

**GROUP THERAPY FOR  
ADULT INCEST OFFENDERS  
AND  
ADOLESCENT CHILD MOLESTERS**

**Brian R. Abbott**

*Focal Group Psychotherapy*

# **Group Therapy for Adult Incest Offenders and Adolescent Child Molesters**

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aspects of their behavior. Rather than being confrontative, interpret the offender's denial. Such an interpretation should come from a supportive frame of reference. Point out to the offender that his denial protects him from having to experience the painful feelings that would emerge if he were to acknowledge the abusive or coercive aspects of his offending behavior.

*Offender:* I guess I always thought what I did with Timmy was okay, because—you know—he always liked me so much. And he never yelled or anything; he never even told me to stop. But maybe he was afraid that his mother would send me away if she found out what was going on—I guess she would've. Or maybe he was afraid that he'd never get to ride the horses again, since I was his teacher and all. I never thought about that at the time.

*Therapist:* Your comments show the beginnings of empathy, Mike. This marks an important step in your recovery—and in making sure that you never commit a sex offense again.

*Offender:* Donna is sixteen going on forty. You'd have to see her before you could really understand. No red-blooded man could resist that kid—especially if she came on to him like she came on to me.

*Therapist:* Paul, I'd like the group to examine what you're saying and the words you're using. You say that your stepdaughter is sixteen going on forty. The reality is that she's sixteen. Try to think back to when you were sixteen, Paul, and what that felt like. And think about your relationship to your own stepfather. Were you intimidated by him at all? Were you scared of him? Did you look up to him? If he had asked you to do something you really didn't think was right, how likely would you be to go along with him anyway? You say that "No red-blooded man could resist that kid"—but the fact is that she *is* a kid, Paul. Maybe thinking about Donna as an adult makes it seem less horrible that you had sexual intercourse with her. Would anyone in the group like to comment?

## Homework

"Write a detailed description of your sexual development. Write about

- The various ways in which you learned about sex
- The age at which you began having sexual feelings and thoughts, began masturbating, and had your first sexual experience
- Any negative sexual experiences
- Your general feelings and attitudes regarding sex"

## *Week 7*

### Review of Homework

#### **L. Skill: Discussing the Abuse in the Family**

##### *Intervention 4: Exercise—Discussing the Abuse*

Give each person a copy of the Discussing the Abuse in the Family outline consisting of the following three questions (Handout 6):

1. How often should the sexual abuse be discussed in the family, and how many of the details should be included?
2. What are some of the feelings or concerns which may stop me (or

us) from discussing the sexual abuse in the family?

3. What are some of the limits that should be set on such things as being around situations or people where another offense could happen; and who should be told about what happened?

Then continue:

"Talking about the sexual abuse within the family is a difficult issue. Due to the shame and embarrassment associated with the abuse, most families would like to pretend that it doesn't exist. Some think that it's just more traumatizing to discuss the sexual abuse."

For the adult incest offender group, instruct the group to break down into subgroups according to the directions used in the chain of events small group exercise. The method of dividing the adolescents and parents into subgroups is the same as that for the adults, except that the subgroups will not mix parents and adolescents together. Instead, each subgroup should be comprised of adults or adolescents and contain no more than four members. This type of division provides an interesting array of responses to the questions. The differences in responses will emerge when the large group processes the exercise.

After breaking into small groups, say:

"Someone in the small group should read each question aloud. After the question is read, each person should state his response to it. As you answer, write down your responses in the space provided. When the small groups have completed this exercise, we'll come together and discuss it further. Okay, go ahead and get started."

When the groups have completed the assignment or when the time is up, ask the members to reconvene as a large group. Ask them to share the content of their responses to the questions. Attempt to elicit from group members the major points which you're presenting through this exercise. Expand upon the responses given by group members when necessary, using the following intervention and closing statements:

*Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

With the adolescent sexual offender group, you can facilitate the following intervention:

*Intervention 4: Exercise—Reality Testing*

"Let's try this out in the group. How many of you parents would yell at your child or reject him if he talked to you about the sexual abuse? How many of you teens wouldn't be able to handle a discussion of the sexual abuse with your parents?"



Let the parents and adolescents respond to these questions. Usually the responses received are contrary to what the group members presented in the subgroup discussion. In this case, underscore the importance of false ideas leading one to make poor choices, and how it's important to check out what you are thinking about another person in order to determine whether your perception is accurate.

In some instances, an adolescent or parent will confirm the fear of a negative outcome in discussing the sexual abuse. In this situation, explore the reasons for this with the member who expresses it. Usually such statements are made out of anger or are an attempt to avoid dealing with the sexual abuse in a direct manner. You can respond to these statements by highlighting the underlying motive in making such a statement.

### **M. Concept: Who Else Should Be Told?**

*Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

### **Review of Treatment Goals**

When this group is run as part of a comprehensive treatment package, it is extended one week. Week 8 is then used to carefully review with participants the treatment process presented in the Introduction. During this session, a treatment agreement for the rest of the package is discussed and

signed by each participant.

## Criteria for Measuring Change

As stated earlier in this chapter, the psycho-educational group is intended to provide a preparatory group experience that introduces the sexual offender and the parents of the adolescent sexual offender to the methods of treatment that the offender will go through. The group is not structured to bring about significant behavior change (however, there have been experiences where the process of psycho-education has helped in working through the denial of the sexual abuse that some offenders present during the early stages of treatment). Instead, the group is designed to plant seeds, in a nonthreatening manner, that will grow later in the treatment process.

The leaders determine whether a group member has adequately learned the material presented through the level of participation of the offender in the group. It's assumed that the offender who fully completes the assignments, attends the group regularly, takes notes on the material presented, and participates in the large and small group exercises is understanding the concepts that need to be learned in order to maximize the benefits of treatment. In some instance where the offender has made poor progress, he will be expected to complete the psycho-educational group over

again.

