



# Child Abuse Investigations

A man in a dark blue suit and striped tie is adjusting his jacket buttons. He is wearing a white shirt and a watch on his left wrist. The background is a blurred modern office interior with glass walls and stairs.

# The Work

You will be remembered for  
your work--The question is,  
how do you want to be  
remembered?

why are  
child abuse  
investigations  
so difficult?

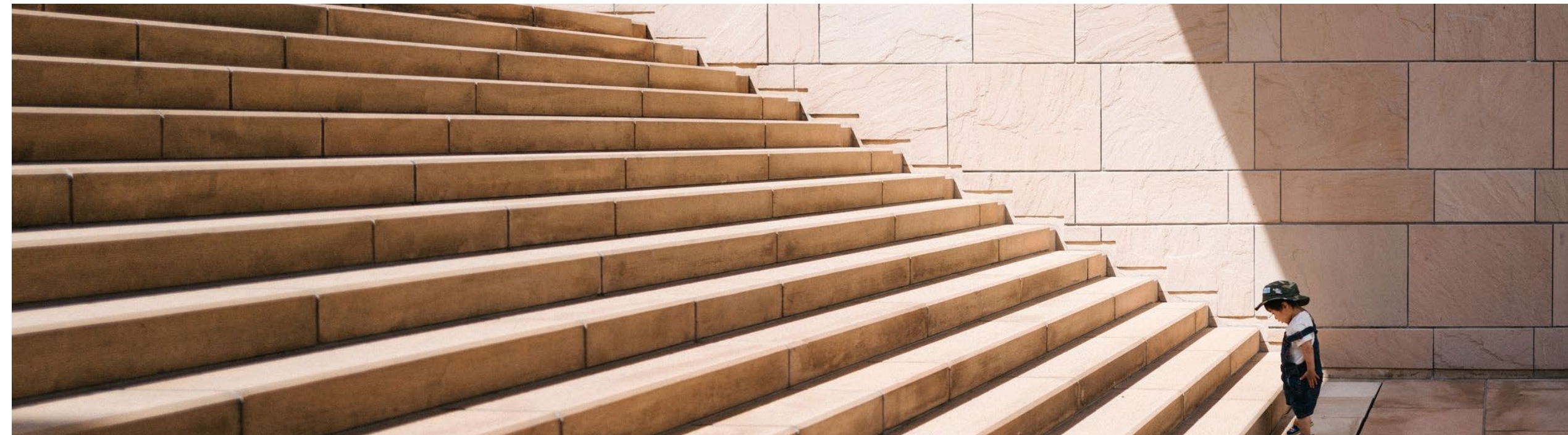


Your family





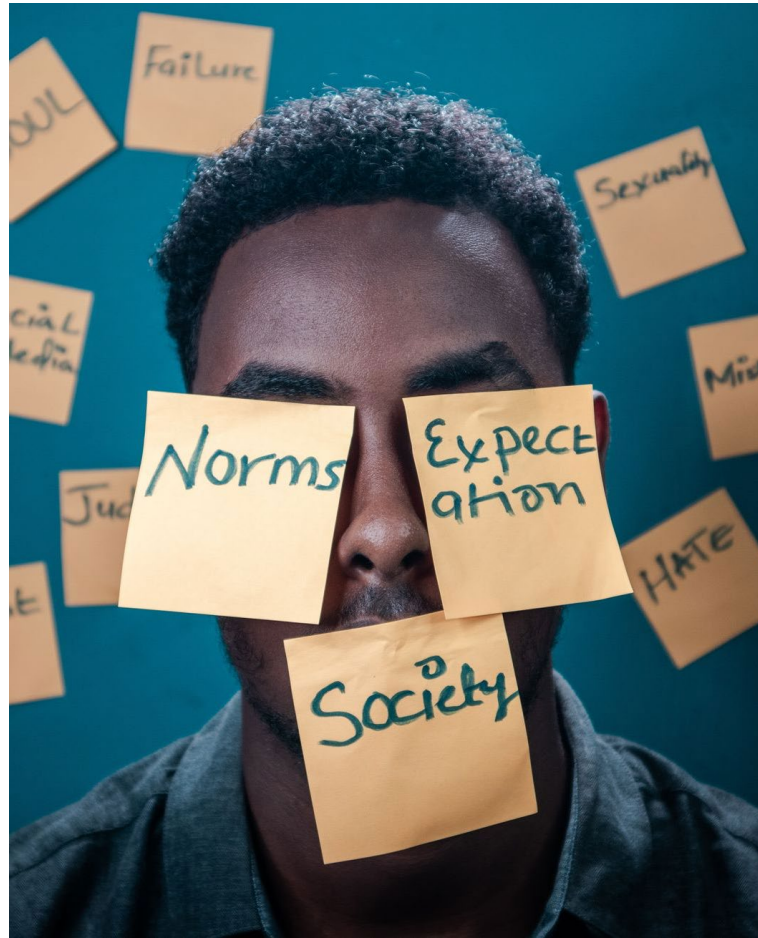
# Challenges



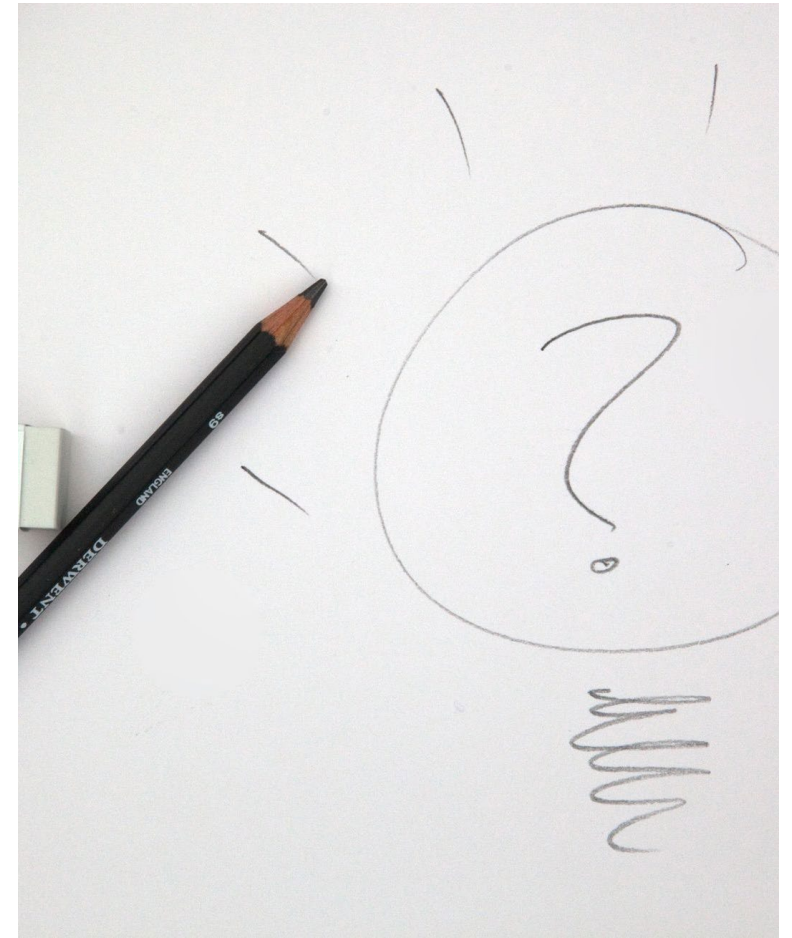
# Three things you must confront



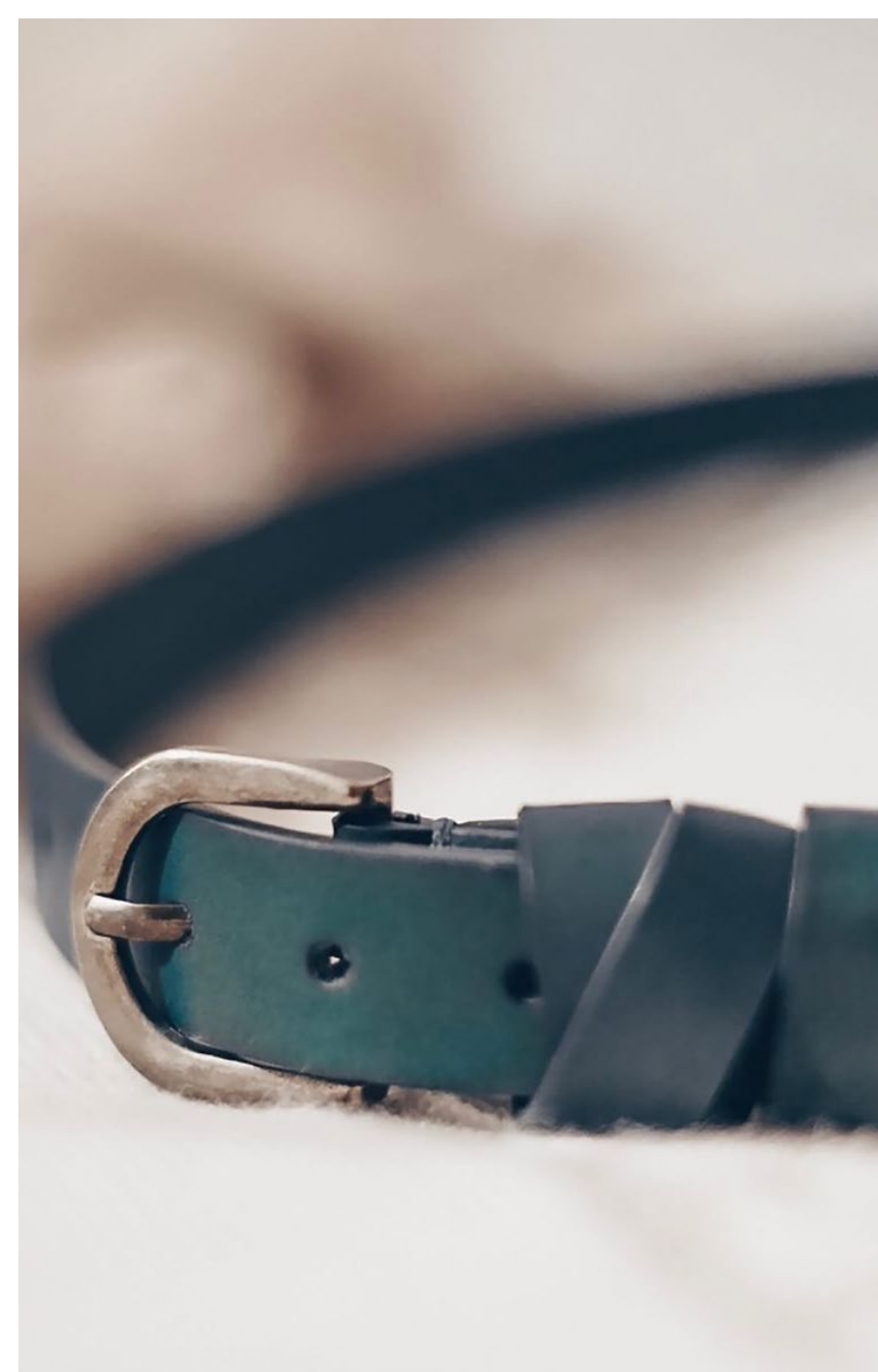
Child Victim



Belief



Hard to prove motive



Beliefs  
about  
child  
punishment

# MISSING



IN 50 METERS RADIUS

UNDERSTANDING

STATEMENTS  
EVIDENCE  
DNA  
TIME  
PHONE  
CONFESSION  
PICTURES  
WITNESSES  
DIGITAL  
VIDEO  
HELP  
JURY  
EASY  
FAMILY  
COOPERATIVE



There is  
always  
evidence!

**There is always evidence  
100% of the time in all  
child abuse cases!**

“a reason for doing something,  
especially one that is hidden or  
not obvious

# Motive



“

In most other crimes the investigation is centered around the accused. Yours will be centered around the victim.



# FEAR



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# Obstacles



A common  
mistake made  
in child abuse  
investigations:  
Look for abuse;  
rather than  
listen for it!



**Who in  
this  
room is  
bias?**





Don't be an obstacle!

Be careful  
with the  
wording  
of your  
reports.

The defense attorney will use your  
words against you in court.

1. suspect
2. Perpetrator
3. non-offending parent
4. sex-offender

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Instead use the  
word accused.

