


DISCLOSURES AND CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN ABOUT SEX ADDICTION

*Dr. Piper Grant, PsyD, MPH, CSAT
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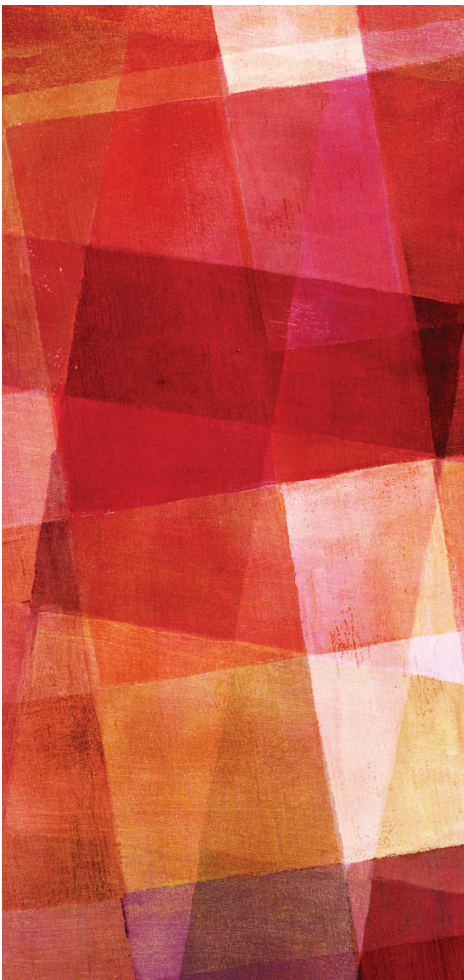
WHAT THIS IS AND IS NOT

- Talking about the impact of sex addiction on the family system with particular attention to the experience of children (adult and minor) of sex addicts.
- Outlined guide on how to support and facilitate a disclosure or conversations to children of sex addicts about sexual addiction and its impact.
- NOT loaded with quantitative data but rather based on qualitative data and case studies.
- NOT about how to do family therapy as a whole. Although addressed, the focus is on the disclosure /conversation.

OUTLINE

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- Terms
- Impact of SA on the Family
- Impact of SA on Children and Characteristics of the Children
- Part 1: Assessment of Motivations to do a Disclosure
- Part 2: Preparing for the Disclosure
- Part 3: Setting up the Disclosure



“

Addiction is a family disease. One person may use but the whole family suffers, [and often children are the silent victims].”

-HealthyPlace.com

TERMS USED

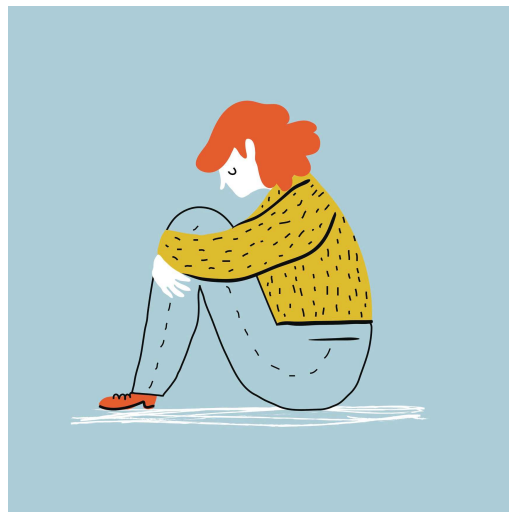
- ‘Sex addiction’ is inclusive of different types of sexual addiction
- ‘Family’ refers the identified primary support group of the child
- ‘Child’ is adult and/or minor children
- ‘Parents’ is the identified primary caregivers



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IMPACTS OF SEX ADDICTION ON THE FAMILY SYSTEM

- A process addiction and can have a “silent” impact on families
- Generational trauma and addiction
- Impacts:
 - Loss of time
 - Attachment wounding
 - Secret holding
 - Family conflict
 - Disrupted quality family time
 - Media coverage
- Influencers:
 - Type of addiction
 - Community implications
 - The discovery
 - Path of recovery



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AREAS OF IMPACT ON THE CHILD OF A SEX ADDICT

- Denial
- Grief
- Anger
- Trust
- Secrets
- Shame
- Boundaries
- Parentification and Enmeshment
- Loyalty
- Self-Esteem and Confidence
- Intimacy and Vulnerability
- Fear of Abandonment
- Sexuality and Sexual Relationships
- Trauma Bonding and Reenactment
- Divorce and Separation of Parents

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PART 1

*Why do a disclosure and what
are the motivations?*



THE WELLBEING OF THE CHILD SHOULD ALWAYS BE HELD AS THE UTMOST PRIORITY.