## **Problems Specific to the Group**

In conducting the psycho-educational group, there are several types of problem members who consistently emerge. There are those offenders who deny that the material is relevant to them, those who are withdrawn or uncooperative, and those who are disruptive or argumentative.

### **The Group Member in Denial ("I don't belong in this group")**

These types of offenders or parents of adolescent sexual offenders may seem to be cooperative when judged by their participation in the group process. However, this person's responses to the issues discussed in the group consistently reflect the theme, "This does not apply to me." Psychologically, these individuals are avoiding and denying their painful feelings—shame, guilt, anger, embarrassment—associated with the sexually offending behavior. The issues discussed in the group begin to activate these feelings, and the individual goes on the defensive to suppress them.

In managing this form of resistance, it's most effective for the therapist to take a supportive role. The group leaders should respond by acknowledging the group member's feelings and thoughts. Then one of the leaders should interpret the underlying motive for the denial presented by

the member. For example: "I'm hearing that you think the sexual abuse did not affect your victim. It seems to me that it would be too painful for you to admit the harm you caused your victim."

After making several of these types of supportive confrontations, and through the material presented in the group, this type of offender or parent of an adolescent sexual offender usually shows a positive change in the pattern of avoidance and denial.

### **The Argumentative Group Member**

The argumentative member wants to contest the material presented by the group leaders. This person becomes problematic when this is the person's consistent style in group. He wants to argue about specific details with which he disagrees; the only basis for his arguments is his idiosyncratic way of thinking about and perceiving his environment and interpersonal relationships. In extreme cases, this type of consistent response pattern may be symptomatic of an underlying narcissistic or antisocial personality disorder. In other cases, the argumentative style of a member may reflect that person's primary way of avoiding the painful feelings that are activated by the group discussion (a neurotic defense pattern). The underlying dynamic for the member's argumentative behavior will determine the type of intervention that is made by the group leaders.

The member whose argumentativeness is a characterological trait requires firm limits and confrontation for his inappropriate behavior. The group leaders have to quickly intervene and let this member know that his argumentativeness is not appropriate in the discussion. For example:

Joe, I find that you're splitting hairs over this subject and it's causing us to get off track. I want to stop the digression at this point and move on.

In some cases, confrontation and limit setting are futile, as the group member cannot modify his behavior to conform to the norms of the group. The group member may have to be prematurely discharged, in such circumstances, from the psycho-educational group. When this occurs, it may be appropriate to send the offender or the parents of the adolescent offender into an ongoing therapy group. A therapeutic group usually has better resources for managing this type of personality.

The group member who shows the neurotic form of argumentativeness is best handled by using the supportive approach described in the previous section. The group leader should interpret for the entire group the underlying dynamic that is contributing to the individual's argumentative response.

### **The Withdrawn Group Member**

The withdrawn group member presents himself as being a

nonparticipating member. This individual remains aloof from all or part of the group process. Several patterns of nonparticipation are seen:

- The member who remains completely aloof from any participation in group
- The person who remains quiet in the large group but is active in subgroup exercises
- The member who will not participate unless called upon
- The individual who does not complete homework assignments

The type of withdrawal can indicate what is motivating the person's nonparticipation.

A general consideration in addressing the four types of withdrawal is to determine if the member has some type of cognitive limitation or severe depressive disorder which precludes his ability to participate actively in the group. In the latter instance, the member will need to be precluded from the group until his mental status improves to the extent that he can participate in the group. When an offender has a cognitive limitation that affects his participation, it may be helpful to assign him a "buddy" in the group to help him complete the homework and discuss the material covered outside of the context of the group.

The initial intervention with the withdrawn member is for the group leader to specifically identify the type of withdrawal and to verbalize that problem behavior to the member. This is done in a supportive manner that places responsibility on the member to change this problem behavior. For example:

Bill, I've noticed that you've really kept to yourself in the group and haven't said much during any of our discussions or exercises. I'm concerned that you're not getting much out of the group and I'm wondering what you have to do in order to begin participating more actively.

Through this process, the leader and member can establish some form of agreement regarding the person's more active participation. In other cases, it may come to light that the offender's lack of participation may reflect his anxiety about being in a group and/or be symptomatic of his poor self-esteem.

Shyness and low self-esteem are probably the most common reasons for nonparticipation in the group. It's helpful in this situation for the group leader to call upon such members directly to elicit a response. When the group member responds, he should be given verbal or nonverbal recognition for his contribution. Such positive reinforcement of the member's answers will increase the likelihood of his future participation.

The withdrawn member's lack of participation may reflect a passive-

aggressive way of dealing with authority figures. The most effective way to deal with this member is to encourage his participation but not become involved in a power struggle. After encouraging him a few times, the leader then responds in a manner such as this:

I can tell, John, that you don't want to participate in this group and I know I can't force you to. I do want to let you know that if you decide to continue not participating, I may have to terminate you from the group or have you repeat it. The choice is up to you.

It's crucial to enforce the consequence if this member decides to continue with his non-participatory behavior.

## Relapse

Due to the preparatory nature of this group, relapse prevention is not an applicable concept. Relapse prevention as it relates to the sexually offending behavior is a standard and important aspect in treating the sexual offender. In the context of the psycho-educational group, however, relapse prevention is a concept that is introduced to the offender and more fully worked on later in sex offender therapy groups.

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## Notes

1 When conducting the adolescent offender psychoeducational group, instruct parents to state their first names, indicate which offender they are affiliated with, and give a brief statement of why they're attending the group.

