

# Counseling Needed For Sexual Abusers To Break The Cycle

BY TERRY POPE

Eight years ago, a six-year-old Brunswick County boy was sexually abused by a family member. His mother protected the relative. The boy became so confused and traumatized by the experience that he refused to talk.

He never received proper counseling. Instead, he was moved from one foster home to another.

"Now he has molested at least five children that I can come up with between the ages of four and 10," said Detective Nancy Simpson of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department. "And there may be more."

He was charged with the crimes and the judge ordered that he receive psychiatric treatment. He is finally getting the help he needed years ago.

Victims becoming abusers is a familiar cycle that the court system is trying to break. One of the goals in a sexual abuse case is to provide the proper counseling for both the young victims and the defendants.

Local programs do offer to help break that cycle, but they are not always accepted.

"For mama and daddy to have to get off from work to take them is a handicap," Ms. Simpson said. "They might show good will and take them a couple of times, but that's not enough."

When victims come forward to talk about being sexually abused, they are referred to the Brunswick County victim's advocate program, which evaluates victims of both rape and sexual abuse to determine what help they may need.

Trisha Brown, a juvenile psychologist with Southeastern Mental Health, also works closely with the sheriff's department to provide counseling to victims.

About half of the reported cases of sexual abuse involve defendants who are juveniles themselves, Ms. Simpson said. Children who are victims may see the abusive action as acceptable behavior later in life. Unless they are taught otherwise

through therapy, they are likely to become abusers themselves.

## Brunswick Center

The Brunswick Center is an adolescent psychiatric unit at The Brunswick Hospital in Supply which treats juveniles between the ages of 13 and 17. There are a psychiatrist and a psychologist on the staff to work with youths referred to that program. It's goal is to "re-educate" the offenders through intensive individual, family and group therapy, said Joe Pritchard, program director.

"With the re-education model, we're trying to re-teach the kids new alternatives or ways to behave," Pritchard said. "It is set up where they experience consequences for their behavior, both positive consequences and negative ones."

Nine out of 10 juveniles referred to the program have already been screened by outpatient therapy, Pritchard said, such as the Southeastern Mental Health Center. They represent the most emotionally troubled patients seeking therapy for their past behavior.

"We just want to ensure that everything that could be tried on the outside has been tried before they enter a hospital environment," Pritchard added.

A person 14 or older may be tried as an adult, but defendants who are under 16 are usually tried in juvenile court. Mandatory counseling is often a part of the juvenile offender's probationary sentencing. "We've got to get them charged to get them the help they need," said Ms. Simpson.

Both victims and offenders have been referred to The Brunswick Center for therapy. The program was developed in June 1989. It is also staffed by a master's level social worker, admissions coordinator and recreational therapist. The patient to staff ratio is "basically three to one," Pritchard said. "We stay pretty full most of the time."

Close contact is considered an important feature of the re-education

program. Juveniles are given the chance to learn new skills and to gain a new outlook on life.

## Reporting Increases

There is more reporting of sexual abuse today than in the past, especially cases involving older siblings who molest younger children in the family. In the past, such taboo subjects have been swept under the carpet. "We still have a long way to go," said Ms. Simpson.

National statistics indicate that of all sexual abuse cases, 43 percent are committed by family members, 33 percent by someone the child knows and 24 percent by strangers. Of the cases processed by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, an estimated 95 percent of the defendants charged eventually plead guilty before ever going to trial. One of the reasons for the high figure is that 75 percent of the suspects confess to detectives before the cases go to court, Ms. Simpson said.

She has been investigating sexual abuse cases for the sheriff's department for 10 years. During that time, only two cases that have gone to trial has resulted in not guilty verdicts. Her more than 300 hours of training in sexual abuse cases pays off when special interviewing techniques help determine if children are telling the truth.

Sometimes the children are questioned several times over a period of months.

"It doesn't take you long," Ms. Simpson said. "Small children cannot make up detailed lies about sexual activity. Little children just don't lie naturally."

The sheriff's department investigated 61 cases of sexual abuse in 1986 and 65 cases in 1987. Last year, 85 cases were reported with charges filed against 16 people. Of those suspects, 14 pleaded guilty in court and two were found guilty by a jury.

This year, 96 cases have been reported so far. Twelve cases have

gone to Brunswick County Superior Court. In 10 of those cases, the defendant was found guilty while two are expected to enter pleas in Superior Court this week.

There is a stack of 40 manila file folders on Ms. Simpson's desk, each one representing a case of reported sexual abuse still under investigation with charges pending. The Department of Social Services must now report suspected abuse cases directly to the sheriff's department for investigation.

"It's not just this county," she said. "It's everywhere. There are many adult victims out there who have never told anybody."

## Families Affected

Counselors look beyond problem behavior as drug abuse among juveniles to search for underlying problems such as sexual abuse within the family. Dealing with abuse that occurs within the home is difficult for the victims, the family and investigators.

"Incest is just so horrible on the whole family," Ms. Simpson said, "yet it's the most common. We spend about as much time talking with the mother as we do with the child."

Ms. Simpson says children need to be encouraged to break the cycle by telling someone when abuse occurs. Yet many times the fear of breaking up a family will force children to keep quiet.

"I've had a mother tell a 12-year-old girl, 'If you had kept your big mouth shut none of this would have happened!'" she said. "For them, it's easier to deny it. It's just too hard to deal with for most families."

