



Revealing A Story of Abuse

Over the last several decades, JPA has provided therapy to children and families subjected to sexual abuse, developing clinical insights into the profound implications it has on childhood development and interpersonal relationships.

We support Chicago's most vulnerable communities facing systemic obstacles and interpersonal struggles. This story is about how the pain of a family's experience with sexual abuse and their therapeutic experience has enabled them to face a devastating incident and provided the tools to discuss their pain and begin

healing together. About five years ago, one JPA clinician began individual treatment with a girl named Star. After signing consent forms for Star, her mother expressed interest in what therapy was all about.

She requested therapy for herself, which led to several discussions regarding her own early childhood trauma. Due to the positive experience from both the mother and Star, mother then requested treatment for Star's older sister as well. Soon after, a close adult family friend also requested therapy with JPA.

To protect the therapeutic alliance and relationships, separate JPA clinicians provided treatment to each family member (and close family friend). With four clinicians providing individual therapy to the family, they began to engage in their own treatment, embarking on their own journey. As treatment continued over the years, the family started to mold, shape, and apply the therapeutic experience outside of their sessions.

There were ups and downs, of course, and changes in the therapeutic process, but what really changed was the family's ability to open up and talk about their experiences. About one year ago, however, Star disclosed

to her JPA therapist a traumatic experience of sexual abuse that had occurred before beginning her first treatment session. She'd held this information in for four years, adding to the multiple layers of shame, guilt, and disappointment she'd felt and internalized for years.

Unfortunately, her experience closely paralleled her mother's when she herself was younger. Star was worried that her family would be destroyed and their connection would rupture, or worse, that they would blame her for experiencing this traumatic event. Increased levels of embarrassment and

shame lay deep inside Star, affecting her mood, interpersonal relationships, and ability to trust others. “That’s why I was so angry for so long. I couldn’t trust anyone and felt angry that I’d replicated this experience my mother has worked so long to forget.”

At one point, the close adult family friend disclosed her own experience of sexual abuse when she was a child and how she felt similar to Star. Hearing this helped normalize Star’s feelings. She wasn’t alone. Hearing the close family friend’s experience helped Star begin to face her own history after holding it in for so long. Star had been fearful of the impact of multi-generational trauma and internalized her own pain to protect her family. But together they discussed their feelings, supported one another, and provided guidance on how it wasn’t their fault.

Star was finally ready to share her story with her family and her JPA therapist. She was nervous about their reactions but was surprised that instead of tearing them apart, they grew closer, wanting to protect each other more, while

validating her feelings and emphasizing how this traumatic incident wasn’t her fault. It was the support of each family member, along with the guidance and support of wrap-around therapy service to the entire family, that enabled this progress to happen.

Multiple therapists provided coping strategies, coaching, and validation of their experiences, allowing the family to begin the healing process. This family had experienced a complex multi-generational trauma that can occur in families who have faced instances involving sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect or domestic violence of children and adults.

Through their independent therapeutic alliances, this family developed strength, perseverance, and the courage to disclose/share even the hardest pain. This cooperative situation was the basis for building a strong foundation. The family now continues to grow, share, and be aware of each other as they continue to support one another through treatment and adoption of lifelong skills to increase their sense of self-worth and build healthier interpersonal relationships. **JPA**

Need more information or help? Contact [Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center](#)
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