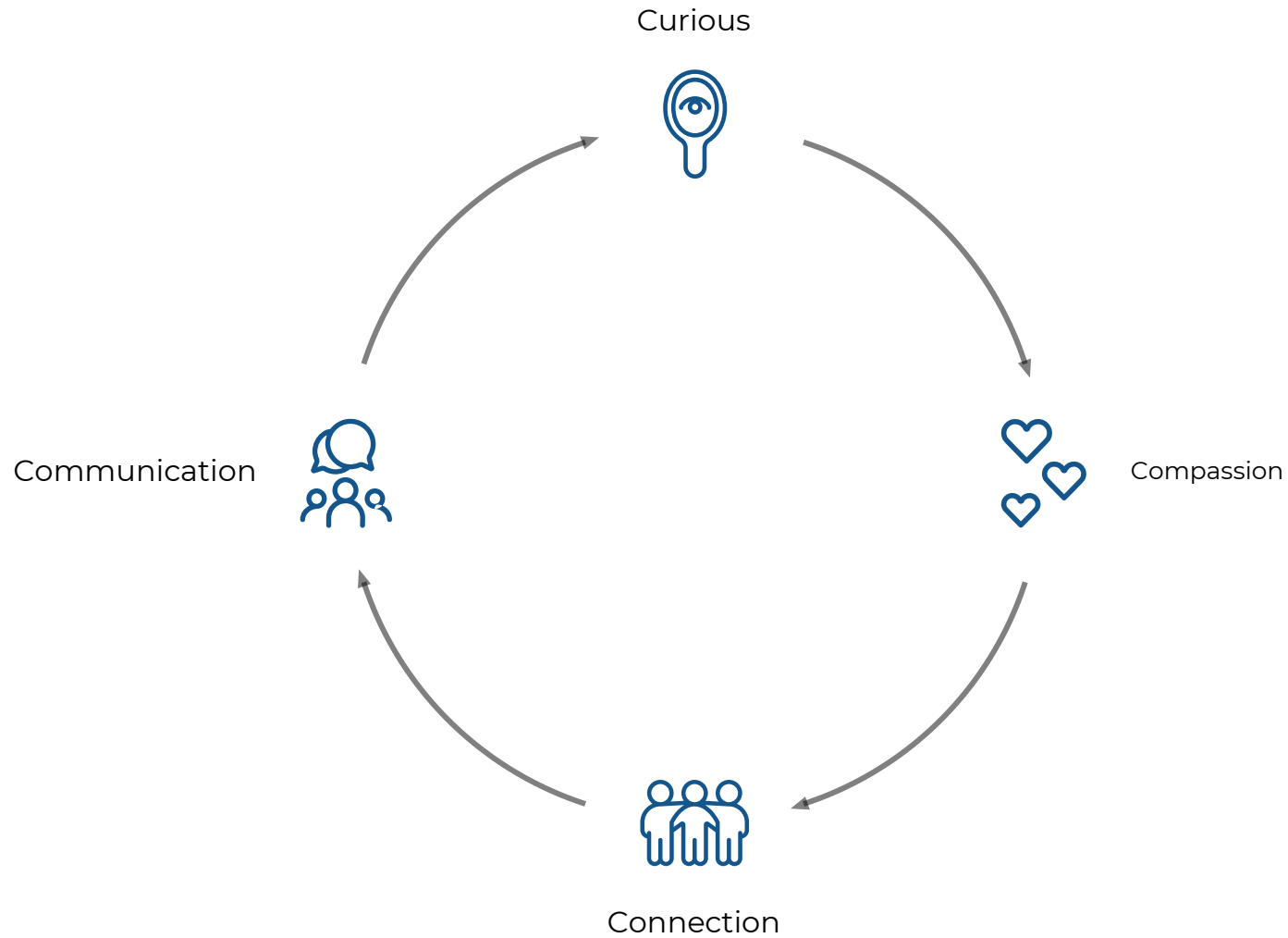


# The Keys to Successful Child Abuse Investigations



**Be Curious!**

# Engage with your cases



- Curious
- Compassion
- Connection
- Communication

# Types of Abuse

# Sexual Abuse



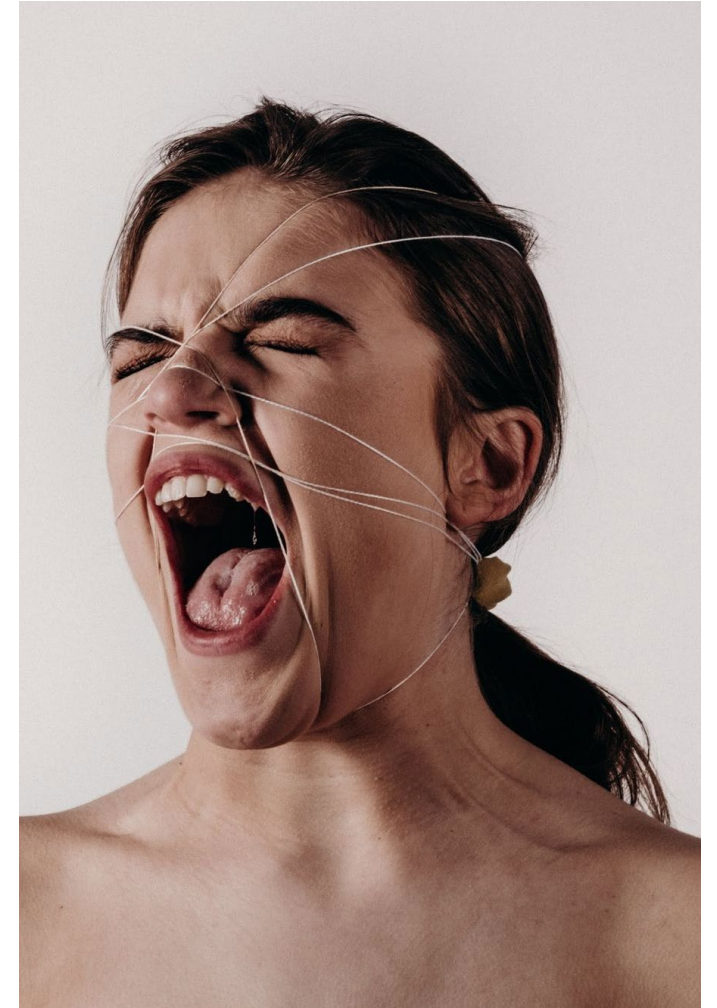
# Different Types of Abuse

Sexual

Physical

Emotional/Psychological

Neglect



# Different types of sexual abuse

- Touch

touching underage victim in intimate area with intent to arouse.

- Intercourse

Having sexual intercourse with underage victim

- Sodomy, aggravated sodomy

sexual activity with victim involving the mouth, anus and sex organs of the victim.