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CONSIDERATIONS

- Structure of the family
- Who is in the home
- Ages
- Developmental capacities
- Mental health issues
- Support systems in place
- What will be occurring in the future



WHY DO A DISCLOSURE?

- After discovery there can be many overt or covert changes within the household that go unexplained
- Assist in reducing anxieties, made up stories, offer clarity, and establish security
- Assess the parental motivations and reasons for a disclosure
- Prompt questions for reflection:
 - “Why do you want to disclose about the addiction to your child?”
 - “What are the goals for your disclosure?”
 - “What does your child know already?”
 - “How does your child know this information?”
 - “What changes have occurred in the child’s life since the discovery/disclosure of the sex addiction, that need to be explained?”

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WHEN TO DO A DISCLOSURE?

- Assess readiness of the parent dyad
 - is the addict well engaged and committed to their recovery?
 - is the partner in therapy with their own support systems?
 - are the parents willing and able to be in solidarity on their goals and plan for a disclosure?
- Is there the gift of time?
 - is parent going away to treatment
 - media or community involvement
 - legal implications
- Prompt questions for reflection
 - “What changes have occurred in the child’s life since the discovery/disclosure of the sex addiction, that need to be explained?”
 - “What changes will be happening after the disclosure to the child?”

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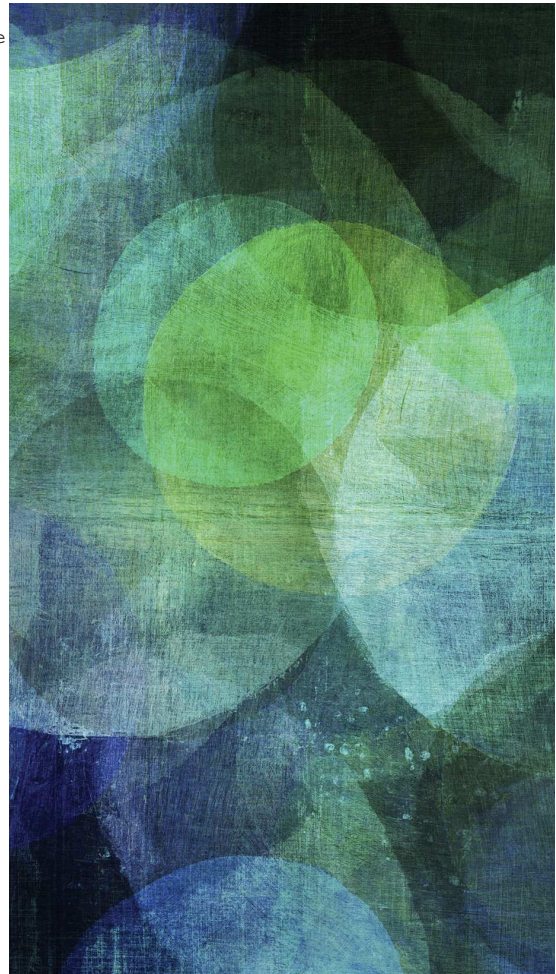
HAVING BOTH PARENTS INVOLVED (if possible)

- Parents in a partnership of wanting the best for their child (not having to be together in relationship)
- A sense of security and safety to a child when hearing information that may be destabilizing
- Can send a message of solidarity and security for the child
- Both the addict and the partner's disclosure is important!
- Each parent do their own preparations and come together throughout the process as a means to be in agreement about how they would like to organize and execute the disclosure

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PART 2

*Letter writing and disclosure
preparation*



WHY PREPARE?

