

Therapeutic Exercises for Victimized and Neglected Girls:

**Applications for
Individual, Family,
and Group Psychotherapy**

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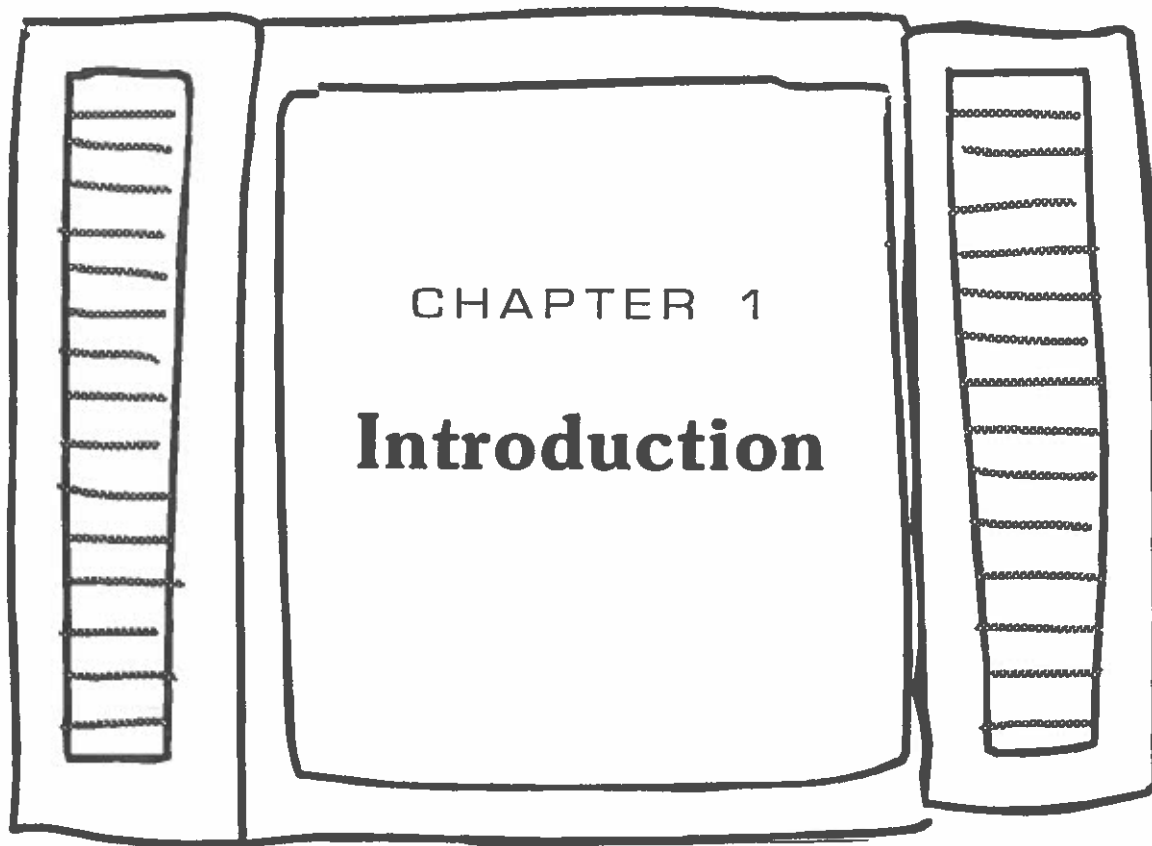
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction

A national incidence study estimated that, in 1986, more than 1 million children in the United States have been injured as a result of maltreatment and 1/2 million more are estimated to have been at risk for or threatened with maltreatment. Of these maltreated children, 1,100 died as a result of confirmed cases of abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1988). Neglect is the most prevalent form of maltreatment, followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Many children are victims of several forms of maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989). These statistics clearly point to the need for treatment services for these populations.

Effective treatment of victimized and/or neglected populations is a challenge. Referrals are often mandated, rather than voluntary, and family and extrafamilial support for treatment is often minimal. These clients are often in a state of constant crisis and have few economic or psychological resources.

This book provides detailed therapeutic exercises for working effectively with these populations. The exercises are not intended to be viewed as an all-inclusive treatment package. Rather, they provide a useful structure from which to introduce difficult topics, teach skills, and depart into more detailed discussions of issues that are highly relevant to victimized and neglected children and their families. The realms covered by the exercises include recognition and identification of feelings, assertive communication and problem solving, constructive peer relationships, constructive parenting, sexuality, physical victimization of children and spouses, and sexual victimization of children. The exercises were designed to be developmentally appropriate for treatment sessions in which the identified client is a school-age or teenage girl. Issues faced by clinicians in providing treatment to these girls are discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 7-10). The instructions for these exercises, as well as potential problems in successful implementation and possible solutions can be found in Chapter 3 (pp. 11-119).