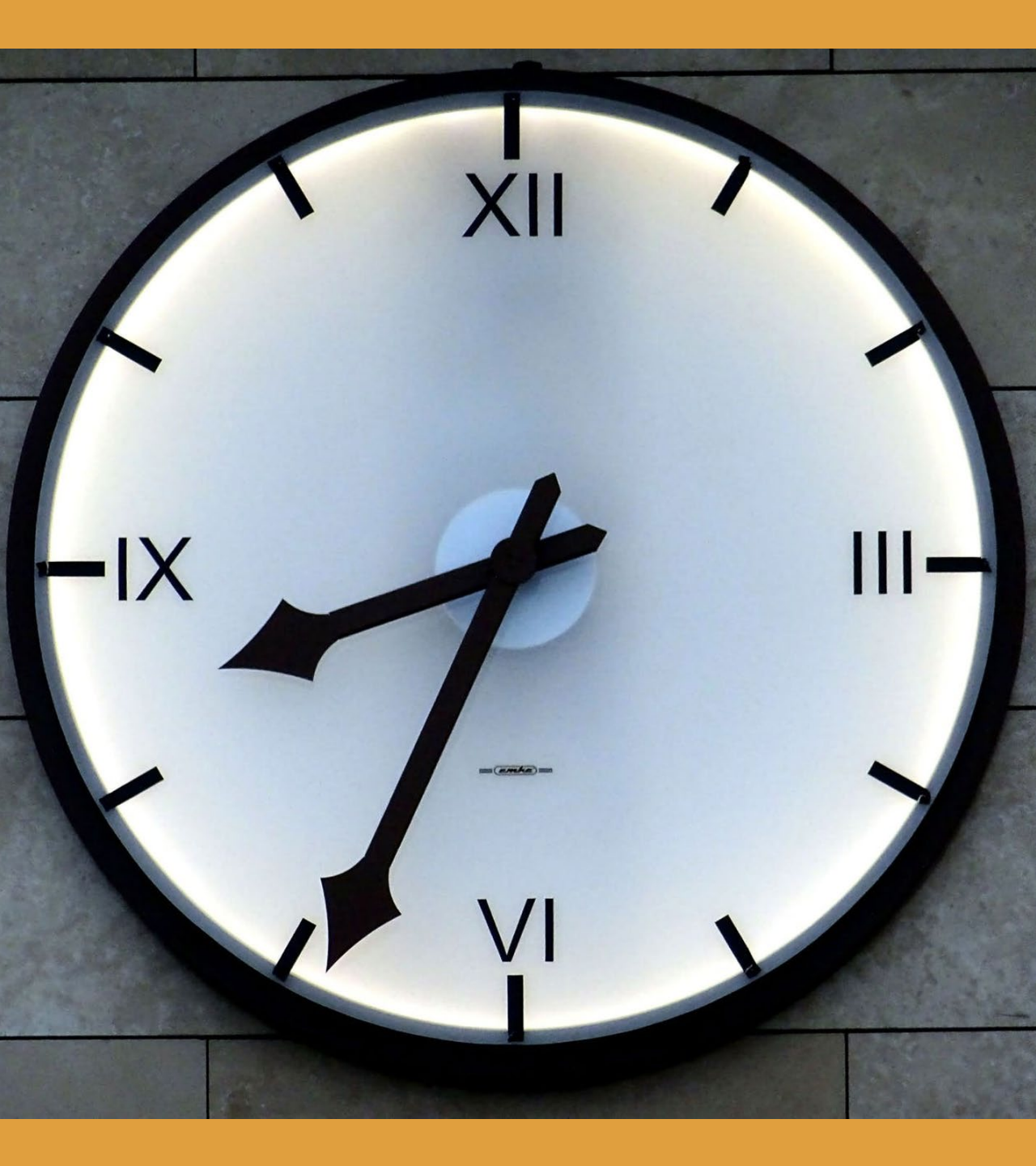
- Rape

sex intercourse by force and under a certain age

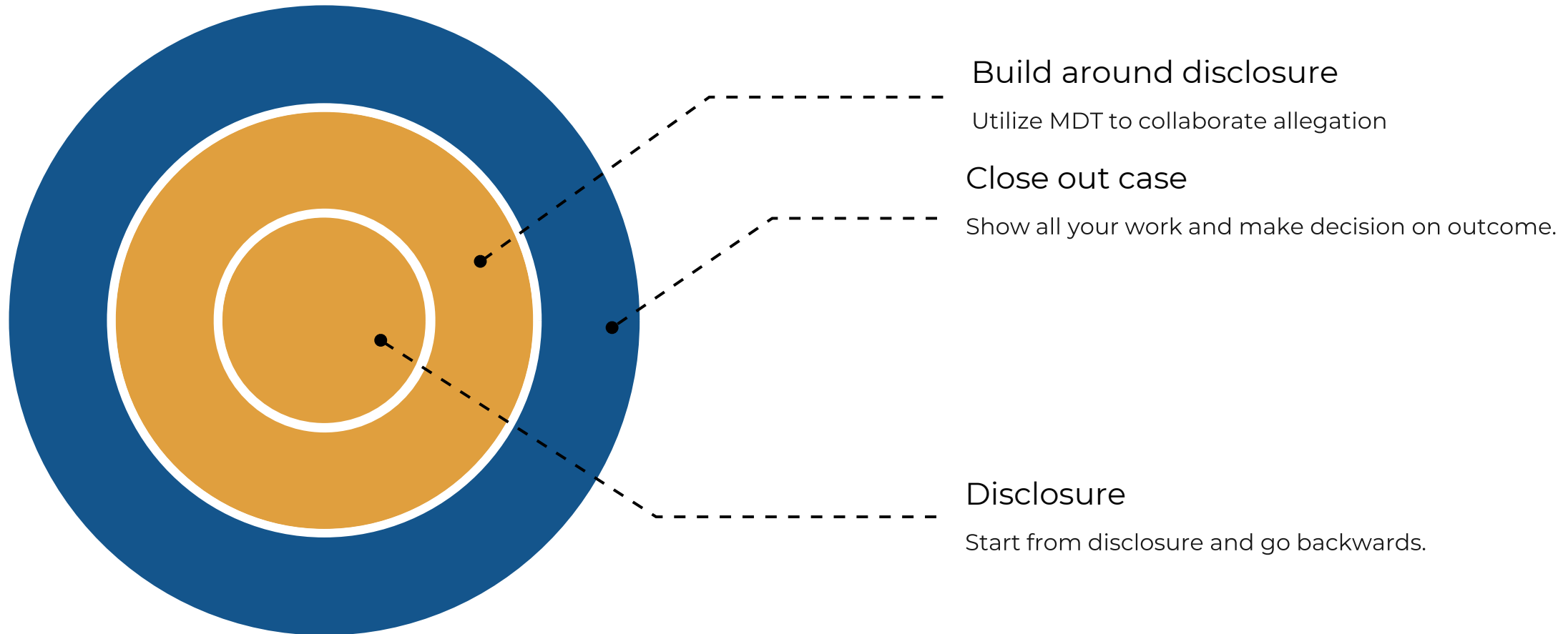
- Child Molestation

any immoral or indecent sex act to or in the presence of a underage victim

# Disclosure



# Treat your disclosure as your most important piece of evidence



“the disclosure is  
to the SVU  
detective what  
the surveillance  
video is to the  
homicide  
detective.”

Det. Kevin McNeil





Delay

# some reasons victims/delay or do not disclose

- Fear of accused

in many abuse cases the offender has made threats to harm the victim or someone they love

- Don't want to break up family

victim believe they will be the cause for the family to break up.

- Fear of not being believed

the accused may be a pillar in the family or community.

- Does not want anything to happen to accused

Victim may care for the accused and not want anything bad to happen to them

Listen to the **disclosure!**

How do we do this?



# Use Time



1. Any STI's, pregnancy
2. any sudden behavioral changes since accused came into picture
3. Was accused and victim in same location?
4. was accusation made before

# Allow the victim's allegation to lead our investigation.

1. Allegation
2. Forensic Interview
3. Locations
4. Observations
5. Collaborations



Section 1: The Problem

# understanding victims



The background is a dark red, textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric, with some lighter, white, wavy patterns. The text is centered and written in a white, sans-serif font. Below the text is a white, wavy underline.

