

Where healing begins for abused children

**SHE SAYS IT DIDN'T REALLY HAPPEN: NOW WHAT?  
WHEN A CHILD RECANTS ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

Carrie Paschall, Director of Forensic Services  
Dallas Children's Advocacy Center

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

---



Where healing begins for abused children

**Financial Disclosure**

**I have no financial relationships to disclose**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Where healing begins for abused children

**Course Objectives**

- How common is recantation?
- Why do recants happen?
- When do you conduct a second interview?
- How do you conduct a second interview?
- Should you and can you proceed with prosecution?

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

Remember.....



**Disclosure is a process  
not an event**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Remember what the child is experiencing...



**"S.H.E.D.R."**

- Secrecy
- Helplessness
- Entrapment
- Delayed, conflicted and sometimes unconvincing disclosure
- Retraction**

*(The Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome by Roland Summit, 1983)*

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

Remember the process of disclosure...



- Denial
- Tentative
- Active
- Recantation/Retraction**
- Reaffirmation

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How common is recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

---

In 116 confirmed cases of sexual abuse, 22% retracted or recanted the allegations. Of that 22%, 93% eventually reaffirmed the abuse.

*(Sorenson & Snow 1991)*

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How common is recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

---

“With respect to recantation, a study examining over 250 substantiated cases of sexual abuse in dependency court found that about **a fourth of the children recanted at some point** and that recantations were more likely if the child was abused by a **member of his household**, if the non-perpetrator **parent expressed disbelief** or was otherwise unsupportive of the allegations, and if the child was **10 years of age or younger**” *(Malloy et al., 2007)*

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**Why do recants happen?**



Where healing begins for abused children

---

- Secrecy
- Societal Attitudes
  - Recantations often used to support the assertion that children do make up stories of abuse
- Lack of support by the non-offending parent
- Inability to return home
- Initiation of criminal proceedings against a loved one
- Direct or indirect pressure by family
- Child and family interactions with professionals

*(Burkhart, 1999)*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Why do recants happen?**



Where healing begins for abused children

---

- "A number of studies indicate that closer relationships are associated with longer delays and lower disclosure rates."  
*(London, Bruck, Wright & Ceci, 2008, p. 37)*
- "Parentally abused children with low levels of family support will exhibit lower disclosure rates and higher recantation rates than other abuse victims."  
*(London et al, 2008, p. 38; see Elliott & Briere, 1994; Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Lippert, Cross, Jones, & Walsh, 2009; Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007)*

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**Can we avoid recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

---

The simple answer and realistic answer is

**No**

Remember it is part of the sexual abuse process of disclosure, and we should not be surprised when it happens.

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**Can we minimize the likelihood of recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

---

**YES!!!!**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**How do we minimize the likelihood of recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Assess the case for recantation risk factors:
  - Child's relationship to offender
  - Family's response after disclosure
  - Child's placement after disclosure
  - Evidence of direct pressure
  - Evidence of negative reaction to family/criminal justice system
  - Media coverage

*(Marx)*

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How do we minimize the likelihood of recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Find physically and emotionally protective environments
  - "a trend indicated that children initially placed into foster care were somewhat less likely to recant than children who remained with a family member"  
(Malloy, Lynn, & Quin, 2007)
  - No contact orders
- Support services for everyone involved.  
(Burkhart, 1999)

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How do we minimize the likelihood of recantation?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Awareness and education for child abuse professionals
- Provide evidence of the child's credibility
- Reduce trial stress and trauma to the child
- Protect the initial interview  
(Burkhart, 1999)

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**Protecting the Initial Interview**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Use a research based interview protocol
- Narrative techniques
- Allowing and instructing for "I don't know" and "I don't remember"
- Early disclosures need to be well documented. Video recorded and notes made about demeanor and any emotions displayed by the child

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**Protecting the Initial Interview**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Thorough questioning about outcry reactions, threats etc. and pressure to keep abuse a secret
- Invite correction
  - "If a child subsequently recants abuse, the likelihood that the recantation is true or false can be assessed in light of the motivations and pressure that the child disclosed (*Lyon & Ahern*)

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**What do we do when we find out about a recant?**



Where healing begins for abused children

**The recant needs to be investigated!**

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How do we investigate the recant?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Who is the "notifier?"
- Ask for the exact words used by the child.
- What was the child's demeanor at the time of the recant?
- What were the circumstances immediately prior to the recant?
- What was the notifier's conduct after recant?
- Anyone else present?
- Interview other witnesses who may have knowledge of the pressure exerted on child.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Do we conduct a second interview?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Every case is different
- Bring team members together to discuss (including prosecutor)
- Thoroughly evaluate all aspects of the case including alternative hypotheses

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How does the interviewer prepare?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Use the same interviewer that conducted the original forensic interview
- Watch original interview
- Meet with team members to find out what has happened since the first interview
- Consider modifying your interview protocol to some extent

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How do you conduct a “recant” interview?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Use a brief introduction
- On camera, address that a previous interview was conducted
- Texas interviewers *must* conduct truth/lie scenario in each interview
- Don't ask “What did you come to talk about today?”

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How do you conduct a “recant” interview?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- “Although there is no research examining how recanting children can best be interviewed, or experience suggests that the same inquiries into the child's feelings and motivations of others can be explored” (Lyon & Ahern)
- Begin with what happened since the first interview. In detail.
  - “Tell me what happened when you left here the first time.”
    - Get parents / caregiver's reactions to the first interview
  - “Who brought you to the first interview? Who brought you today?”

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**How do you conduct a “recant” interview?**



Where healing begins for abused children

- Discuss placements since first interview
- Discuss family support or lack thereof
- Gets parents / caregiver's reactions/feelings toward the perpetrator
  - *What has X said about Y?*
- Review details from child's first interview but be careful
- Address the concerning details given in first interview
- Ask child hypothetical reasons a child might recant

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### Case Study of 12 yo. Anaya



- Lived with Mom and BF and BF's Brother
- BF caught her smoking weed
- BF told her a boy liked her (letters)
- BF told her she needed sexual experience
- Man (JR) wanted pics (cell phone)
- Closet sex with "JR"
- Mom (very appropriate) but tipped off BF
- BF and Brother moved out-trashed apt.
- PD searched for cell phone—missing
- Mom said BF must've taken it
- Letters found

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Addendum



- Alona eventually reaffirmed after her and mom moved back in with AP in NY and he abused mom
- Alona said that she recanted because of both direct and indirect pressures put on her by mom's reactions
- Alona is now 19 yo. and has a child of her own and did not want to go through a trial
- Anthony plead guilty and got 2 years TDC

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Questions

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---