2 The information presented here can be adapted to more accurately reflect the victim characteristics that may be present in other treatment settings.

- 3 The small groups should have no more than four persons. The size of the overall group will determine the range of numbers you will use to assign numbers to group members.
- 4 The parents of the adolescent offenders are asked to imagine what actions their sons could take in order to prevent a reoffense from occurring.
- 5 Usually the long passage plus one or two of the shorter passages can be completed in the time allowed. When reading the shorter passages, instruct one group member to read the entire excerpt to the small group.

## Handout 1

### *A Personal Account of a Father*

From: Giarretto, Hank. *Integrated Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse*. Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior Books, 1982. (reprinted with permission of the author)

In the children's home where I grew up, I learned to hate: social workers, school, almost everything and everyone. Next I learned to destroy what I hated. I played some very sad and heavy games. It became easier to hate than to love. I stuffed inside myself any feelings of being hurt and didn't let myself hurt. I never let a tear come out of either eye, because guys I lived with at the home wouldn't have tolerated that. I learned not to discuss or share any emotion about being physically hurt or sad.

I didn't ever think I had a meaning or purpose or sense of flow about my life. I just pointed myself in a certain direction and tried to conquer and destroy. I had no sense of belonging to a family or to society. Once a priest came to the home and cornered me to get inside my thoughts. I wasn't a Catholic and didn't want him to know my thoughts. My faulty reasoning was that it would keep him from coming back. I was seventeen years old then but operating with a ten-year-old's reasoning. I wasn't close to males at any time in my life on any kind of feeling level. I didn't know how to deal with the fact

that the males I know kept all their feelings repressed and pushed down. They couldn't do anything for me that I needed, so I just let them do their own thing.

I was ready to give but not receive, even when I was very young. I could give and give and give...but I didn't know how to let anyone else give. As a result, lots of people rejected me because I didn't accept anything from them. They needed to give, too, but I didn't let them. I learned not to attach myself to anything or anyone.

I liked being rejected because then I knew how to react. I knew my ground and what to do next each time that happened. I thought I knew what other people thought and that I could guess when they didn't want me around anymore. Then I'd say, "Okay, I don't have to be around anymore." And I'd hurry and detach myself, even if it was someone I really was drawn to. I learned that very young and kept that pattern as an adult. I learned to fantasize about relationships, about being close to people. Of course, it was always on my terms. At night lying down, I'd fantasize in a dream state about having relationships where people accepted me. The only place I could have relationships was in my dreams—not in real life.

As an adolescent, I had several girlfriends. I'd make each one reject me and make them go on to someone else. I kept repeating that pattern. I kept all

of them from being able to harm me or get into my "garbage can." By garbage can I mean all my repressed or angry feelings that I kept stuffing inside myself and keeping a lid on.

What I learned in the children's home about stuffing feelings inside myself and denying them followed me into adulthood. I was very, very negative about everyone and everything. I was angry most of the time. That really affected my outlook on life. I didn't share my feelings with anyone. I didn't want to be touched or to be close to anyone, because they could reject me by surprise. I pushed people to reject me so that I could maintain control of any rejecting that resulted. I was used to being in a rejected state. Any other state was unfamiliar and left me feeling I didn't know what ground I was on. Being rejected was ground I knew, so I could handle that.

I kept my thoughts to myself in that garbage can I started filling as a boy. That can was never empty, because I kept filling it every day. I also held on to everything that I had ever put in there, so it got more and more full every day. I had a very low opinion of myself. I wasn't accomplishing much success or adding much to the world. I never tried suicide, but I often thought that if I snuffed out the light on my life that it would be better for the people around me.

I had very little self-control and let myself be very violent. I got

frustrated a lot; and when I did, I wanted to throw or bang or destroy something. One time I got a bolt started right but couldn't make it fit back in my car. I threw my wrench neatly through the windshield and blew the glass apart. That just caused me more problems and more frustration. Another time, when I was in business for myself, I designed and drafted some drawings, which was \$140 worth of work several years ago; I ruined it with one sweep of my knife. I did it because it didn't fit precisely the way I wanted. I did that even though it looked acceptable enough and the people I did it for had approved and accepted it. It wasn't what I wanted, so I destroyed it. And when I had to do it over, I got angry with the people and blamed them instead of myself. When I finished, I destroyed the plates because I didn't want any reminders around of that experience.

I was destructive to others and to myself. I didn't eat much or eat right. I'm six feet tall and was three hundred pounds and looked like a bloated hunk. Even if I got hungry at work, I wouldn't eat. I'd get the shakes and be nervous from hunger, but I'd use will power to deny that it was happening and try not to let it bother me.

I was a real loner. I thought I liked being alone. I wallowed in my garbage of thoughts by myself. I tried to keep thoughts straightened out in my head enough to satisfy myself. I didn't try to straighten out matters with anyone else. I avoided any place where there were crowds, like parks. I didn't

want people staring at me, so I stared at them instead. I liked being the silent observer, so I'd sit in a corner and watch people. I'd try to figure out what was going on with them and try not to let them see what was going on with me. I watched football on TV and tried to be knowledgeable about it, because the guys at work related to that. I wanted to sound knowledgeable.

I deceived others about how much I drank. I thought it was manly to sit down and drink a case of beer. Sometimes, I'd follow the beer up with a quart or a couple of six-packs. I won approval from my fellow employees and other acquaintances by doing that. Right before I came to Parents United, I drank a fifth each day and drank all day long.

I convinced myself that drinking helped me cope with my wife's health problems. In reality, all it did was help me repress those problems. I kidded myself that if I lived alone, I could lick my drinking problem easily. When I drank, I could talk more easily, hold a conversation better (I thought), be a different person that I couldn't be when sober. When I was drunk, I related to other people's stories better and forgot some of my "garbage." Drinking helped me get into a comfortable "gray field." It made me feel more successful and stronger than I felt at any other time. In recent years, when I couldn't reach that level and just got sick, I felt helpless that booze couldn't do for me what it had done for me earlier in my life.



