

# INTERVENTION



## FINDING AND UNDERSTANDING TREATMENT FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT or ABUSE



### CAREGIVER/PARENT

#### FINDING A THERAPIST WHO IS A GOOD FIT FOR YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM

A therapist must feel competent working with children who have autism as well as carrying out treatment for sexual abuse. When forming a relationship with a therapist, it's important to ask questions such as:

- Do you feel comfortable working with children diagnosed with autism?
- What is your training/experience with autism?
- Do you feel comfortable treating children who have experienced sexual abuse?
- What evidence-based treatment options do you provide for children who have experienced sexual abuse?
- Do you feel comfortable adapting treatments for sexual abuse to be appropriate for children with limited verbal communication skills?
- Can you provide treatment that uses visual elements to support non-verbal participation?
- Do you feel comfortable making treatment work for children who display restricted and repetitive behaviors?

A good therapist will feel comfortable answering these questions honestly.

It's also important to share your expectations regarding treatment. Some things you can expect or request from a therapist include:

- Willingness to add predictability and structure to the therapeutic environment
- A therapeutic environment that accommodates your child's sensory sensitivities
- Willingness to adapt and modify treatment to your individual child based on developmental level, learning style, mode and level of communication

#### KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT FROM TREATMENT

Your child will be given an opportunity to discuss details of the abuse and their feelings in a supportive and nurturing environment. Children should be able to communicate in the way that works best for them, such as by drawing pictures, writing or typing it out on the computer. Therapists may also help children share their stories by using a tape or video recorder. Use of toys or other strategies can be used to help communication and tailor treatment to the child's developmental skills.

Treatment should teach correct information about sexual abuse that eliminates common misconceptions, such as, "The abuse was my fault" or, "I'm the only kid who has experienced abuse." Children are usually taught skills for relaxation and coping with negative feelings. Treatment for sexual abuse also helps children learn to cope with reminders associated with abuse. Overall, treatment should aim to reduce any negative psychological symptoms your child began experiencing following the abuse and help your child learn ways to prevent abuse from happening in the future.



Because parents and caregivers know their children best and spend the most time with their children, they are often included in treatment. Some things to expect when you participate in treatment include:

- The opportunity to discuss your feelings and thoughts about your child's experience
- Learning techniques to improve parenting skills
- Gaining skills in family communication
- Becoming prepared to discuss the details of the sexual abuse your child experienced with you child

[www.paautism.org/BeSafe](http://www.paautism.org/BeSafe)

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