A major obstacle to providing effective treatment to victimized and neglected girls is that they are often withdrawn prematurely from treatment, losing both an opportunity to “profit maximally” from therapy and the opportunity to experience a healthy termination of their relationship with the therapist and other group members. There are no perfect solutions to this problem. However, one solution is to provide the girls with an alternative means for accessing therapeutic material. The Appendix (pp. A-1 to A-31) presents a handbook for girls that summarizes the information, and reinforces the skill building, covered in the Chapter 3 exercises. Instructions for the use of this handbook are provided.

EXERCISE SELECTION

The therapist needs to use clinical judgment in determining when and if to use an exercise and how to modify it before or during implementation to make it maximally effective for specific girls. It may be appropriate for some girls to go through all the skill-building units contained within Chapter 3 in the order in which they have been presented. For other girls, only some of the skill-building units will be useful and, within units, only some of the exercises will be necessary. As a general guideline, the following skill-building units are considered appropriate for all victimized and neglected girls: identification and expression of feelings, assertive communication, constructive peer relationships, and constructive parenting. The units on sexuality, physical victimization, and sexual victimization are more specialized; a therapist should read the exercise introductions carefully before deciding when and if they are appropriate for a specific girl or girls. In addition, some exercises within a unit may be more or less appropriate depending on the girl’s developmental level. For example, within the area of sexuality, the body image exercises may be relevant to the majority of girls, while the exercises aimed at defining the difference between love and lust may be most appropriate for teenagers or younger girls who are actively engaged in consensual sexual activities.

With minor modification of the instructions, it is possible for therapists to introduce the skill-building units in almost any order. Therapists can also decide whether to fully complete units or move back and forth among units. However, in the author’s experience, girls need to have mastered the skills learned in two units - identification and expression of feelings and assertive communication - before they profit from the other units. In addition, if victimization issues are focused on too early in the skill-building process, they may generate a stress level so high that girls cannot profit maximally and, moreover, may terminate prematurely from treatment (Berman, 1992).

Each unit consists of several exercises. The order of the exercises within units reflects either the recommended order for presentation or the relative stress level of the material. For example, in the unit on expression and recognition of feelings, Exercise 1 is easier to complete than Exercises 2 and 3. In addition, these last two exer-

cises contain increasingly greater amounts of abuse/neglect-related material, thus requiring greater stress tolerance from the girls.

EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions for using these exercises within individual, family, and group treatment are provided; however, they are not intended to be rigid prescriptions. Within individual and family therapy, the author has used the exercises very selectively and has often modified the instructions. For highly defensive families, structured exercises may be an ideal modality, because it is less threatening to work through exercises than to self-disclose. For other families, structured exercises may be counterproductive, and the therapist may use exercises simply to generate ideas for treatment planning. Group treatment of seriously disturbed girls, due to the larger number of girls and their poor or deviant socialization, can easily become chaotic. Within this modality, the author adheres carefully to the structure of the exercises because it reduces acting out (Berman, 1992). Girls will come from families with many different constellations such as nuclear, single-parent, adoptive, and so on. For simplicity, the exercise directions and handouts are written from the perspective of the nuclear family. The therapist may want to alter the language of the directions and handouts to match the actual constellation of each girl's family.

Chapter 4 (pp. 121-129) describes three case examples to illustrate the use of these exercises in individual, family, and group therapy. These case examples illustrate patterns of behavior that were seen in actual therapy sessions. The names, family configurations, demographic information, and other details have been changed to insure confidentiality.

The Appendix contains the "You Sparkle: A Handbook for Girls." This handbook is designed to be given out to girls at the end of treatment to help reinforce the skill building and summarize the key messages provided during treatment. It will provide the greatest benefit to the girls if it is reviewed with them prior to the termination of treatment. Many girls remain in stressful family circumstances after terminating treatment. They can be encouraged to look through their handbook during times of stress or confusion to gain a sense of support for how they are coping or to gain ideas for how to cope. The handbook can also be sent to a girl who has been withdrawn prematurely from treatment. This may serve to reinforce what she has learned in treatment, provide her with a source of validation for the ideas and values promoted in treatment, and serve as a reminder that the therapist considered her an important person.

EXERCISE 21

Recognizing Children's Reactions to Spouse Abuse

GOALS

To help girls recognize and gain insight into children's reactions to family violence.