I became a Boy Scout leader. I learned about boys' problems and about counseling them. I didn't drink when I was with those boys, which was one weekend a month. I had to give up being a scout leader after I molested my stepdaughter. I couldn't risk that they'd find out about me. I still regret that so much and it still hurts. I can't take the chance, though, that someone would call them to say they had a child molester as a leader. I contribute to them now in a more direct way. Scouting seemed to me the one place where I really started to get in touch with myself. That happened on campouts when I had time to myself late in the evenings and would do some sober thinking.

I had met my first wife while I was still in the Marines. We lived together before marriage, then just took off one night and got married. We had two children. At first the marriage was very secure and we shared a lot of thoughts and feelings. I felt enlightened and enthused about the marriage. Then my drinking interfered. I became depressed and began visualizing us separated and divorced. That fantasy became a reality. I let both of my children go completely. That was very frightening then and still is today.

After my first wife and I became alienated from each other, I became aware of a warm feeling inside myself that I'll call love. I thought maybe I could be capable of love, but I didn't deal with it beyond being aware of it. Then I jumped out of my first marriage into my second one. I was single for only thirty days when I married my second wife. Our communication level

was great before marriage but slipped right after we married. My drinking interfered, and she chose not to talk about some things anymore. I let my wife pay all the bills and take care of all the household needs, because I had no interest in the house or in my family. I was interested in one thing: drinking! I had a cocky, arrogant attitude at home. Everything had to be my way or no way at all. If I didn't like what my wife cooked for dinner, I didn't go to the table to eat. I didn't always win with my family; but at least when I lost, I knew where I stood. I knew the actions I would take about losing, because I was used to losing.

I didn't understand by wife. I was confused and I didn't know the reasons why I had married a woman with many physical illnesses. I resented her being sick because I hadn't asked to have those problems, and they were very hard to cope with. I was angry with my wife all of the time. Mostly because she was physically sick a lot of the time. One of the times was from a hysterectomy that caused her trouble afterwards. Our physical action certainly wasn't great. In sex, she made me feel like her partner didn't count. She seemed just to want to get herself taken care of. It took me longer to climax because of my heavy drinking, I think. My mind wanted to perform, but my body wouldn't. She didn't know how much I was drinking because I always denied it. It was at this point in my life that I began to get so close to my stepdaughter.

I never felt I was a natural, functioning part of my family. I was the strong arm, the heavy, in the relationship with my wife. I was the disciplinarian. My kids were used to my wife saying "Wait 'til your dad gets home." Sometimes I'd come unglued when I punished the kids: I'd lose control and I didn't know when to quit punishing. I wouldn't let things drop even after I had punished them. Whatever they had done wrong, I might bring it up over and over again for three weeks. I was mentally abusive about the way I did it, too, because I'd ride the hell out of one of my stepsons.

I acted differently to my stepdaughter. I let her get away with a lot of shit. The interaction between us was very different. She know how to twist me around to get what she needed, and I let her do that. I started to get close to my stepdaughter when I started helping her with her homework, and that's when I started molesting her. She started touching me first, and I really liked that. I started touching her back. It happened over a period of most of a year. I drove her to school and back every day, and that brought us even closer together. I was the one who took her clothes shopping for her gym clothes and uniforms that she needed for the private school she attended. My wife decided that it was more practical for me to be the one to shop with her since it was on my way home from work and since I was the one who picked her up from school.

I had set up in my own mind a plan, a fantasy, of making my wife reject

and divorce me. That is what I wanted. I envisioned living alone in a trailer safe and sound, surrounded by my possessions and being only with myself. Then all of a sudden there was this young person loving me without question (my stepdaughter). She'd put her arms around me and depend on me to do things, which my wife did not do. She'd stand beside me while I watched football games just to be near me. She's pressured me in a nice way to do things I couldn't do on my own—like put on a swimsuit, which I was very self-conscious about. She'd make me feel it was okay to do. She had a special way of bringing me out of myself and she did it in a way no one else could. She got me to take her and other kids places—like a fair or somewhere—where there were those crowds I hated. She'd hold my hand and help me through those situations. I was still uncomfortable but at least I could bear it with her at my side.

We became very close. Then the touching became closer. One evening I was showing her how to operate a calculator, and she stated to rub my neck and shoulders. I returned her touches. This touching was the wrong message for me to give her.

The sexual abuse got progressively worse from that evening. I never had conscious intentions of having intercourse with her. I just wanted some self-gratification, I think. I don't really know. The amount I was drinking made me unable to get an erection or ejaculate, anyway. I had desire, but my body

wouldn't respond physically. Because of that, I don't see how I could have done some of the things I was accused of doing. I remember touching her back and buttocks frequently and probably her private parts. (I say "probably" because my drinking made my memory hazy. I've accepted the responsibility of it, though. If it happened, then it did. All I can do about it is never do it again.)

My stepdaughter told my wife I was patting her on the butt. Moments before she told her mother, I was patting her on the butt and rubbing her back with her in my lap. She told her mother afterwards she didn't like that and didn't want that much closeness. At the time, I thought her idea of closeness and mine were the same because she'd often start rubbing my neck or back before I touched her.

I denied it and refused to admit I had been drinking. Immediately afterwards, I had a six-day drinking binge. During that time, I had a motorcycle accident but didn't get hurt badly. My wife has since told me that during those six days, I was extremely violent and ran all of my family out of our house. My wife told our relatives that I had molested my stepdaughter. Soon there were several people coming down on me for what I had done. I knew how to have enemies one at a time; but I couldn't handle this whole group.

