

## **Fostering or Adopting Sexually Abused Children, Part 2**

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Parenting is a challenging profession under the best of circumstances. What if the child for whom you are responsible comes to you through the foster care system or by adoption and suddenly you are dealing with issues you never imagined or prepared for? Or, perhaps you are not the parent, but involved in the child's life as a grandparent, aunt, uncle, teacher or caregiver.

What do you do if the child you have brought into your family begins acting out sexually as a result of experiencing child sexual abuse in his or her life before joining your family? Whom do you call? How do you know the right thing to do?

In the first article of this series, several actions were recommended in preparation for including a new person in your family. Learning all you can about normal sexual development, as well as the child's history, are key components of creating a healthy atmosphere for the child and the whole family.

Another recommendation is that the child receive a complete developmental evaluation to determine the physical, mental and academic levels of the child at the time he or she comes into the family. This exam may include a recommendation that the child begin some kind of therapeutic or academic intervention to deal with developmental delays or difficulties. However, assessing the situation at the time the child joins the family is not the end of the story.

Part of learning about normal sexual development is an understanding of sexual behavior rules. When the members of the family know these rules and apply them consistently, the behaviors associated with potential problems become apparent more quickly.

When problems arise it is important to get help for the child. However, not just any help will do. Seek evidence-based treatments that are appropriate to the situation—programs that provide the proper therapy for the child.

In addition, parents need to be involved. For example, when children with sexual behavior problems are being treated with cognitive behavioral therapy, parents' participation in treatment to help the children deal with their behavior problems is a highly effective way to put everyone on the path to recovery.

Most parents are not trained therapists and even those that are trained should not treat their own children. For many parents finding out what is the best course of treatment for your child may be more difficult than you imagine. However, doing your research, talking to competent professionals in the field, such as those who are recommended by your diocesan victim advocacy team, and following up during therapy to make sure what is needed is being provided will assure you that your child is getting the best possible help.

Reaching out to foster and adopted children is truly doing God's work. Your heart is in the right place but do not ignore your head.

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