

## Treatment Guidelines for Sibling of Sexual Abuse Victims

**Sibling therapist:** Incestuous sex offenders typically manipulate the entire family. The offender may be a loved and valuable person to the sibling, while the victim may have a "bad reputation" within the family. A common scenario is that an offender abuses an older step-child, but has not yet abused a young birth child. It is very difficult for a pre-adolescent child in this situation to understand that a parent must leave the family home forever due to a "bad touch." Parents often object to even discussing the abuse with children who have not been abused, fearing this will cause the child to lose respect or affection for the offender, or prematurely learn about sexual matters. Issues commonly addressed in sibling treatment include-

- 1 Grief and loss issues-The loss of the offender, family changes such as foster care, loss of the sibling, these issues should not over ride the sexual abuse of the victim
- 2 Attribution of responsibility-Siblings are often quite concrete in blaming the victim's disclosure rather than the abuse for the family's difficulties.
- 3 Self protection-Siblings may need to learn about healthy boundaries and family rules.
- 4 Family role realignment-In some families, the offender is more "valuable" than the victim. Children may have been harshly disciplined by the offender, leaving the non-offending parent to develop new methods for discipline. The NOP who may have been subjugated by the offender must be accepted as the leader of the family. The sibling's loyalties are divided between family members.
- 5 Trauma issues-Siblings have often been exposed to many of the same traumagenic factors as the victims, minus the sexual abuse.
- 6 Undisclosed victimization-Having seen that the victim was interrogated, received a medical exam, placed in foster care, blamed by family members and other negative outcomes, siblings who have also been abused may decide to stay mute. Treatment for siblings may create a place for a child to talk about their own victimization.