My family left me. Then my wife called to tell me a police sergeant wanted to talk to me in a few days. I kept drinking until I got sicker and sicker and wasn't even high. On the third day, I contacted AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). I had listened to an employee of mine talk about it. My police interview was to be in two days, and I knew I needed help pulling myself together for it. AA sent a member over to my house. He didn't try to stop me from drinking. He said, "You said you wanted to kill yourself drinking. While you're doing that, I'd like to sit here and tell you a part of my life." I could really relate to him. Pretty soon he was making coffee with honey and orange juice with honey, and I was drinking it.

Guilt feelings started to surface. I confided to him that, in a rage, I had run off my family: I didn't tell him I had molested my stepdaughter, because I didn't think he or anyone else in AA would understand that. The AA people stayed with me for the next two days until my appointment with the sergeant. My wife and daughter had already seen the sergeant by that time. The sergeant cut some tapes about my case and had written a report. What he wrote was not the truth. He later admitted that the facts were a combination of my case and someone else's case.

I spent seven days in jail. I began feeling that I didn't want my family to reject me and that I wanted us all to be back together. I didn't know it at the time, but my wish would never come true. Two guys who were in jail with me

for the same charge told me about all the frightening possibilities I was facing. I tried to deal with all the different people involved by myself: the public defender, the OR (own recognizance) program people, etc. A lady from the OR program was the one who told me about Parents United and its list of attorneys that I should consult. Since the public defender wanted me to plead guilty and told me to expect five to fifty years, I decided to try a private attorney.

At that point I had been sober several days. I thought I should be able to go on and live my own life and have this problem dealt with and over with. But I had no goals and no place to go. I didn't know whether I would work or go on welfare. I was very confused, and I'd started crying inwardly over little things. I didn't want to be in jail, yet I wanted to be away from people. I was caught up in feeling guilty.

I contacted an attorney through Parents United, and a beautiful relationship developed with him. When he talked to me, I still had the shakes from days before and felt very uncertain of myself. I was going to be released on OR, but first I had to be arraigned. My attorney advised me to plead guilty, which switched my case from municipal to superior court. I was allowed to live in a Halfway House for alcoholics when I had been sober for nine days.

I went to several AA meetings that week. And I met Hank Giarretto and

Ellie Breslin, who was to be my individual counselor at Parents United.

I did not know what to expect from the court system, and I was afraid. I had a woman judge in superior court, a woman counselor in Parents United, and a woman group leader. Women seemed to be in charge of my life at that point, and that was frightening. I also felt terror about not knowing what tomorrow would bring. The lawyer I had found through Parents United prepared me for what might happen in superior court. He spent time with me and put me at ease. Almost everything he prepared me for did happen. Now Parents United has a chart to offer members telling them about the court system and the possible sequence of events and explaining legal terminology like "arraignment" to those who have never been through the system. I'm one of the sources of that paper.

My case was postponed many times and dragged out for nine and one-half months. My attorney assured me that meant that the people in the court system were taking a thorough look at my case. The court system was not very humane. I felt I was locked up like an insane person. I do not think I should have been slapped into a brown uniform and forbidden to communicate with other prisoners. The system really did stink.

I was forced to have a Mentally Disordered Sex Offender Hearing, which scared the hell out of me. Someone else was going to make a value judgment



about me, and they might see nothing else about me except that I was an alcoholic and child molester. The first doctor gave me a clean report. The other doctor decided I needed to see my mother. They gave me a clean report and stated that I was not mentally disordered. It was a frightening experience.

My sentencing was postponed four times, and each time was very frightening because it left me hanging, not knowing what was going to happen. Some Parents United members were in court with me. My shaking nerves may not have shown outside, but inside I was torn up. I didn't even hear my sentence when I finally got it; I just heard the woman judge say, "I am now sentencing Jim to five years." She paused before she said, "...probation," so I missed that word. I thought I was going to jail. I was also sentenced to do 500 hours of community service. The probation department allowed me to give all my community service time to Parents United work. That was really nice. Even as simple a thing as setting up chairs for the weekly meeting was a reward for me and let me contribute to the group and feel I belonged to that group.

I don't think being in jail would have helped me to grow at all. It would have made me clam up and not learn anything about myself or my problem. It probably would have taught me more about being a criminal. The adult probation department put my sentence up for modification now.

The week I came to Parents United and met Hank and Ellie (my individual counselor), emotions were cropping up from everywhere and driving me crazy. [When I met Dorothy Ross at CSATP, I resented her because she was an authority figure and I was the slave.] I felt I no longer had control over my body or mind, that these people could decree what I had to do.

I began individual counseling with Ellie, disliking her at first because she was trying to pry information out of me and get into my head and into my garbage can of stuffed feelings, I thought. I didn't think she could get in, though, because my garbage can was the long-lasting chrome kind, not just the galvanized kind that's easier to break through. She was making me deal with what I didn't want to deal with. By looking at the situation, though, I did start to deal with it. My wife and I went to the Parents United group session the second week I was out of jail. For a month I didn't say anything in those sessions in the orientation group. I didn't know what I was supposed to say. I didn't understand what purpose it served for all of these members to stir up the thoughts that made them feel bad. So my concept was that people in this group make everyone feel bad.

After finishing orientation, we went through the Couple's Communication Group. Two fantastic people led that group and let me be silent for a couple of weeks. Then they made me interact by throwing questions and statements to me. I was scared and told them so. One of them

asked me if I could tell why I was so scared. I said, "Because no one else has ever felt the pain and guilt I'm feeling, and no one else could share it with me." I discovered that the other guys in the group felt exactly as I did. I talked to those guys and worked with them in the sessions. Things started opening up. Then my wife and I started to communicate. She told me she had filed for divorce. I didn't want to lose her and tried to hang on to her. I was afraid of being alone. Ellie recommended a book on loneliness. I was more aware of my loneliness than I had ever been in my life.

