service if:

- They are aged between 10 years – 17 years inclusive
- They reside in north west metropolitan Melbourne.

Consideration as to whether the sexually abusive behaviours should be reported to the police:

It is identified that the young person with sexually abusive behaviours is residing in a "safe placement" and not having unsupervised contact with any victims or potential victims.

What happens in the program?

You will have made contact with CPS via our intake line and after a One CPS assessment has been completed and our service is deemed suitable it is at this point that they will be allocated a counsellor within the Sexual Abuse Counselling and Prevention Program. Following this, a therapeutic-needs assessment will occur over 6 to 8 sessions.

Your child will be assessed on a number of factors that can increase/decrease the risk of your child in re-engaging in sexually abusive behaviours. Part of the assessment will also include hopefully meeting with both parents (where possible) to understand your child's early life and gain better insight into the family structure and dynamics.



Following the assessment, recommendations are made. Often young people will be invited to participate in the group therapy program, when one is available. The group therapy program consists of a series of modules that have specific aims and objectives.

These include:

- Taking Responsibility/Cycle of Offending
- Victim Awareness
- Fantasy Control
- Relationships, Masculinity and Sexuality
- Relapse Prevention
- Emotions and Communication.

Purpose of Counselling

Counselling supports young people to take responsibility for their actions, empathise with their victims and learn strategies to change and control their behaviour. It also helps a young person identify and understand their thoughts, feelings, actions, and problematic situations. This enables them to develop control over these factors that may previously have placed them at risk.

While you may feel that your child has learnt his/her lesson and that he/she will never repeat the abusive behaviour, it is often difficult for young people who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviours to change without professional guidance.

Indeed, a young person may be more likely to re-engage in sexually abusive behaviours if they have not received therapeutic support as they may not have the internal resources that can assist them in not using these harmful behaviours again.

Many adult offenders report that their offending began during adolescence. Research shows that early intervention is highly successful in stopping young people from sexually offending in adulthood.

Your feelings about the Abuse

If you have just recently learned that your child has engaged in sexually abusive behaviours, you may be experiencing a range of feelings and thoughts:

- Anger at your child and/or yourself.
- Fear of what will happen next.
- Guilty that you are somehow responsible for your child's sexually abusive behaviours.
- Shock in thinking that it is usually only adults who can sexually harm others.
- Confusion about how and why your child's sexually abusive behaviour has occurred.
- Frustration with your child as well as the police, legal and welfare systems.
- Denial that your child has done what has been alleged.



Your Child's Feelings

- **Shame** – Young people may feel shame about their behaviour because they know they did the wrong thing.
- **Embarrassed** – Young people might feel embarrassed by their behaviours and the idea of discussing them with others.
- **Fear** – Young people may fear what is going to happen next. They may fear punishment, rejection and being labelled by others.
- **Helplessness** – Young people may feel helpless to stop their behaviour.
- **Anger** – Young people may feel angry towards others for disclosing their behaviour. They may also feel angry at professionals and others for wanting to address their behaviour.
- **Sadness and Depression** – Negative feelings associated with their behaviours may leave young people feeling overwhelmed and struggling to cope. This may lead to sadness and depression.

Therapeutic Services is a voluntary program

Generally attending Therapeutic Services counselling is a voluntary process. The family and (where possible) the young person have to agree to participate on a voluntary basis.

There are times, however, that your child being mandated to attend. This may either be directed by the Department of Human Services as part of conditions of a statutory order, via Police direction where criminal charges have been laid and a judge has ordered treatment or via a Therapeutic Treatment Order which is another statutory order that mandates a young person attending counselling to address their use of sexually abusive behaviours.

Questions often asked by Parents/Caregivers

How else can a Therapeutic Services Counsellor support my child and my family?

