



It's Normal To Be Normal & The Process of Disclosure

Physical & Behavioral Aspects of Sexual Abuse

Keely Iannelli, MD & Verena Brown, MD

DYNAMICS:

- Different than adult sexual abuse
- Victim typically knows perpetrator
- Grooming often involved:
 - Less violent encounter
 - Less likelihood of injuries

IT'S NORMAL TO BE NORMAL:

- Low frequency of abnormal exams
- If positive findings:
 - Hymen injury or trauma
 - Sexually Transmitted Infections
 - Pregnancy
 - Semen in forensic specimens

WHY THERE CAN BE A NORMAL EXAM:

- Heal rapidly and completely
- Elastic, allowing penetration without injury
- Many acts do not involve injury (fondling, pornography)

MYTHS:

- Normal-appearing, well educated, mid-upper class people do not molest children
- Child molesters molest indiscriminately
- Children who are abused will immediately tell someone
- Children who are abused will show physical evidence of abuse

When It Doesn't *Necessarily* Leave A Mark

It's Normal To Be Normal & The Process of Disclosure

Physical & Behavioral Aspects of Sexual Abuse

Keely Iannelli, MD & Verena Brown, MD

DISCLOSURE:

- It's a process
- It may be partial, not all at once, or not at all
- Recantations can occur:
 - Rare that children lie
- Delays in disclosure are extremely common
 - Delay is more common if it's a close family member
 - Fear of consequences, not being believed, shame, retribution
- Disclosure more likely if they feel it is safe to do so
 - Supportive parents
 - Distance from perpetrator (Divorce, Distant family member)
 - Educational programs creating awareness
 - They were asked
 - To protect others
- Memory in trauma is complex

IF A CHILD DISCLOSES:

- Stay calm and comforting
- Ask open ended questions
- Reassure them you're there to keep them safe
- Believe them. Protect them.