I underwent a big change after being a member for a while. For the first time, I wanted to take care of myself physically. I watched what I ate and drank. I took vitamins. I got enough sleep, brushed my teeth, kept my hair combed. I thought, "Hey, I ain't such a bad guy, but I'm going to be in a real bad place if I don't take care of myself." After taking care of what was physically wrong, I could deal with my emotional problems better. Ellie showed me a couple of meditation exercises in our counseling sessions that really put me in touch with my life. I'd sit quietly and count breaths. It taught me to let problems and feelings be there. It made me alert to the fact that I was hurting and crying.

After being in Parents United two months, I cried for the first time. I sat under a tree one day, and my whole life fell in on me. I felt very sad about who I was and what I had done. I still drive by that tree sometimes and remind

myself that is where my life turned around. I felt relieved after crying and after talking to Hank and Ellie about my stepdaughter. I told them I couldn't remember doing all the things she said I had done, but I knew she had no reason to lie.

After that, I grew very rapidly in the program and kept seeing Ellie every week for counseling. I participated more in the groups and learned a lot about myself: What makes me tick, what I like and don't like, how I feel, whether I'm afraid. I got in contact with all the feelings I had suppressed for years. I learned that I could feel good if I wanted to feel good. I learned even from the things that went wrong. After I had been in Parents United for six months, I set goals for myself, and I have met all of them. My newest goal is to co-lead an Alcoholic Group for Parents United.

I have gotten more support from Parents United than from any other people in my life. I remember once one of the women members sat on one side of me and held my hand while my wife held my other hand. It helped me realize the kinds of love that aren't sexual at all but are just a way of caring about one another. But before that when any of the women members put their arms around me to give me a friendly hug, I would stiffen and pull away from them. What they did scared me and I'd think, "What do they want of me?" I hadn't realized yet that they just wanted to be my friend.

I learned to realize something else, too. Through Parents United, I learned to talk about incest outside of PU—like through the Speakers Bureau when I went on speaking engagements. I was surprised to realize that there were people out in the community who would relate to me personally and didn't think I was the most disgusting person in the world. I learned that they could talk about the problem. So all of a sudden I had a new worth I hadn't known I had.

I kept educating myself in many ways. Every time Ellie said a word I didn't understand, I looked it up in the dictionary. I read books that covered the topics she talked about. Now I have three shelves of paperbacks about self-esteem, humanistic psychology, etc. Being in Parents United made me look at myself, see how I had put it together, see how much garbage I was carrying. It's sad that I had to fall so near the bottom before I could get turned around, but now I'm on an uphill climb. I sometimes slip downhill, of course, but my worst day now doesn't compare with how bad my past days were.

This program saved my life. When I was first released from jail and lived in the Halfway House, I thought, "Why don't they just castrate me? They should just throw me in a box, close the lid, and throw dirt on it." They didn't. And what I learned is that human beings don't always destroy other human beings. That was really a revelation. That let me start thinking, "Maybe there is something worthwhile in me." I found the worthwhile parts, and now I can

love life, and through that I can love other people.

I can't relive the past, but now that I know I have choices, I can choose not to live the same way I did. Now that I'm more aware of how and why I let my daughter twist me around to get what she wanted, I probably would never let myself slide into that situation again with anyone—the situation of letting someone control my behavior because they have some kind of hold on me. It's great to know I can be responsible for not getting back into the space where I would molest my stepdaughter.

I haven't lived in my make-believe world for a long time. Now I want to remember about the molestation. I want to find out where things went wrong. That knowledge may push me back down and make me take several steps backward in progress. Eventually, I'll look at more of what actually happened. When I do take that look, I'll have the wisdom that Alcoholics Anonymous taught me with its slogan: I know what I can change and what I can't. And I can accept things that I can't change.

Now I know how to let people into my life. I still have difficulty having a concept of God. But some higher power within me allows me to watch myself develop now and to watch what I do turn into accomplishments. Until after I molested my daughter, the only feelings I dealt with were anger and superiority over others.

My biggest concern now is love—whether I have enough of it and whether I'm giving enough of it. My main goal is to love everyone even if I can't like them. In my opinion, love means you keep trying to understand the other person and really listen to their words. I'm entering a new relationship with a woman, and I'm scared about it. I've never felt a natural or functional part of any family. I want to be able to do that now. I'm looking forward to marrying the beautiful woman so that we can share our lives. I want her to walk beside me—not under me. I do not want us to clip each other's wings. I want her to look ahead, behind, and to the side of me. She and I can enjoy the journey together.

## Homework Assignment Questions for

### *A Personal Account by a Father*

1. What were some of the offender's negative feelings and thoughts toward himself and others, based on his childhood upbringing?
2. How did his unresolved feelings and problems lead to him having difficulty in his relationship with women?
3. What are some of the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings he experienced that contributed to his sexually abusive behavior?

4. In what manner or ways did the offender see and feel about the victim that allowed him to act upon his impulse or urge to be sexual with her?
5. What are some of the ways in which the sexual abuse by the offender affected himself or his family?
6. What are some of the ways in which the offender takes responsibility for his sexually offending behavior?
7. In what ways did the offender's participation in all aspects of the treatment program help him?



## Handout 2

### *Chain of Events Model*

The chain of events model is a way for me to understand the different thoughts and feelings that made the sexual offense happen. Once I understand, I can learn other ways of handling my chain of events so that I can minimize the risk of acting in a similarly abusive way.

