



MINI WORKBOOK

Disclosure and Conversations with Children About Sex Addiction

BY DR. PIPER GRANT
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST , CSAT



About Dr. Piper Grant

Dr. Piper Grant is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, holds a Masters in Public Health, is a sex therapist, and Certified Sex Addiction Therapist. In addition to her work with couples and individuals on issues related to sex and relationships, she is a trained family therapist with extensive training in child development, psychoanalytical treatment of children and families, and a trained children's play therapist. As Dr. Piper continued her work in the field of sex addiction she began working with couples in recovery on how to coparent, facilitate family disclosures, and navigate family healing.

This led to direct work with children (minors and adults) impacted by sex addiction and working with them through their healing and understanding of how their parent(s) addiction had impacted them. She has developed exercises on how to work with a family impacted by sex addiction to continue the dynamic work of supporting families and their children in healing the ruptures and impacts of sex addiction.

Dr. Piper Grant

www.NumiWellness.com

ig @Dr.PiperGrant

Introduction

Following the discovery of sexual addiction, there are often many changes that happen within a family system. While some of these changes seem more benign to adults, such as a parent not being home for one night a week because they are attending a meeting, these changes can have significant impacts on a child. Furthermore, there may be bigger shifts in behaviors, emotions, and schedules of the parents that can be complicated for a child.

These shifts and changes without conversations to explain the reasons 'why' may be unsettling and confusing for children. Often a lot of children start putting together their own story of what happened between their parents based on things they have overheard, observed, and changes that have occurred. Through an appropriate and guided disclosure to children, clarity can be gained and family healing can take place.

When beginning to think about how to discuss or disclose about a sexual addiction, it is imperative that great consideration is taken for the wellbeing of the child. The following mini workbook will begin to help guide you through how best to have these conversations while always holding your child's wellbeing in the forefront. It should be noted that this mini workbook does not include all the the comprehensive questions, and thus it is strongly suggested you work with a qualified professional to guide you through this process. For the full course and workbook you can visit, www.NumiWellness.com under "Courses".

**the wellbeing of the child
should always be held as
the utmost priority**



Disclosure and Conversations about Sex Addiction to Children

One of the hardest things for parents to decide is what and how to tell their children, whether adults or minors, about sexual addiction. Prior to a disclosure being made, multiple factors need to be considered including understanding why the disclosure is taking place, best prepare for the discussion, put in place ancillary support for the child, and ensuring that the disclosure is approached with the child's best interest in mind. Disclosure to children about a sexual addiction can be confronting, confusing, and hard to navigate for parents. No matter the age of the child a disclosure about their parent's sex addiction can be upsetting and yet also it can bring immense clarity and understanding for a child.

The age and developmental stage of the child receiving the disclosure needs to be considered throughout the entire process of preparing for and doing a disclosure. If there are multiple children in the family, the differences in their ability to understand the issue due to their varying developmental stages needs to be addressed, and thus with each following point you may need to work on them separately for each child.

Potential Benefits of a Disclosure to Children of Sex Addiction

- more openness
- clarity
- reduced parentification
- opportunity for understanding
- breaking of cycles
- reduced fears, shame, secrets, and avoidance
- modeling of emotional language
- unity in parenting goals
- modeling of responsibility
- transparency about changes



It is not typically recommended that disclosure to children occur until there is a solid recovery plan in place for both the addict and partner and that the working of the recovery plan is occurring. Things to take into consideration when assessing the appropriateness of the time

- 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?

Step 1:

Why do a disclosure and what are the motivations?

When considering a disclosure to children about a sex addiction, it is imperative to assess the motivations and reasons for a disclosure. Assessment and reflection about if the motivation is directed from a place of best interest for the child or from a place that benefits the parents rather than the child, offers an opportunity to understand why and how to do a disclosure to your child.

Due to the difference in children's ages, developmental capacities, and stages of life, it is encouraged that this be done separately for each individual child. Gaining clarity on why a disclosure is taking place, will help to keep you in alignment with the disclosure intentions and meet the continual overall goal of doing what it best for your child and your family.

Step 2:

Letter writing and disclosure preparation

Rooted in your understanding about the motivations and reasons of disclosing to your child about a sex addiction, the preparation for a disclosure needs to best fit you, your family, and current situation. It is suggested that you prepare a letter or outline prior to the disclosure with your child, as a means to ease any confusion, avoid leaving out information, or adding too much information during the disclosure time.

It is important that both parents (if possible) have an opportunity to share with their child about their experiences and offer a disclosure. While there may only be one addict in the family system, it is likely that your child has witnessed some shifts in the partner, and that the partner is experiencing their own emotional response and healing work.

It is suggested that both parents prepare a letter or outline with the intention of reading it to their child during the set disclosure time. It is important that the partner's experience be included because initially children may be more impacted by the partner's change in behavior rather than the addict's. A disclosure helps them make sense of things like 'why mom was always crying' or 'why daddy stopped picking us up at school.'

A note about using the term 'sex addiction':

In my clinical practice, I do not typically recommend the use of the term 'sex addiction' unless it is an adult child and feels necessary. For children under the age of 12 years old, there is often no concern or debate about whether or not to use the term. Rather often parents find it more comfortable to not use the term 'sex' and having to further explain the meaning of sex, what it is, and how it manifests as an addiction.