A man scheduled for sentencing in Brunswick County Superior Court this week realizes he has been recommended for an active prison term for repeatedly sexually abusing a four-year-old girl. It isn't the first time he has been charged. His family has since fallen apart. The home has been sold to help pay at-

orney fees.

Sometimes the public is upset when sex offenders receive probationary sentences. "If they think the person can be helped they will put the offender into a therapy program," Ms. Simpson said. "But for some people, therapy isn't going to help. A lot of time it's the age of the child and the frequency of the abuse that's taken into consideration."

The number of reported cases usually increases in September and October and just after the holiday season in December and January. The reason is obvious.

"When school starts the children feel more comfortable telling a teacher or friend," Ms. Simpson said. "A lot of kids, if they are visiting their daddy during the holidays, then they'll tell him about it."

The figures show the effect that having someone to talk to has on juveniles who are victims. There were 14 cases of possible sexual abuse reported to the sheriff's department in September this year and 15 in October. This month, there have been nine cases reported.

To weed out the false reports from the actual cases, children are interviewed alone since most will not want to talk about the subject with their parents in the same room. Getting past the embarrassing moments can be easier when the parents are not around.

"I learned 10 years ago not to talk to them in the home," Ms. Simpson said. "There are interviewing techniques you use to determine what's a lie and what's not."

Sometimes a case will be reported and the suspect's name will sound familiar. Checking her files, Ms. Simpson will note that the suspect was once a victim of sexual abuse. There are a number of such cases where the cycle was never broken.

"We try to encourage parents to keep their children in counseling," Ms. Simpson said. "Years ago, nobody coped with it."



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

## Going Once, Twice...

At Laughinghouse made a convincing auctioneer Nov. 15 at the Long Bay Garden Club's annual auction, held at the home of Vicki Jones in Copas Shores. With the assistance of member Dianne Baxley (left), Laughinghouse auctioned crafts and handmade items for more than \$1,200. The funds will be used for local projects that include an annual scholarship to a high school student planning a career in horticulture. Club members and their husbands will gather Dec. 6 at Sandpiper Golf Club for a social.

Wishing you joy and peace for the holiday season.

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# Contact Lenses After 40

## Enter a new world of vision

Your 40th birthday marked the beginning of a new era in your life. It is a time of maturity, change, growth, enjoyment and fulfillment.

Then it happens. Your vision for reading and other close work begins to blur. Your distance may also be affected. Your eyes are changing.

There is, however, good news. You do not have to resign yourself to reading glasses or telltale bifocals. Today's contact lenses offer you a viable alternative and a new yet natural world of vision.

## Consider the choices

- You can choose:
- firm, flexible and oxygen-permeable bifocal contact lenses, available in many brands and designs to meet your individual needs.
  - monovision instead of reading glasses. You wear a contact lens, focused for near vision, on one eye. It works for many.
  - monovision in place of bifocals. You wear a pair of contacts, one focused for near seeing and the other for distance vision. Many people adapt to this easily.

The final decision, however, depends on the results of your vision examination. Your optometrist will advise about which option is right for you.

## Take the road to successful wear

You want contact lenses that will give you the best vision possible; comfortable wear; and compatibility with your lifestyle. That's possible, even though your eye care needs are now more complicated than they were a few years ago.

It means that you must consult with your contact lens practitioner, who should be skilled in prescribing for people over 40 and willing to spend the extra time that may be needed to give you contacts that will meet your vision needs and not compromise your eye health.

Thorough care is more than fitting contact lenses. Remember, a skilled, concerned doctor of optometry will:

- offer a variety of types and brands of lenses because no single type or brand will work for everyone.
- provide a thorough eye examination, covering your general health and vision history; a series of tests to determine eye health, evaluate your vision needs and determine your prescription; and additional procedures to prescribe contacts and determine which lens is best suited to your eyes. It usually takes 30 to 60 minutes or longer.
- offers and insists upon office visits for follow-up care during the first few months of wear.
- provides long-term care on a regular basis for as long as you wear your lenses.

## Make your optometrist your partner

- Go to your examination prepared to discuss:
- health matters such as allergies, medications or oral contraceptives you are using and eye or general health problems you have.
  - your seeing needs on the job, at home and when pursuing hobbies.
  - any seeing difficulties you are experiencing.

Ask your optometrist about the pros and cons of the different types of bifocal contacts and about monovision. Bring up any concerns you have about contact lens wear. You may, for example, have questions about adapting to contacts; caring for them; or putting on and removing them. Your new knowledge combined with your optometrist's knowledge, experience and expertise makes the perfect partnership for selecting the right contact lens for you.

## Consider cost

Your total cost should cover your thorough diagnostic examination; the lenses; lens care kit; training on proper lens wearing and care procedures; and unlimited follow-up visits over a specified time.

Ask your optometrist to calculate the total charge in advance and tell you specifically what the cost covers.

Be wary of bargain prices. They may cover a minimal examination and inadequate follow-up care. You need and deserve thorough care.

## Help yourself to safe, successful long-term wear

When you receive the proper care, you will find today's contact lenses are marvelous for seeing and a joy to wear. They will give you more natural vision and a more youthful appearance.

To maintain your good vision and comfortable wear, though, you need either to take a few minutes each day to clean your daily-wear lenses or to follow carefully your optometrist's lens care instructions for your extended-wear lenses.

You also need to return periodically for a professional check of your eye health and vision status, plus the condition of your lenses. Since the frequency of long-term follow-up care varies by lens type and individual, your optometrist will advise what is right for you.



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