A. *Link 1:* What are some of the hurts and abuses that happened to you in your childhood that were upsetting, that you've not really talked about, or that still bother you?

B. *Link 2:* How have these past hurts and abuses affected your thoughts or feelings about yourself and others? What are the fears or concerns which led you to have problems in relationships with others?

C. *Link 3:* High-risk situations that led to the sexual abuse. What were the thoughts and feelings that were bothering you around the time of or just before you committed each sexual offense?

D. *Link 4:* What were the coping strategies—behaviors, feelings, and thoughts—that helped you deal with the high-risk situations? How did these coping strategies lead you to act in sexually abusive way?

E. *Link 5*: What were the false or distorted ways of seeing or thinking about your sexually offending behavior that made the offense seem okay or you seem less bad?

## Handout 3

### *Relapse Prevention Worksheet*

*Purpose:* At this time you are probably thinking that you have your sexually abusive behavior under control. "It will never happen again" or words like that are being said by you or your parents. While you really may not want the sexual abuse to happen again, you must take more active steps to prevent a re-offense.

Based on the discussion of the chain of events, this assignment helps you to develop a plan of action to deal adaptively and non-abusively with these situations, feelings, and thoughts.

Describe what you would do in order not to continue with thinking of, or actually following through on, another sexual offense.

1. What could I immediately do to deal with the ways of acting, the feelings, or the thoughts which could lead me to commit another sexual assault?
2. Whom could I call (list name and phone number) or talk with (give person's name) to tell about my urges, feelings, or way of acting?
3. What do I want the person listed above to do?

4. What can I do to stay away from opportunities which give me access to potential victims?
  
5. What are some of the things I could do or say to handle the high-risk situations, feelings, and ways of acting which contributed to my offense occurring?
  
6. What are some true or realistic statements I need to make to myself in order to correct the distorted ones which might lead to me committing another sexual offense?

## Handout 4

### *Readings From Victims of Sexual Abuse*

#### Letters to Myself

Dear Chris,

*I'm only three.* I was so scared and afraid when I was three. Daddy hurt me. I crawled into a corner in my room. It was so big. I cried and didn't know where Mommy was. Mommy, I need you. I need you to hold me. Mommy don't make me come out of the corner. I'm scared. Mommy you didn't help me. You just made me come out of the corner. I'm scared. Mommy don't leave me. Help me Mommy! I don't understand.

Dear Chris,

*I'm five now.* I liked rubbing myself down there. It felt good. Mommy sees me. Mommy why are you hitting me? Mommy stop hitting me. I won't do it again. Don't hurt me anymore. Please stop! Mommy stops. I'm scared of Mommy now too.

I'm so scared Mommy. I wet my bed. Grandma gives me a dolly. I stop wetting. I love my dolly. I feel safe with her. My dolly doesn't like my Mommy and Daddy. Sometimes I still wet. Mommy you take my dolly away. I get so

scared because I'm alone. I don't have my dolly to take care of me. Mommy I was so afraid. It was dark. I didn't want to go down the stairs to the bathroom. Daddy might get me. Mommy, why can't you see how scared I am?

Daddy you hurt me. Why do you keep hurting me? I don't understand. I love you but you keep hurting me. Daddy it hurts. I don't like it. What have I done for you to hate me so? Stop hurting me, Daddy. I hate you Daddy!

I love my sister. She takes up for me sometimes. Mommy and Daddy take her away from me. I'm in this room. There are all of these children. I'm scared. Sister where are you? I do not talk. I am alone. Why did they take sister away? I must be bad.

Dear Chris,

*I'm seven now.* Mommy I hate you. You didn't believe me. Mommy, Daddy is hurting me down there. Mommy, help me. I'm mad at you Mommy.

I'm mad at my dolly. She doesn't take care of me anymore. I kill my dolly. I love you dolly. Why did I kill you? I'm all alone now.

Dear Chris,

*I'm eight now.* Hi, Grandma. I like you. I like it at your house. I love you, Grandma. Grandma, uncle hurt me down there. Grandma, yes he did. Please

believe me. Grandma do not say that. There is no place that is safe now. I hate you Grandma. I'm not bad. I try to be a good girl. I must be bad...I hate myself.

Dear Chris,

*I'm eleven now.* I can't handle what's going on anymore. I just want to die. Dad you're still hurting me. I want to kill you. Dad I'm going to tell someone. You tell me don't you dare. I say I am. You put your hands around my throat. I wake up. I wanted to be dead? Why didn't I just die?

Dear Chris,

*I'm thirteen now.* I tell this man down the street what Daddy is doing to me. He is going to talk to my Daddy. Someone believes me! He talks to my Dad. Thursday night Daddy and that man both rape me. I tell Mom. She does nothing! Daddy and that man get me an abortion. Two years of Thursday nights go by. Now there is my Daddy and two men. They get me another abortion. I tell my Mom again. Nothing!

I am nothing. I hate everyone. I hate me. We move. No more Thursday nights.

Dear Chris,

*I'm fifteen now.* I have a friend. It feels good to have a friend. My first

one. I love and trust her Mom. I tell her Mom what my Dad's doing to me. She says nothing. Help me I say!! She drives me home. I hate my friend. I hate myself. I never tell again.

Dear Chris,

*I'm sixteen now.* I have my first real boyfriend. I'm not scared of him. He is nice to me. He rapes me. I'm scared. A baby grows within me. I tell my Dad. I tell him I tell him I don't want to kill the baby. He makes that decision for me. My baby is dead. My father comes to rape me again. I say no more. He says if not, I'll tell everyone you killed your baby. It was I, or was it? I give up. I forget the rapes.