When there is no  
tangible evidence, look  
for signs of trauma

# The victim does not live in isolation

- School

Check with teachers/guidance Counselors

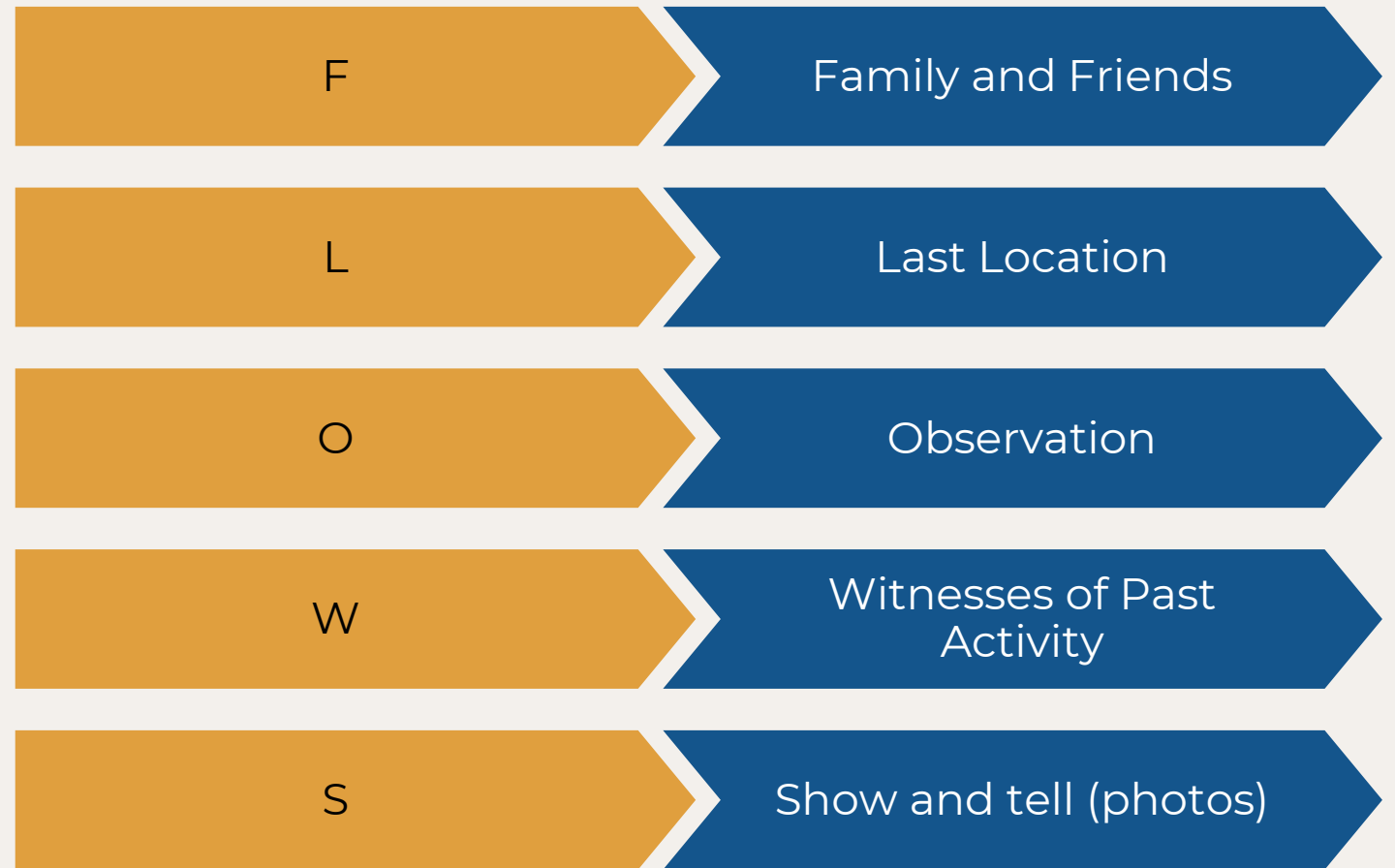
- Relatives/Siblings

See if anything has been seen or mentioned

- Neighbors/friends

sometime victims make unintentional disclosures

# Flow-your investigation flows where the child goes!





Get to know  
your school  
resource  
officer.

# Some Behaviors Sexual Abuse Victims May Exhibit

Express premature or inappropriate curiosity or understanding of sexual behavior

Start to display regressive behavior (e.g., wet or soil their pants, wet the bed, thumb-sucking)

Display inappropriate or aggressive seductive or sexual behavior with peers, teachers, or other adults (e.g., sucking) depressed, anxious, fearful, or depressed

Resist diaper changes or going to the bathroom

Use sexually explicit language or make sexually explicit drawing

Have eating disturbances (e.g., overeating or under-eating)

Masturbate compulsively • have sleep disturbances

Have poor hygiene or bathe excessively (nightmares, afraid to go to sleep, sleep long hours)

Abuse alcohol or drugs • be unable to concentrate • have school problems or have a significant change in school • lack of social skills

**Children  
are always  
communicating**



# How Trauma Can Affect Victims

## **COGNITIVE**

Slowed language development

Attention problems (ADD/ADHD) ·

Speech delay ·

Poor verbal memory/recall ·

Loss of brain matter/IQ SOCIAL ·

Aggression & violent outbursts ·

Poor self-control of emotion

- Can't modify behavior in response to social cues
- Social isolation—can't navigate friendship

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

· Poor social/emotional development

· Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, often "early initiation"

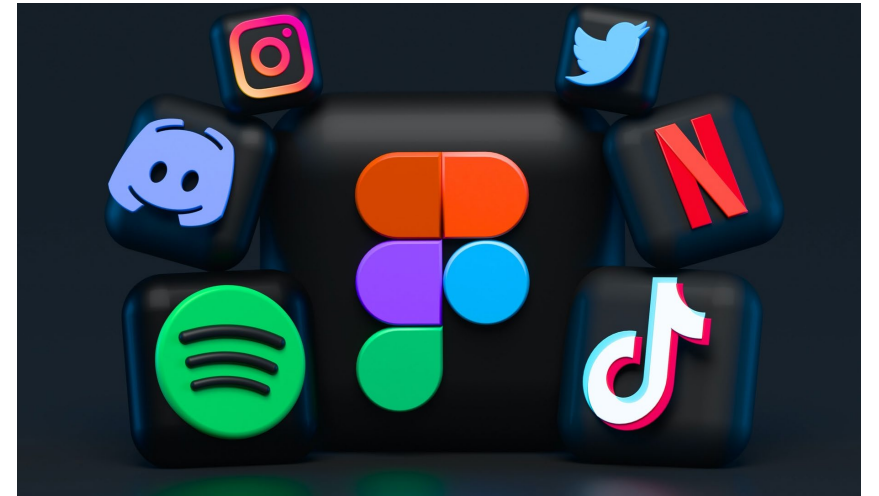
Adolescent & adult mental health disorders: Depression, suicide, dissociative disorder, borderline personality disorder,

## **PTSD**

Washington State FAMILY POLICY COUNCIL A Family, Community, State Partnership Families Thrive With Us [www.fpc.wa.gov](http://www.fpc.wa.gov)

# Victim may have used other ways to disclose

- Social Media
- Journal
- unintentionally to a friend or relative





Behavior

# EXAMPLE OF AN UNINTENTIONAL DISCLOSURE

FRIEND: "Hey let's go to your house and play!"

Victim: "No, I'd rather not!"

Friend: "Why not? You have all the cool games."

Victim: "My mom's boyfriend is there and he is a pervert."

Friend: "What does that mean?"

Victim: "Let's just say I'd rather not be around him."

# If you have DNA evidence, GET IT TESTED!

If there is a chance DNA evidence may be discovered on clothing, bed sheets, buccal swabs, STI's or sexual assault kits get it tested.



**MEETING  
WITH  
FAMILIES.**

# ENGAGE AND EXPLAIN

Who are you?

INTRODUCE  
YOURSELF

What is your  
role?

Why are you  
involved?

Best way to  
contact you.

Provide an open line  
of communication.

Explain the process

You do this for a living. This process may be fearful and threatening to the victim and family.

Introduce your team

Even if they are not with you, explain to the victim and family you will not be working alone.





**Preparing the  
parent/caregiver!**

Ask  
questions  
about your  
victim!



# **Establish The Relationship**

# Ask the Caregiver to explain interactions or ask indirect questions.

- Explain when you may have had to say something about their interaction.
- What good things do they say about each other?
- When they are angry, what do they say to or about each other?



# Information to Seek

- **Access**

How often and plausible was it for the accuse to have access to the victim?-- This gives the jury a window into what it was like being the victim.

- **Attitude**

What is the accused, victim and caretaker's family attitudes toward one another?--This may explain why victim was reluctant to disclose. Especially if accused is a beloved family member or friend.

- **Action**

What type of actions does accuse and victim engage in: good or bad.--This may reveal grooming behaviors or that the victim feels uncomfortable around accused.

