



Dealing with Personal Disclosures of Child Abuse For Workshop Presenters / Discussion Facilitators

The topic of child abuse is deeply personal for many people, and workshops dealing with child abuse and neglect often raise many emotions. Participants regularly express anger, sadness, fear, surprise, worry and many other feelings. Be aware that some parents may have great difficulty listening to or discussing this topic. At times participants reflect on their personal experiences with abuse, and this may lead to their speaking out during the workshop or approaching the presenter afterwards. Both can be challenging situations, however, presenter preparation will assist in minimizing the challenges. It is advantageous to use co-presenters with this topic whenever possible.

Interruptions

1. The first may be a person who has experienced abuse or neglect and is speaking out in the role of an “expert”. They may or may not have dealt with their own situation with a professional counselor. I suggest that you use similar techniques as with any “expert” that may show up at your workshops. I thank them for offering information and attempt to limit their “sharing”. If it seems as if they are monopolizing, or sharing too personally, I will interrupt, gently. I always ask first if they ever told anyone about their abuse. If they say they had told someone, I use phrases such as; “I appreciate how your experience has made this important to you. I wonder if I could ask you share with us a little be it later in the program when I talk about children’s responses”. Hopefully this will allow you to contain the participant’s sharing. You can, at the end of the program, give them distinct parameters and ask them to share in a minute or so, how important the topic is for parents.
2. The second could be a person who is talking about their own abuse for the first time. If this is the first time they have talked about their own abuse, I try to quickly stop the sharing. This is not the best place for someone to discuss their own abuse for the first time. I gently interrupt and use phrases such as; “This might be difficult for you. I would really like to speak with you afterwards or maybe you would like to speak with my partner right now”. Hopefully this allows them to choose and also contains the disclosure. Please follow-up with this person if they choose to speak with you afterwards.

Disclosures after the Workshop

These participants may be the same folks who interrupted. The initial response is still important, so ask again if they have told or who it was they told about their abuse. The following statements are helpful if you are speaking with a parent who has told someone about their abuse.

- I'm sorry you had to experience this. I think you are very brave (strong, resilient, etc.) to be here."
- "Is there someone in your life now that you talk to about your experiences?"
- If yes, "I am so glad you are able to discuss this with someone."
- "You know how important this topic is for parents and children."
- "I can see that you know it's important to talk about this subject. Are you sharing with someone now?"
- "You understand how critical this issue is. I'm glad you are involved with the project."
- "Here, let me give you some more information before I answer this person's questions."

A parent who has not talked about their own abuse may exhibit varying degrees of emotion. You may not be able to assess how well they are dealing with their feelings. Please try to ensure they have information to take home with them.

- I'm sorry you had to experience this. I think you are very brave (strong, resilient, etc.) to be here."
- "Have you thought about sharing with a (family member, friends, etc) or talking with a counselor?"
- "I think it's important that you share this with someone you see regularly."
- "This is one of those things that might be tough to deal with on your own."
- "Sharing with me, a stranger, can be tough. I believe you might be ready to share with someone else."
- "There are many people out there who would be there for you."

Recommendations

- Always have information for parents to take with them.
- Whenever possible, include local information.
- Provide immediate attention if someone becomes visibly upset during the presentation or afterwards. If during and you have a co-presenter, one should take the parent to a private area. If you do not have a co-presenter, stop the workshop. If they know someone else present, try to elicit their assistance and get them to a private area.
- If need be call for emergency medical assistance.
- Be cautious about asking for their help with this project too quickly. Most adult survivors of child abuse can deal well with child abuse prevention projects. However, they are some that may become too emotional or radical or may not follow your script.