- Prepare in order to repair!
- Rooted in the motivations and reasons for the disclosure
- Needs to best fit the parents, family and current situation
- Intended to
 - ease confusions
 - avoid leaving out information
 - reduce chances of over sharing
 - assists in upholding systemic boundaries
 - put parents on the same page

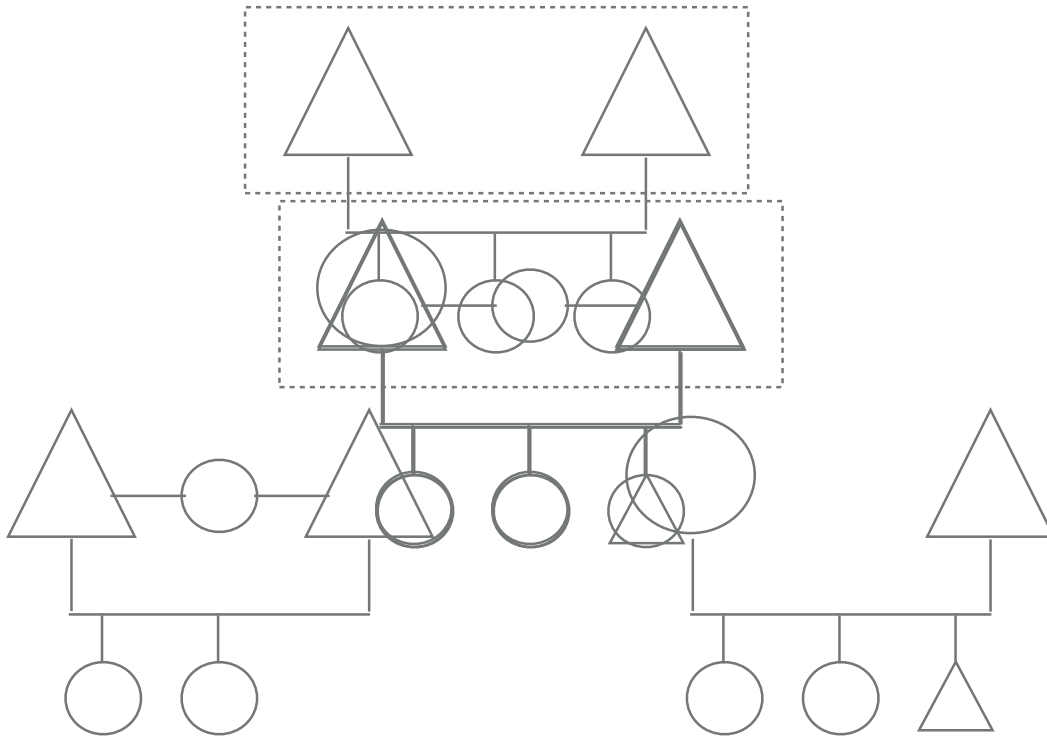
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WHAT TO DISCLOSE AND HOW

- Outline vs. Letter
- Conversation vs. Formal Disclosure
- Keeping it succinct, clear, and to the point (as to maintain attention)
- Prompt question for reflection:
 - “What would you like your child to know about the sexual addiction?”
 - “What information do you not want disclosed to your child”
 - “What information is important that you convey to your child during disclosure?”
 - “What words and descriptors of events are you not comfortable using in the disclosure?”
 - “What words and descriptors of events are you most comfortable using in the disclosure?”
 - “What are you okay with your child sharing with others, and with who?”
 - “What setting would you like the disclosure to place in?”