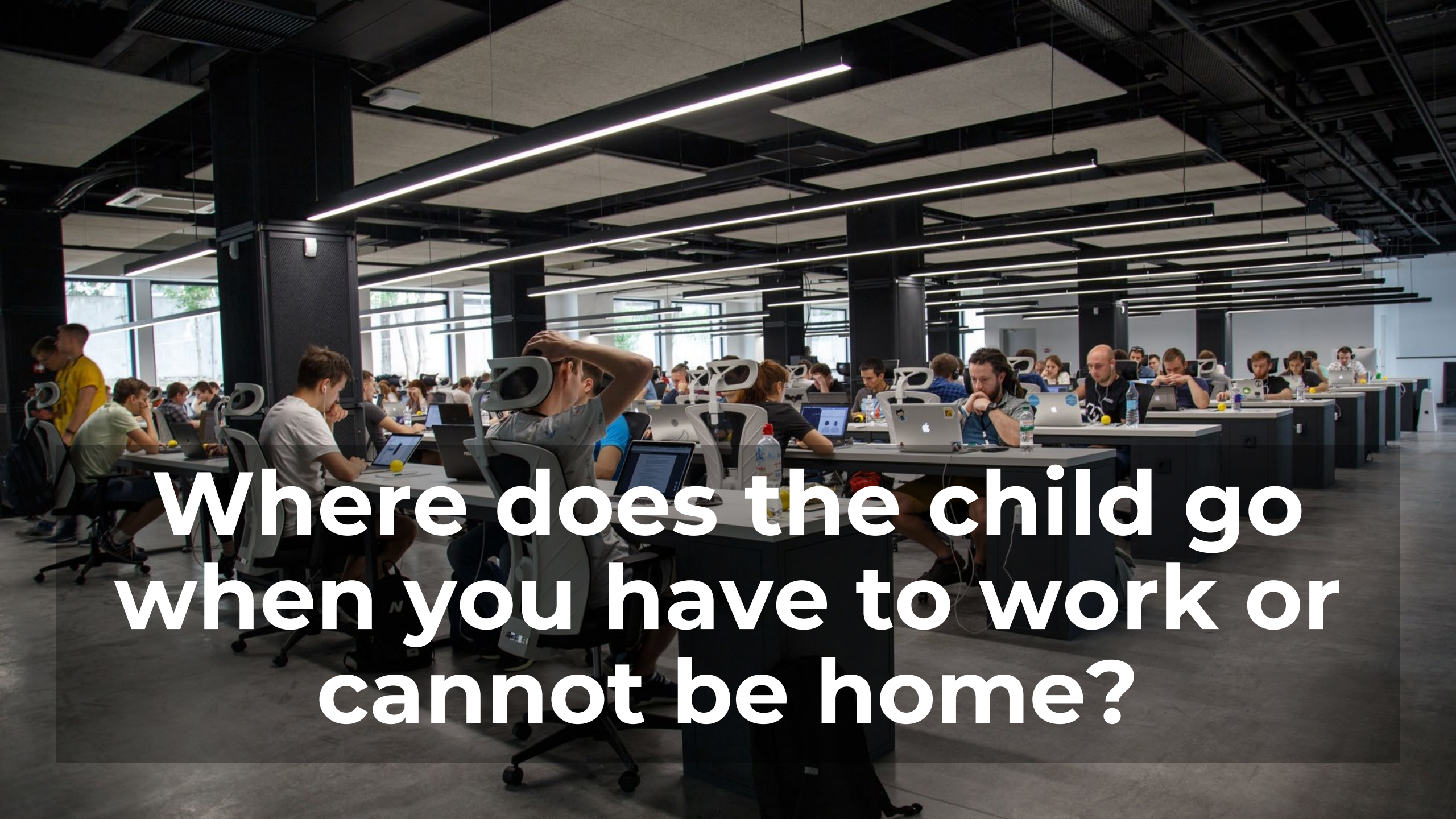




**What was the current accessibility status at the time of disclosure.**

# Some Questions to Consider

1. Has the accused had contact with victim or caregiver since disclosure?
2. Has the accuse attempted to make contact?
3. Has anyone questioned the victim about the disclosure?
4. Has the victim discuss the incident since the disclosure?



**Where does the child go  
when you have to work or  
cannot be home?**

# The Forensic Interview



# Thing We Can Do Before The Forensic Interview

- Contact Social Services

Alert Social services you are investigating a case and will need assistance. Ask if they have any information on family.

- Find out what school victim attends

If child is school age attempt to get school information

- Begin looking into accuser background

Find out if accuser is from area, has social media, or prior history of abuse

- Think about getting necessary warrants for photos and DNA

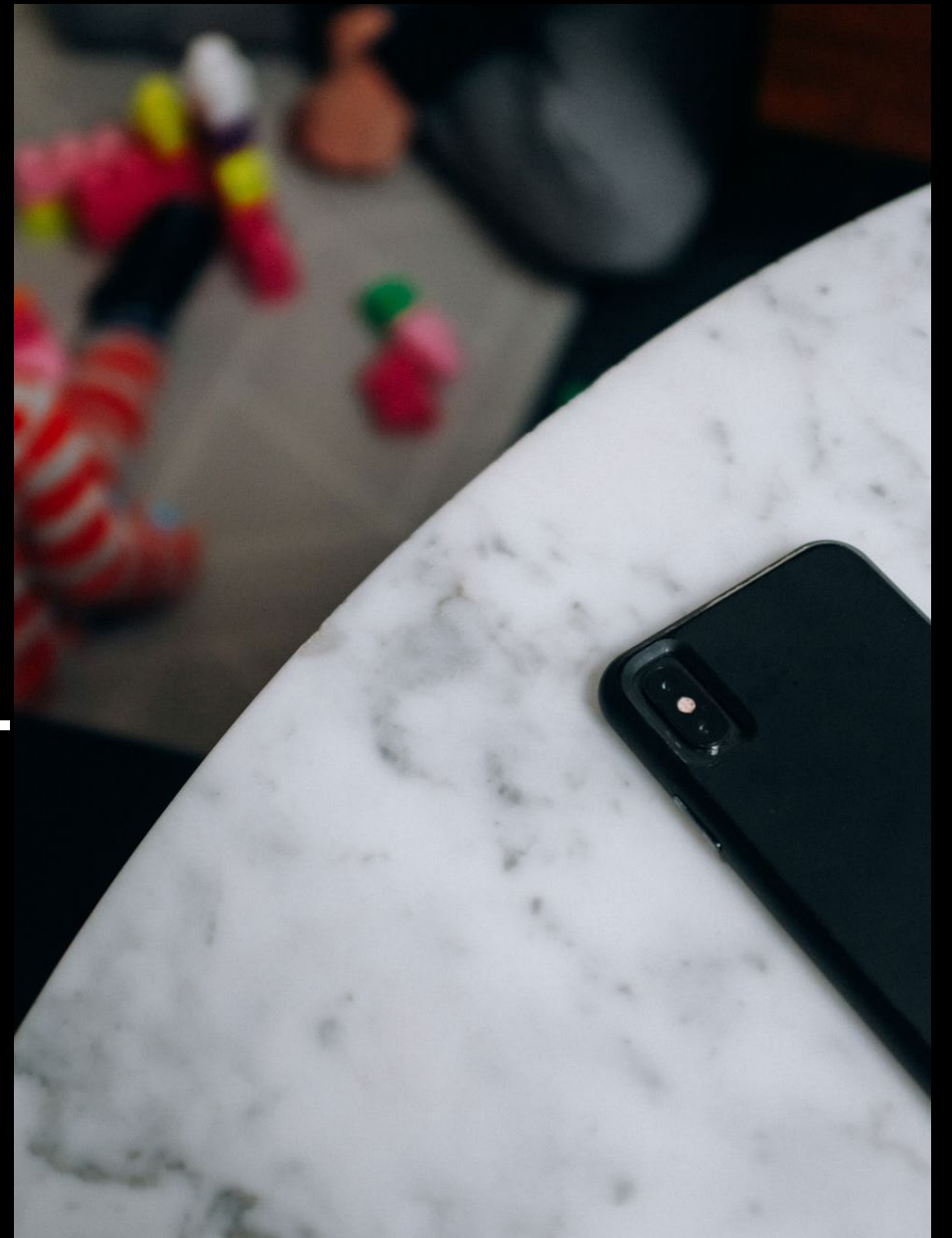
- Organize a file so any investigator can pick it up and continue where you left off---

ATTENTION!

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The forensic interview is the victim's account of what happened, **not proof that it did happen!**

DURING THE  
Forensic Interview-  
Put away  
distractions



# Important details

The forensic interview is to the multidisciplinary team what the surveillance video is to the robbery/assault detective!