- **Advocacy** – The Therapeutic Services Counsellor can offer support and guidance around how the system (school, etc) can better support your child while they are attending counselling.
The counsellor will also be happy to meet with other important people to ensure that continuity of care occurs.
- **Safety Planning** – At times it might be necessary to ensure your child is not in the contact of other children, therefore a safety plan will be necessary. This plan may generally involve parents and other adults as external support for the young person to minimise the risk of them re-offending.
- **Care Team Meetings** – Part of the Therapeutic Services counselling will involve participating in meetings where all professionals, parents and carers, when available, meet to discuss the ongoing progress of your child and any needs or issues that may arise.



What can I do until a counsellor calls me?

- **Supervision** – When allocated, a counsellor can assist in thinking about how to best supervise your child while they attend counselling. In the mean time it is important to be mindful of where your child is all of the time and whether they are with other children. If they are with other kids then it is important that they are being supervised in their play to ensure they continue to play appropriately and safely.
- **Boundaries and Consistency** – It is important after disclosures of abuse occur that the boundaries and rules that were in place before continue to exist after. This may actually be an opportunity to reflect on what rules do exist and whether some new ones need to be introduced in order to better protect your child, any possible siblings and other children your child may be in contact with. Whether this means that your child (for the time being) doesn't actually play with other kids without you being around might be a new rule that needs to be introduced.

What can I say to my child?

Recovery is a long process and it can start with the parents. It may be useful that you say to your child some of the following:

- “We would like you to attend counselling to better understand how the abuse occurred and what can be done to make sure it doesn't happen again”.
- “We want to support you to make sure you can be happy and healthy”.
- “Sometimes these events can bring up some bad feelings, and we want you to be able to talk about these to make sure you are happy again”.
- “We/I think it is really important that you talk to someone about what happened because these things can leave people feeling very confused”.

Can my child remain living at home?

It may be considered by legal and/or welfare professionals that it is unsafe for your child to remain at home for a period of time, especially if they have younger siblings. This is recommended as a way of ensuring safety for both known and potential victim/s to protect your child from possibly re-engaging in sexually abusive behaviours, and to maximise therapeutic outcomes for your child and victim/s.

Therapeutic Services does, where appropriate, assist in the reunification of families. This usually occurs at the end of your child's therapy, however the safety, feelings and wishes of the victim are always prioritised.

How can I best support my child?

Your role in the therapeutic process is very important. The level of support you provide is crucial to assist young people with sexually abusive behaviours in developing non-abusive behaviours and maintaining a non-abusive lifestyle. The counsellors will provide you with the support and strategies



necessary to enable you to best support your child through the counselling process and following the completion of counselling.

It is well documented that young people with sexually abusive behaviours who have involved and supportive counselling, they have a stronger support system and are likely to be at less risk of re-engaging in sexually abusive behaviours.

When Therapeutic Services may not be suitable

There are times when Therapeutic Services may not be suitable and they are as follows:

- Police investigation is ongoing. If the Police have been notified and they are currently investigating the allegations, then there may be a chance that charges will be pressed. Therefore, Therapeutic Services would generally wait until the outcome of this investigation.
- DHS Investigation. This takes into account the safe placement of your child and whether there are younger siblings in the house. DHS must investigate and consider whether the best interests of all children are being met and sometimes this means the young person who has sexually offended may be required to reside out of the family home. Doing this may have a positive effect in allowing the young person the 'space' to reflect on their behaviours without the pressure of home life and younger siblings. It can also be counterproductive (in cases of sibling sexual abuse) to allow a young person who has harmed to continue to reside with their victims if they have limited support or supervision.

Is there any support for parents and caregivers?

Therapeutic Services extends its counselling services to the young person's parents, caregivers or significant others who are affected by the abuse.

Through individual and/or family counselling and parent/caregiver groups, counsellors will offer you the time and space to work through your feelings, thoughts and responses to your child's sexually abusive behaviours.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your child's counsellor.

Other Services at CPS

The Children's Protection Society has a range of programs for children and families. For further information about these services contact CPS:

Fathers Support Program

Tel: 03 9450 0900

Child FIRST

Tel: 03 9450 0955

Family and Community Services

Tel: 03 9450 0900