Dear Chris,

*I'm nineteen now.* I go out with this guy. I remember he is the guy who raped me when I was sixteen. I get scared! He rapes me again. I find a knife. I stab him. There is blood everywhere. I run. I'm home now. I'm going to forget all of these things. I love my Mommy and Daddy. I have had a really normal childhood. I do not feel. I do not remember.

Dear Chris,

*I am now 34 years old.* I have lived with the fantasy of having a really



normal childhood for sixteen years. With the help of many adult women who were molested as children and a loving and caring woman, Leona, I am alive. I feel for all these years there has been this big black cloud that I needed to surround me. Bit by bit I've broken through that big black cloud. At first I only saw a bit of sunlight. Now the sunlight encircles me. I feel so warm. I do exist. I feel. I love myself.

I share "me" in hopes that this may help someone. I can think of no better way to turn what happened to me into a more positive thing than if by sharing "me" I help someone else.

--Chris Shultz<sup>10</sup> ©1982

Over the past six years, I have been molested by my brother and it messed me up pretty bad. I am writing this letter to tell everyone...especially my brother...how I feel.

I feel that I have been used, abused, and hurt a lot. I feel that because I have been molested by my brother I have bi-sexual feelings. I am just starting to accept the fact that I am bi-sexual...for a long time I was very ashamed about it.

I feel sorry for my brother because he had a rough life, too, and he has been abused himself. I hope that he starts working on getting his own life

together. I hope that my brother can admit what he has done, so that he can get his problem out in the open and deal with it. I love my brother and don't want him to have this on his shoulders all his life.

Love,

David<sup>11</sup>

\* \* \*

## **Molest Is**

Molest is when a man touches a boy or girl

In the wrong place

It is the same like a woman touching a boy and a girl

In the wrong place

It is hardly any different

but a girl has more things to touch than boys.

Molest feels like all sorts of things.

It hurts

It tickles

and sometimes it can make you bleed.

Deena2

### **Mother and Son Secret**

I am a man in my late 40s who was molested by my mother. The molest took many forms and occurred many times during my childhood and youth, culminating in an episode of intercourse which has seemed to me like a nightmare. She continued to invade my privacy as a young adult.

You may be wondering how this has affected me. It put me in a "double bind" and has caused me frequent periods of depression due to the conflict of anger, rage, hate, and compassion for both my parents. I was hooked into every secrecy and was made to feel responsible for "rescuing" my mother. She would tell me all her problems with my dad, not enough love or warmth. She ran him down and told me how loving and warm I was, all the things he wasn't. She manipulated and controlled the communication in the family. She had the power to have me beaten by my father and then to take care of my welts. She turned me against my father and I hate her for that. I hated being in

this family triangle and having to be responsible for her happiness. There was tension all the time and I took every opportunity to get away from it—school, farm work, etc.

There were a few times as a child that I was horrified by my intense feelings of hostility and rage. I acted this out against my brother, putting him in the hospital once and another time almost killing him. Most of the time I stuffed down these feelings and pretended that I was a nice, sweet boy without a mean bone in my body, and eventually I convinced myself that I had no anger, either.

My mother says I am being "tacky" when I confront her with the incest and she refuses to talk about it. I am not going to tell my father because he is now 80 years old.

The damage for me has been distortion of reality, lies, deceit, dishonesty, hate, rage, destructiveness, guilt, shame, failure, self-rejection, and depression. The only way out for me is to accept that it happened and stop denying and pretending that it was just a nightmare. Parents United and Adults Molested as Children United has helped me to get in touch with my feelings that I have repressed for so long—and to finally accept the fact that I was a victim. I *am* a survivor.

—A Male AMAC

1. *Becoming Whole, Adults Molested as Children United*

2. *From DSU, We Love You*

Both publications are available from Giarretto Institute, 232 East Gish Road, San Jose, CA 95112.

### **Questions**

*Instructions:* Based on the passages that you have read, please answer each of the five questions:

1. What are some of the short-term effects of sexual abuse on victims?
2. What are some of the feelings the victims have regarding the sexual abuse committed against them? Also discuss your reaction to victims' feelings.
3. Who are the victims' feelings directed at?
4. What do you think are the steps the victims need to take in order to get over their reactions to being sexually abused?
5. If you were a victim of sexual abuse you would feel, think, and react to being sexually abused in the following ways: (Please write your answer in the first person—for example, "I feel...", "I think...")

## Notes

[10](#) Becoming Whole, Adults Molested as Children United

[11](#) (David, Deena,& A Male AMAC) From DSU, We Love You

## Handout 5

### *What Is Normal Sexual Behavior?*

In small groups you are to discuss and take notes on the following questions:

1. What is considered normal sexual behavior on the part of an adolescent, adult, and child?
2. What is a sexual fantasy? What is an appropriate sexual fantasy as compared with one which is not normal?
3. Explain the differences between consent (which means to agree, to give someone permission) and coercion (which means to make someone do something by force; force can be physical or verbal).

Based on what you have learned about consent versus coercion and the difference between sexual abuse and typical adolescent sexual behavior, please write down your answers to the following questions:

1. What are the things that occurred in my offenses which involved coercion?
2. What are the things that occurred in my offenses which make the sexual behavior abusive?
3. What are some of the new ideas I've learned about coercion and

abusive behavior in my sexual offense? (If parents are answering the questionnaire: What are some of the new ideas we've learned about coercion and abusive behavior in our child's sexual offense?)



## Handout 6

### *Discussing the Abuse in the Family*

1. How often should the sexual abuse be discussed in the family and how many of the details should be included?
2. What are some of the feelings or concerns which may stop me (or us) from discussing the sexual abuse in the family?
3. What are some of the limits that should be set on such things as being around situations or people where another offense could happen; and who should be told about what happened?