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BOUNDARIES

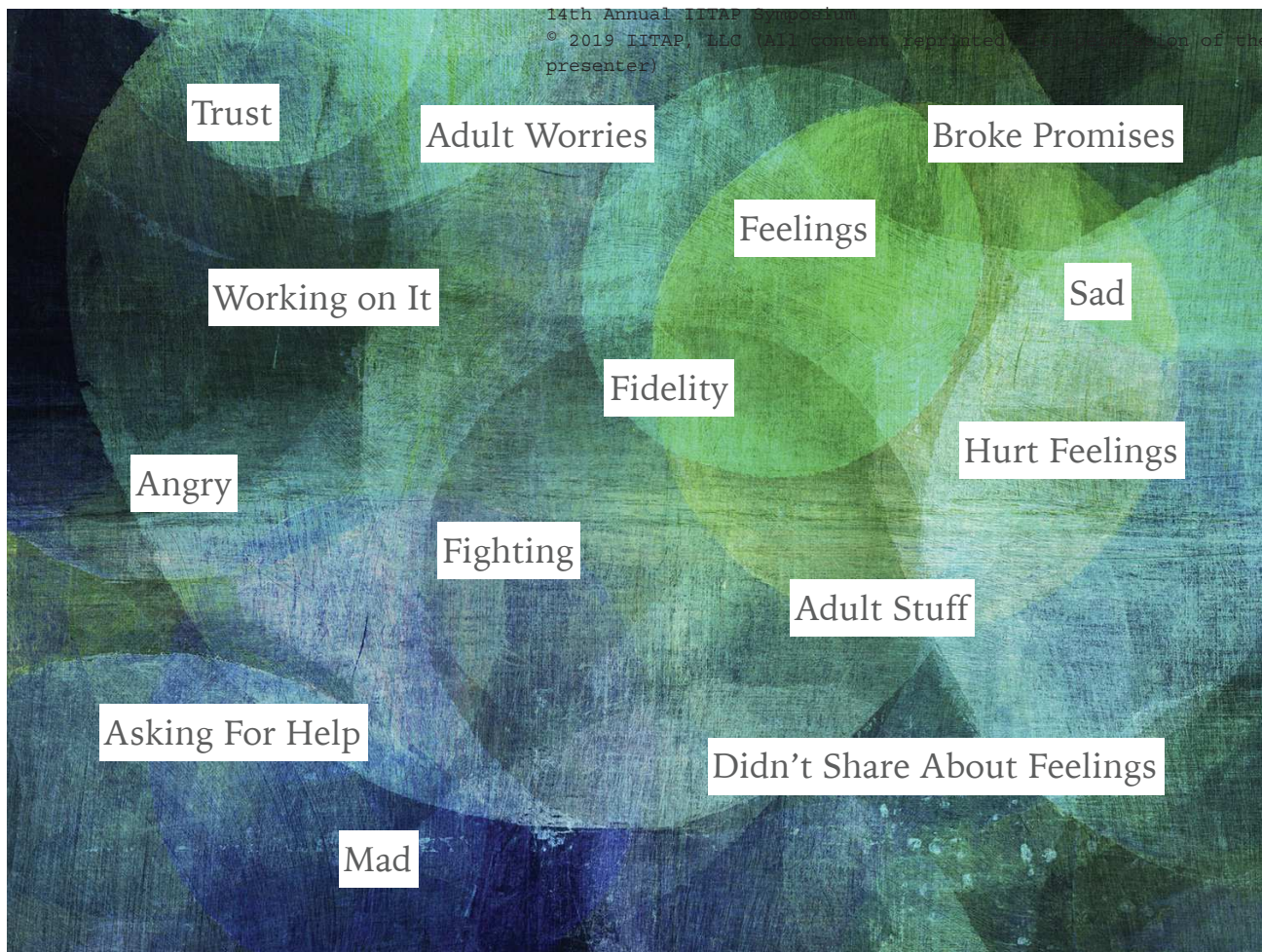


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LANGUAGE

- Consider the age and developmental capacity
- Descriptors and phrases to describe the addiction, the impact, how each parent felt, and what will be happening as a result
 - “Daddy had made a promise to Mommy that he broke, and as a result Daddy is doing a lot of work on how to be a better husband to Mommy, and trying to help Mommy know that she can trust him again.” (younger child)
 - “I made a commitment to your Dad of fidelity and truth. I broke that commitment, by having an affair and as a result we have been working through the impact of that.” (adult/older teenager)
- Helps to avoid dodging or fearing questions

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USING “SEX ADDICTION”

- Rarely used
- If the term is used there is clear conversations about what sex addiction means to each parent, the family, support available, and the work being done around it
- Debates about “blanketing the truth”
- Consider information already known and to be revealed
- Can validate information without using the term
 - I had a problem watching too much online pornography and it felt out of control (older children)
 - I was not faithful and it became very hurtful to your dad and me