1. Any item mentioned

2. Threats made

3. promises made

4. time of day

5. time of year/season

6. clothing

1. specific items mentioned: ie, lotion

2. Noises

3. others present at location?

4. any expression of emotion

5. questions

# If it is mentioned during forensic interview, you must investigate or collaborate it.

- **Date, time, location**

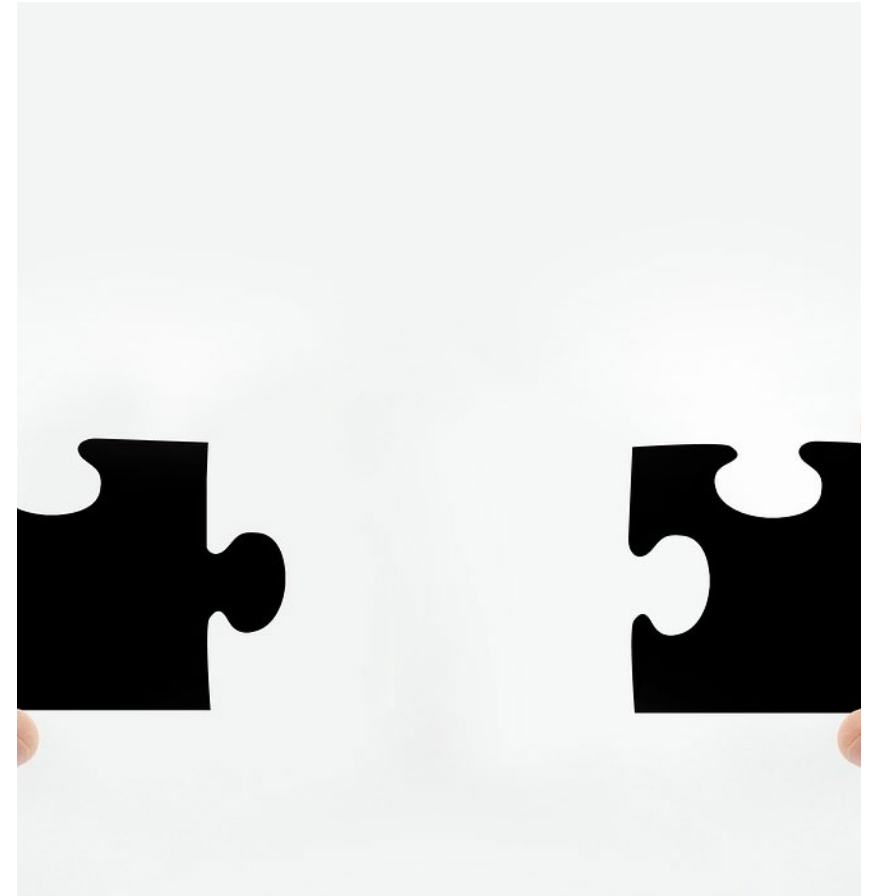
Was the victim or accused living or visiting location at or about the time of the alleged incident?

- **Items, witnesses**

Were there specific items the victim mentioned during the interview i.e. lotion, television, mirror, sex toy, siblings in another room

- **Statements or threats made**

If the victim mentioned accused made promises, threats, or other statements during interview make sure to put this in your report. You will want to question the accuse later about these statements.





# After the Forensic Interview

1. Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate
2. Was anything mentioned that needed to be collected from the incident location: ie: clothing, lotion, toys
3. obtain necessary warrants, seek out additional witnesses
4. contact accused



# Think like a defense attorney!

If you were defending the accused what questions would you ask?



**Possible  
Defenses--how  
will attorney  
fight my case?**

# Questions your investigation should answer?



## Jurors want to know:

- Why did the victim not disclose right away?
- Why did the victim disclose now?
- Why the victim disclose to someone other than caregiver?
- Why are there variations in the victim's disclosure?

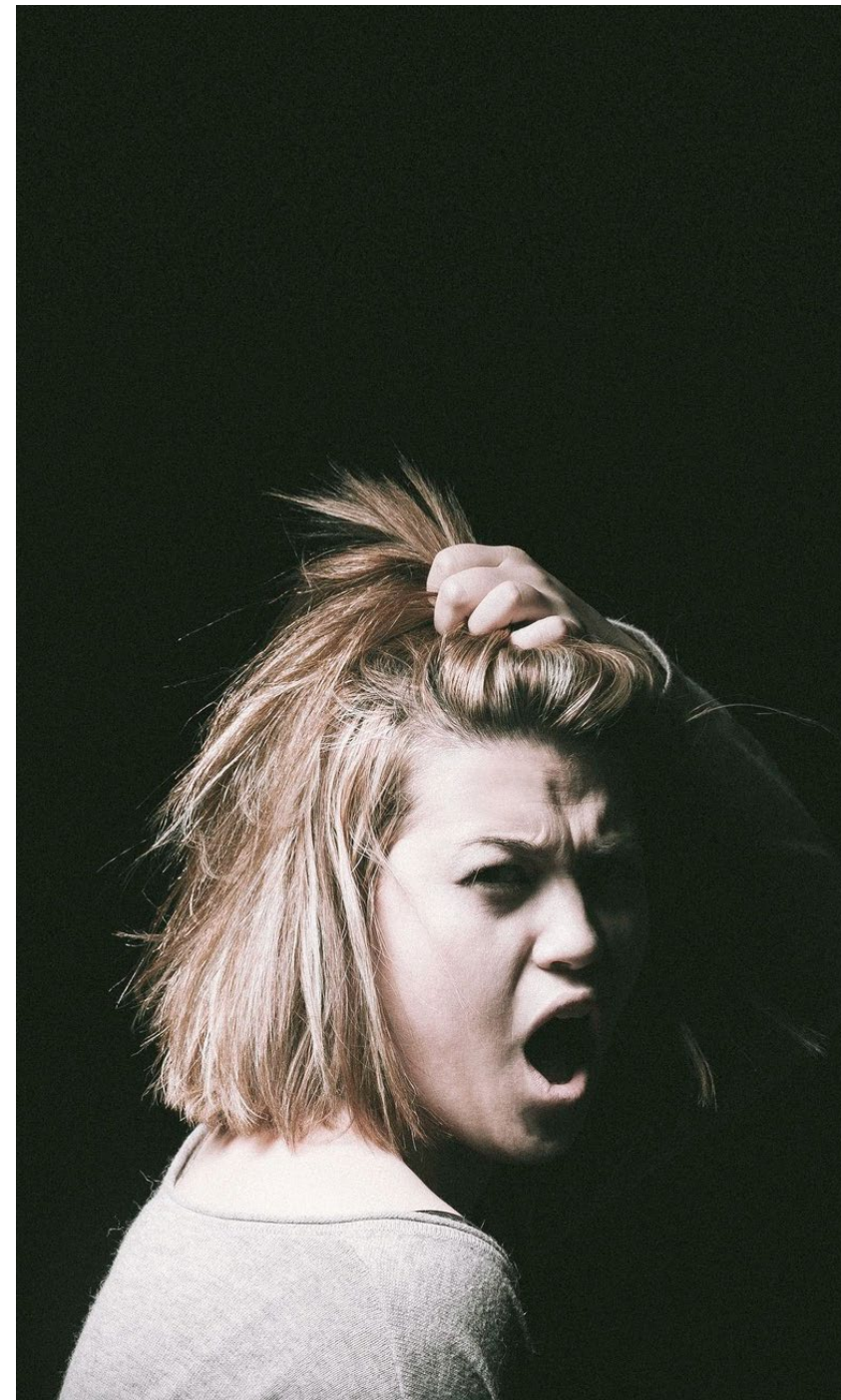
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Remember the jury is going to want a MOTIVE (WHY?)--If you do not give them one the defense attorney will!