For children who are teenagers, and have an awareness, education, and knowledge about sex, there can be different factors to consider. Often parents debate about not further "blanketing the truth" and being more honest with their children about the nature of the addiction.

During these times, while there is an understanding about wanting to be honest with their children about the nature of the addiction it additionally needs to be considered that sex addiction is an intimacy disorder, and the mere conversations about a parent's sexual acting out can be a violation of needed family boundaries if not dealt with carefully (for instance, children do not need to know about excessive masturbation, amount of money spent on sex etc.).

Depending on the family system, current boundaries in place, and information already known by the children, parents might find themselves not using the term 'sex addiction' but validating the child's experience by saying something like "mom had a problem with watching too much online pornography and it felt out of control" or "I was not faithful and it became very hurtful to me and your mom."

If the term 'sex addiction' is used, both with a minor or an adult child, it is strongly recommended there be a clear discussion about what is sexual addiction, how it manifests in your family, and specific recovery work that is taking place. Hearing the word 'addiction' can be scary and unknown for some children.

Due to the fact that there are not always clear messages and media coverage about sex addiction, it is important that if the term is used there is clear conversations about what sex addiction means to each parent, the family, and what support and work is being done around it.

Writing the Letter or Outline

Determining whether to write and read out loud a letter, or have an outline for a more organic conversation is often based on age and developmental capacity of the child. Writing out a letter is suggested for children aged 12 years old and older, as they typically have a greater attention span for listening to you read a letter, can understand the need for you to speak without interruptions, and have a higher ability to process larger chunks of information.

For discussion with children under the age of 12 years old, there may be more of a discussion intertwined with play or an activity-taking place. It is easier for your younger children to digest smaller chunks of information, and thus engaging in the disclosure more as a discussion may better serve them in having the disclosure information understood.

By writing an outline for yourself, it will help to organize your thoughts, allow you to practice the language you have determined to use, and keep you on a track for the goals of the disclosure. Whether writing a letter or an outline, it is important to be clear, concise, and succinct.

A disclosure is a significant amount of information for a child to take in and process (even for adult children), and thus keeping it short and to the point can be beneficial in maintaining the concentration of your child and not losing the intention of the disclosure.

To begin writing the letter it is suggested that you start with an explanation of why you are sharing this information with your child. Such as “we have always talked about how it is important to be honest in our family, and so I want to be honest with you about some things that have been happening between me and your mom.”

If both parents are involved in the disclosure, the letters will sound different and address different points because each have had different experiences. To continue, you may want to consider below as a rough outline:



For the Partner:

- Describe the impact of the addict's behavior on you (referring back to anything you believe the child has observed or any changes that have occurred in their life, for instance "I have been very sad and sometimes very angry lately. I know that you have seen me cry and heard me yelling.").
- Describe how you feel about the addict (eg. I am very hurt and taking some time to think about everything, and also still love your Mother).
- Describe why you are sharing these specific things with your child (refer back to your goals for the disclosure).
- Describe any impacts that you have seen on your child (refer back to how they know the information they know, and how have they been impacted).
- Explain any initial or long-term changes that will be happening as a result, with specific attention to any healing work that you are doing and why you are doing that specific healing work.

To end your letter it is suggested you

- Offer support and validation of understanding that it may have been a lot of information
- Offer that they are able to ask any and all questions that they would like
- Note that you may not have the answer for all of their questions but you will try
- State that you are willing and able to give them all of the time they need to think and talk about what you shared.
- Identify and explain any support or plans that you have in place for your child, noting something like "I imagined there might be a lot of feelings about the things I shared with you, and so I have already made some time for us to come back here and meet with X so we can talk after you have had some time."
- Let them know that this is not a one-time discussion but rather you would like them to know that you are happy to discuss it at any time with them.

Other considerations:

- Any media or community coverage - if it is known or presumed that there will be any coverage about your family and/or any sexual addiction related behaviors, it may be important to specifically address this during the disclosure. 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. If you are having 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 you may want to share with them that you felt it 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.

Once the letter or outline is complete, review it with your therapist and co-parent. Some parents find it helpful to practice reading their letter out loud, or doing mock conversations based on their outline, as a means to get comfortable with the language being used and the information they are disclosing.

This can help you feel more comfortable and grounded during the disclosure, only further benefiting your child.

PART 3:

Setting up the disclosure

Setting up the disclosure calls for attention to the wellbeing of every person that will be participating. By this stage of preparation, it is most likely known where you will be having the disclosure and who will be there.

In moving forward with the disclosure it is important to ensure that there are plans in place that will take care of not only the children after disclosure, but you and the co-parent.

It is important to assess any history or present concerns for your child's welfare. These things might include but are not limited to severe anxiety or depression, rage, self-harming behaviors, suicide, homicide, or eating disorders.

If there are any of these concerns present, it is imperative to speak to your therapist and child's therapist about this, and consider if the disclosure will be serving the best interest of your child. If the disclosure is necessary and yet these concerns are present, it is strongly suggested that you put in place plans and measures to monitor your child's wellbeing and actions in addition to a plan being made if the concerns become critical post-disclosure.

Having after-care and follow-up planned for a child is very important. The after-care is for the first 48-hours and follow-up is for the weeks after the disclosure. After-care may include the child having an individual therapy session if already in their own individual therapy, doing something that is enjoyable and relaxing to them, or giving them a day off from extra-curricular obligations.