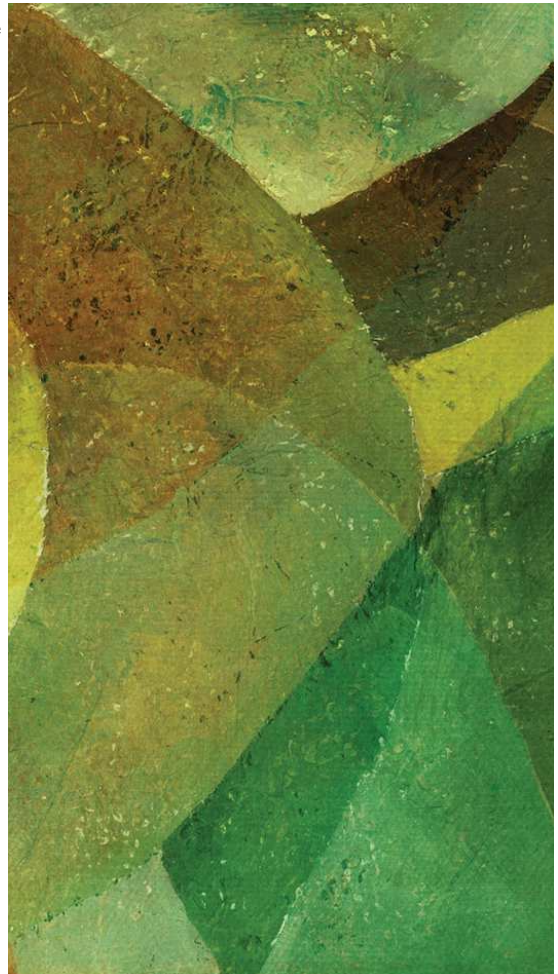
SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Any media or community coverage: if it is known what the children will be publicly exposed to, seek to help them make sense of it by offering context and explanations
- Different ages and different disclosures: if there are multiple children who are of different ages and/or developmental abilities, it may be appropriate to do different disclosures
 - With different disclosures it will be important to let each child know if their other siblings know, and invite them to speak with each other about it. During a disclosure to an older sibling it may be shared that it felt necessary to speak to them privately as a means to offer a more mature explanation, although their younger siblings also know in a way that was appropriate for them.

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PART 3

Setting up the disclosure



PRE-PREP AND POST CARE

- Calls for attention to the wellbeing of every person that will be participating
- It is important to ensure that there are plans in place that will take care of the children and parents after the disclosure
- Prompt question for reflection:
 - “What are you most concerned about with the disclosure to your child?”
 - “What are you looking forward to about the disclosure to your child?”
 - “Are there any safety and wellbeing concerns for your child after disclosure?”
 - “What is the after-care and follow-up plan for your child?”
 - “Are there any safety and wellbeing concerns for you after disclosure?”
 - “What is the after-care and follow-up and plan for you?”
 - “If your co-parent is available, do you feel in agreement about the information to be disclosed and not disclosed, language used, and intentions for the disclosure?”

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PROCESS OF DISCLOSURE OR CONVERSATION

- Location: in therapy office, at home, on a trip etc.
- Allow ample time for processing
- Have water available
- Take breaks as needed
- Support parents to be attuned to child’s needs
- Addict goes first, either reading letter or opening the conversation
- If child becomes dysregulated or overwhelmed Partner may delay their disclosure, with attention paid to there being a future conversation
 - “I imagine you have seen some things be different with me. I too wanted to share with you about these things, and for you to know we can talk about them. If you’d like we can take some time and in a few days I can share that with you if you are open to it.”

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REMINDERS FOR PARENTS

- Seek **therapeutic support** during this process
- If you get off track or lose your train of thought, bring yourself **back to the goals and reasons** for the disclosure
- If using an outline during the disclosure, **have a printed copy** with you to reference if needed
- If at any point you need a break, **take a break**
- Allow yourself to **be open to questions and seek to show-up** for your child with appropriate boundaried truth
- **This is not a one-time conversation**, but rather the beginning of a conversation that will evolve over time

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A disclosure done with preparation and mindfulness about the child's needs, is one that is clear about the intentions of the disclosure, attuned to the experience of the child during the process, and holds the space for the child to process as needed.



WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT ALL OF THIS?

QUESTIONS?

COMMENTS?



THANK YOU!!!

Dr. Piper Grant, PsyD, MPH, CSAT

www.NumiWellness.com

DrPiper@numiwellness.com



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