ACTIVITY

1. In Step 1, the girls are told that children may have many different types of thoughts and behave in many different ways after witnessing parental violence, and that some of these thoughts and ways of behaving are listed in a handout. The therapist gives each girl a copy of the handout, "After Seeing a Fight Between My Parents I . . ." (p. 99; adapted from Beckford & Berman, 1992). The girls then read through the list and discuss each of these reactions to family violence in terms of the benefits and/or disadvantages it brings to the child, including how the reaction may be viewed by significant others (teachers, friends, police, etc.). For example, the therapist could ask how likely it is that a specific reaction will lead someone to help the child, result in the child being punished, result in the child being physically hurt, result in the child being ignored, prevent the child from achieving in school, or prevent the child from making friends.
2. In Step 2, girls look through the response list again, this time for examples of passive, aggressive, and active behavior.
 - a. The therapist may need to give concrete definitions of passive, aggressive, and active behavior.
 - b. The therapist helps the girls think through which general response style brings the most advantages (e.g., personal safety, personal growth) to the girl.
3. In Step 3, the girls identify the type of behavior the children in their family are most likely to exhibit after a violent episode. Girls identify what response style (passive, aggressive, active) their behavior represents. Alternative responses to these episodes, that might result in greater benefits to the children, can then be explored, underscoring that it is the responsibility of adults to stop family violence.

INDIVIDUAL THERAPY INSTRUCTIONS

1. The therapist and girl go through the list together.

2. The specific dynamics of the girl's family and her reaction to these dynamics should be highlighted. The therapist needs to interject comments about how the girl's specific responses to violence are helping or interfering with her personal development.

FAMILY THERAPY INSTRUCTIONS

1. The therapist needs to carefully assess if a family is ready for this activity.
2. After discussing each reaction in the list, the family members should consider which type of reaction (passive, aggressive, active) most closely mimics their own style. Family members can be expected to have developed differential responses to violence. The reasons behind their differing styles can be discussed as well as the advantages and disadvantages of these styles.

