Dear Stop It Now! Helpline,
My daughter sexually abused her sister
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With Guest Expert
Jane Epstein
Content warning:
Child sexual abuse

How Do I Help Both of Them?

My oldest daughter is 12 and my youngest daughter is 11. Yesterday my 11yo came to me crying to tell me she was touched inappropriately by my 12yo on Sunday night. She stated when they were watching a movie the other day she fell asleep and woke up to her sister touching her. She pushed her off and did not know what else to do. She knows she can tell me anything and shared this with me. What do I do? Who do I notify? How do I help both of them right now? I feel so lost and torn.
What We’re Seeing on the HL

- Over 7% of Helpline inquiries involve concerns with sexual behaviors between siblings
- Who:
  - Parents
  - Adults concerned they were abused
  - Adults concerned they abused

Sibling Contacts - Prevention Level

- Green: 2%
- Yellow: 20%
- Red: 78%

Slide 5

Our Guest Expert: Jane Epstein

Slide 6

Defining Sibling Sexual Abuse

- General agreement in the literature is that SSA includes sexual behavior between siblings that is "not age appropriate, not transitory, and not motivated by developmentally, mutually appropriate curiosity," and which often involves the exploitation of a power dynamic and some degree of forced or coercive activity.
- More likely to include physical force and involve intercourse
- Specific acts and behaviors still need... well, specifying
- Approx 5x the rate of parent-child sexual abuse
Slide 7

**Little Attention – Little Known**

- Least reported
- Least studied
- Rarely disclosed
- Least likely to receive intervention

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Slide 8

**The Impact of SSA**

**On the children**
- Disruption of developmental
- stage/tasks
- Behavioral, mental health
- and relationship problems
- Feelings of guilt, shame,
- confusion

**On the parents/family**
- Feelings of lack of control
- Loss of family/parental
- identity
- Feelings of denial, shame,
- anger

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Slide 9

**Loving Them Both**

- Feelings of guilt or resentment
- torn between two “different sides”
- Parents feeling responsible for the abuse/not seeing it sooner
- Change of interpersonal dynamics, home layout, new rules or
- supervision
- Including the need to address underlying family and individual issues
- days of the two involved children

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**Slide 10**

**Harmful Sexual Behaviors (Abusive)**

- Shows vulnerable (younger) child explicit sexual images, videos or content
- Uses force, aggression, bribes, coercion or manipulation paired with sexual behavior
- Mature sexual behavior between young children or between an older youth and a younger child
- Does not respect another child’s “no” or elicits complaints from another child when playing sexual games

**Slide 11**

**Healthy or Unhealthy?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unhealthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity, Discovery, Processing</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Coercion/Control, Emotional Need, Reactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual consent, Equal power, Spontaneous</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Manipulation, Threats, Unequal Power, Staged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking, Touching, Showing</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Adult sex-like activity, Repeated behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun, Silly, Spirit of play</td>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>Fear, Shame, Entitled, “Sneaky”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Slide 12**

**Let’s Talk Prevention**
Environmental/Situational Factors

- Witnessing violence
- Experiencing abuse
- Privacy (or lack thereof)
- New parental/relationship
- In other sexually charged environments
- Exposure to pornography
- Healthy sex ed/boundaries
- Other “normative” factors

Safety Planning in the Home

- Boundaries, privacy and consent – discussed and modeled
- Consistent rules – for everyone
- Appropriate supervision
- Healthy sexuality education
- Askable parents and caring adults
- Check in, ask questions, follow up

Everyday Privacy Concerns: When Are They Too Old to Be...

- Co-sleeping
- Bathing/changing together
- Nude/minimally dressed in common areas
- Snuggling/wrestling
Slide 16

My 13 year-old harmed my 11 year-old

A few weeks ago I learned my 13 year-old asked my 11 year-old if he wanted to play sex. They both took turns taking their penis out and pushing it in each other's butts. My 11yo told us after it happened and, after a lot of talking and crying, we learned that this had been going on since he was 7 years old (and my older son was only 9!). It sounds like the first time it happened, my 13yo forced him against his will. My 13yo admitted it right away and was distraught. We are struggling with treating our oldest son as a sex offender right now and feel truly lost and torn.

Slide 17

Next Steps
- Safety planning
- Environmental safety
- Therapeutic support
- Medical treatment (if needed)
- Reporting
- Protect relationship

Slide 18

How Do I Help My Adult Son?

My 24 year-old shared with me recently that he was molested by his brother when he was young. His brother was 3 years older. His brother passed in an auto accident 4 years ago. My son gets anxious and has a hard time calming his brain. He’s turned to alcohol. He struggles with suicidal thoughts even though he knows he doesn’t want to hurt himself. How do I help him? He hasn’t had good experiences when seeking counseling partly because he doesn’t reveal his “real” self and partly because he doesn’t know how to articulate himself.
Finding Out Later: Parents of Adult Children

- **Guilt**: If I was a better parent, this wouldn't have happened.
- **Shame**: What does this say about my parenting?!
- **Anger**: I feel like I want to hurt them for hurting their sibling!
- **Confusion**: I just can’t believe it… is this really possible? Wouldn’t I have known before now?
- **Denial**: There’s just no way!

Common Responses: Parents of Adult Children

- Wanting to “fix” everything
- Wanting to know all the details
- Wanting things to go back to “normal”
- Wanting to push resources/information/therapy

Next Steps: Parents of Adult Children

- Support both emotionally
- Offer therapy
- Let them go at their own pace
- Help them set and respect boundaries
- Find own counseling
- You don’t need to choose one “side” or the other
Questions?

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Stay tuned for our next webinar!

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