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Child does  
not like  
accused.





**The child wants attention!**

**CALIFORNIA  
LAW**

# **Why Kids Make False Molestation Allegations**

**Legal  
Analysis**

SHOUSE CALIFORNIA  
**LAW GROUP**



**CALIFORNIA  
LAW**


**How to Win a "Child  
Molestation" Trial**

**SHOUSE CALIFORNIA  
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**Investigating the  
Accuser in a Child  
Molestation Case**

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Recantations!

# Reasons victim may recant

Do not automatically close case

- What has changed since initial outcry?
  - Was someone arrested?
  - Was someone deprived?
  - Did financial or living situation change?
  - Did caregiver blame of fault child?
  - Was child punished by family and friends?
- Maybe it did not happen!
- Social workers and victim advocates can assist with this information!



# The Suspect Interview

# Accused Behaviors in Child Sexual Abuse Cases

1. Overly Protective/Jealous
2. Shows favoritism
3. Inappropriate boundaries
4. Interested in who the child shares information with
5. Gives child gifts

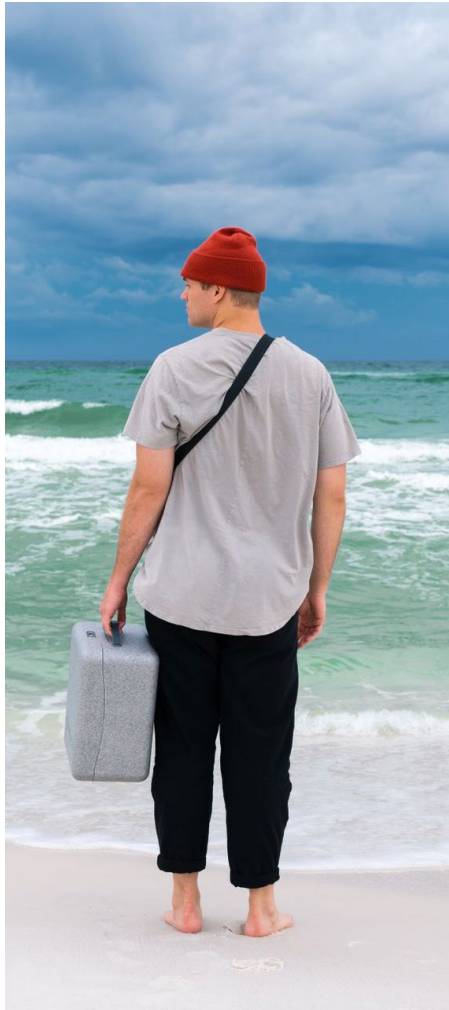
# The goal is to get suspect to talk

- 1 Focus on suspect relationship to victim
- 2 Don't seek confession, engage in conversation
- 3 Stay away from accusatory language
- 4 Ask Open ended questions
- 5 Record conversation instead of writing



**REMEMBER KEEP THE  
VICTIM THE CENTER OF  
YOUR INVESTIGATION!**

# SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER



1

RELATIONSHIP TO VICTIM

2

ACCESS TO VICTIM

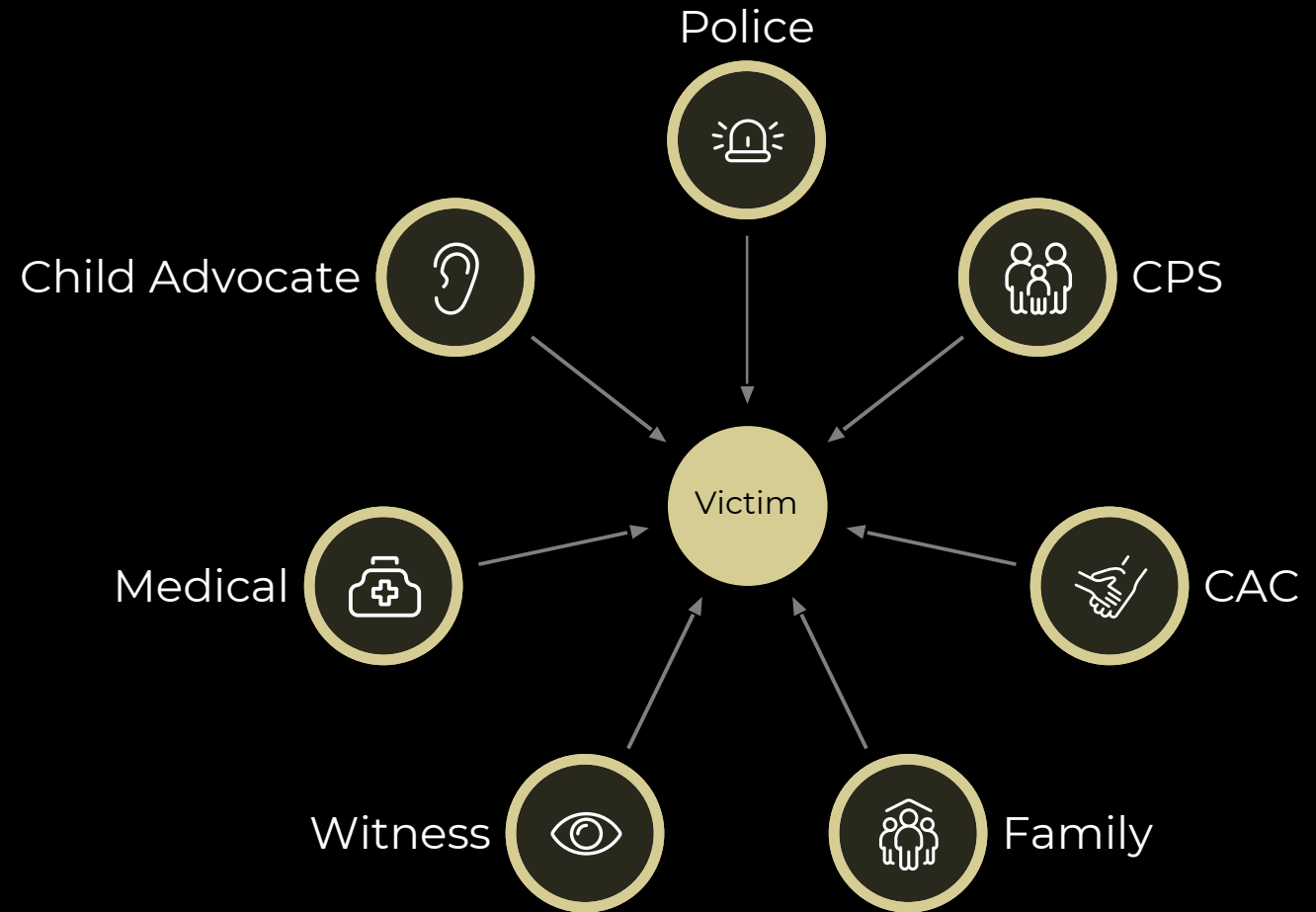
3

RELATIONSHIP WITH  
VICTIMS  
CAREGIVER/SIBLINGS

4

ACCUSED TRAVELS

# The investigation Model



# A.B.U.S.E





**Build**

Who  
can  
help  
me?



# Utilize Your Team





**Show us  
your work!**

# A.B.U.S.E



# Thank You

Ret. Detective Kevin

[McNeiltashanna13@thetwelveproject.com](mailto:McNeiltashanna13@thetwelveproject.com)



# CONTACT US



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