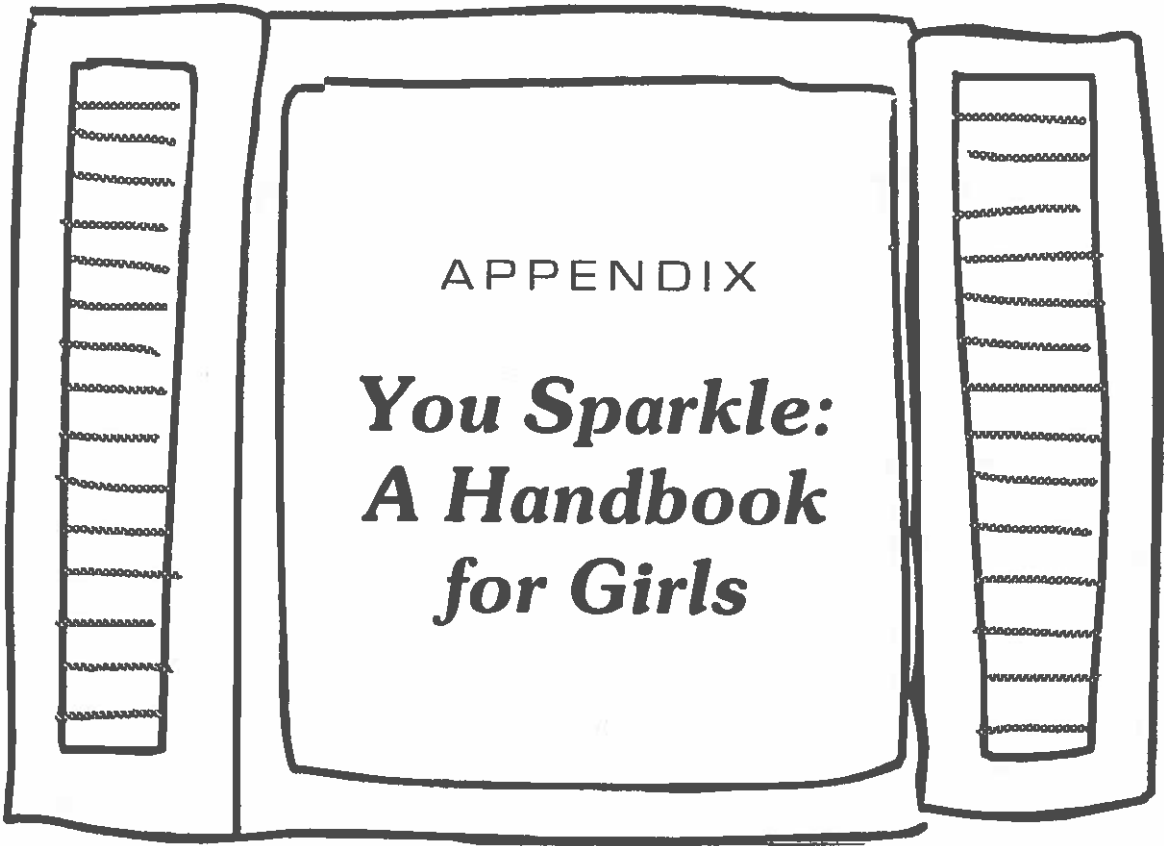
GROUP THERAPY INSTRUCTIONS

1. The group can be divided into teams of three or four people.
2. Each team goes through Steps 1 and 2 separately. Within a team, it is not necessary for the girls to reach a consensus about the benefits or advantages of every individual reaction discussed in Step 1. However, in Step 2, the therapist should attempt to help the girls reach a consensus as to whether passive, aggressive, or active response styles *in general* bring the most advantages to the girl.
3. If the girls have not already begun discussing their personal reactions to parental violence, initiate Step 3.
4. After Step 3 is completed, the therapist should draw attention to similarities and differences in response styles across group members. Peer support should be generated for helping individuals move toward active behavior.

EXERCISE 21 HANDOUT

**After Seeing a Fight
Between My Parents I . . .**

1. did mean things to people.
2. talked to my teacher or counselor about it.
3. had headaches.
4. called the police.
5. left the house because I didn't want to hear it.
6. tried to hurt myself.
7. took it out on my dog (pet).
8. called an adult family member to help stop the fight.
9. hid because I was so scared.
10. broke something to distract them.
11. talked to my friends about it.
12. jumped into the fight.
13. didn't pay attention in school.
14. had trouble sleeping.
15. felt like there was nothing I could do about it.
16. felt shaky and nervous all over.
17. screamed and yelled at them.
18. ignored them because they fight all the time.
19. felt sick.



APPENDIX

***You Sparkle:
A Handbook
for Girls***

How To Use This Handbook

The *Handbook for Girls* is designed to be copied and distributed as a resource for preteen and teenage girls. It is intended to increase the long-term impact of individual, family, or group treatment that has followed the skill-building units covered in Chapter 3. Optimally, this handbook can be given to a girl when she is ready to terminate treatment. Each page of the handbook can be read aloud and discussed within a therapy session. As treatment themes are reviewed, the therapist can encourage a discussion of the girl's progress. Girls can be encouraged to look through the handbook whenever they miss being in therapy or whenever they have a problem and aren't sure what to do. If a girl is withdrawn prematurely from treatment, the handbook can be sent to her or given to her via a Child Protective Service caseworker.

Each copy of the handbook needs to be individualized for a specific girl by putting the correct phone numbers on the page entitled "Do You Have a Problem" and by the therapist signing the last page. Do *not* copy this page when you prepare *You Sparkle: A Handbook for Girls* for distribution to the girls. Begin copying with the title page on A-1.

The handbook will not be appropriate for girls who have significant reading difficulties.

***You Sparkle:
A Handbook
for Girls***

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WHO ARE YOU?

YOU SPARKLE!

1. You are very special and important because:
 - a. no one looks exactly like you.
 - b. no one talks or laughs exactly like you.
 - c. no one thinks exactly like you.

2. You are very likable and lovable and:
 - a. there are many people in this world who will want to be your friends once they know what you are really like.
 - b. there are many adults who will want to care for you and help you when they know what you are really like.

NOT EVERY PERSON WILL RECOGNIZE THAT YOU SPARKLE

1. This is because every person is different and not everyone will like the same things you do.
2. This is because it is not easy to understand another person.
3. This is because not everyone takes the time they need to get to know someone.

YOU WILL ALWAYS SPARKLE!

1. You are the most important person who needs to remember this!!!
2. You may need to help others realize this!!!

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

STAND UP FOR YOURSELF AND RESPECT OTHERS

1. Being assertive means standing up for yourself and expressing your feelings in a way that doesn't blame other people or push them around.
2. Being assertive doesn't mean people will always be nice to you or listen to what you say. However, being assertive is the best way to try to get someone to be nice and listen to what you say.

Examples of How To Be Assertive

- a. Your best friend has called you a bad name.

Assertive: I feel hurt that you are calling me names.

- b. Your mother always sends you to your room whenever you get home from school; you would like to talk with her.

Assertive: I feel disappointed when you send me to my room because I would like to talk with you.

- c. Your friend always wants to play basketball and you don't like basketball.

Assertive: I really like you, but I don't like to play basketball.

3. Being assertive means you never threaten or try to push other people to do what they don't want to do.

Don't Say: If you don't do it, I won't be your friend.

4. Saying something in an assertive way means you state your true feelings and why you feel that way.

Assertive: I feel (feeling) happy (why) because you remembered my birthday.

Assertive: I feel (feeling) jealous (why) because you are spending time with someone else.

5. It can be hard to be assertive, especially if you are angry - but always try. If you make a mistake and say something in a mean way, apologize in an assertive manner.

Assertive: I am sorry that I swore at you. I was feeling really angry because you said I had to wash dishes and I hate washing dishes.