

The Reparation Project

Therapeutic Reparation for Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors Part 6 of 6

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One way to make amends after taking accountability is to do a “Reparation Project”. The youth with PSB must put forth a little bit of time, a little bit of effort and a little bit of money (resources). All children or teens need guidance, support and coaching by their caregivers so that the reparation project is appropriate and helpful to all involved. The youth with PSB is willing to participate and is reassured that the chosen project will be realistic and match the youth’s age, development and cognitive abilities. The **time** required would be approximately 8 to 10 hours total for an older teen, perhaps 4 to 6 hours for a younger teen. The time included can be the time earning the money, finding materials, making the project or delivering the reparation project.

Effort is required. The youth must DO something to help the child(ren) they abused. Many youth are used to “going without” things and this does not impact them positively on an emotional level. Actually doing something enables the youth to feel proud for their efforts such as building, creating or making something or participating in activity, etc. This is different than simply giving up privileges or grudgingly buying a gift with money. The project will take some effort in order for it to have meaning and be symbolic of the youth ‘working’ to make amends but not so severe that the youth with PSB then becomes resentful and feels punished.

Any **expense** should be 100% earned or compensated by the youth. If the youth does not have a source of income, the youth could give up a planned activity such as summer camp and use that money for the project. Or find relatives, churches, or friends to give the youth a temporary job to complete chores or handyman projects. If the youth is not able to obtain money for the reparation project, they should compensate by spending extra time and effort on the project. Do not include traditional or routine chores around the house to earn money for this project. This will feel more like punishment of extra chores and hard labor instead of “doing something positive” as a gift to help the abused child and show true remorse. In summary, a 7 year old’s project would be much different than a 17 year old’s project.

The Final Decision

The reparation project is agreed upon **equally** by 3 parties- the receiver of the project, the youth with PSB and the caregivers. The caregivers and therapists will make sure the project is reasonable, practical and attainable. A realistic time frame is established and a deadline is set. The provider/team leader identified when first discussing Reparation will encourage all parties to complete the necessary steps and make sure this special part of treatment happens.

Examples of Reparation Projects

1. Taking the abused child/sibling to zoo on family outing and buying a gift at the gift shop.
2. Taking the abused child/sibling to Build a Bear Workshop, and both parties wishing for healthy boundaries on the heart that is put into the bear.
3. Building a shadow box for the abused child/sibling's sports ribbons or medals.
4. Making a wooden shelf or doll house for the child/sibling.
5. Earning money and donating it to a local house of worship and speaking with clergy about behavior or feelings of remorse.
6. Earning money and donating it to local organization that is meaningful to the abused child/sibling or specifically requested by the abused child/sibling such as girl scouts, humane society or YMCA, etc.
7. Assisting the abused child/sibling in baking items for a school carnival and bake sale or helping them complete a large school project.
8. Earning money and donating it to child sexual abuse prevention programs such as the local Child Advocacy Center, child abuse prevention month in April or Darkness 2 Light.
9. Participating in a charitable activity in honor of the child who was abused. Examples are: local child abuse prevention effort of planting pinwheels, 5K races, serving food at a homeless shelter or volunteer work at a food bank.

Preparing the Abused Child for Reparation

Before a reparation project is presented to a child who was sexually abused, they must have a therapist to help them receive the project and make sense of the concept. The emotional and safety needs of the child who was abused is always the guideline for making decisions. A therapist who specializes in sexual abuse can expertly offer advice on how, when and where to deliver the reparation activities. Delivery of reparation may be done in writing, in person, or in joint sessions with therapists. The mood of the delivery sessions is light, helpful and encouraging. The presentation of the activity is done casually, but ceremoniously. The amount of sessions or meetings needed is "however many it takes" to achieve the desired results. If the child who was abused is not available, a reparation activity could be presented "by proxy" to other positive adults such as forensic case workers, probation officers, therapist for the abused child, clergy or other family members.

Delivery of the Reparation Project

If presented in person, a family session is recommended for best results. The child who was abused generally picks the location and where people will sit in the room. In the cases of sibling sexual abuse, the parents are sitting with the child who was abused and verbally supportive of the youth with PSB. The therapist will be there to sit next to the youth with PSB. This is the one specific time in which it will be obvious that the caregivers are showing more support for the child or youth who was abused. If the project is an activity outside the office, then a family session is done before or after the activity, and possibly both. The caregivers are there to observe and assist BOTH children in having a meaningful exchange, while maintaining the required level of supervision. Refer to Part 1 “Understanding Reparation” for more details on the dos and don’ts of delivering reparation activities, including reparation projects.

Try to prevent problems

It is up to the therapists to adequately prepare all parties so the reparation activity is delivered appropriately. The following is a list of items to consider when making plans, the reparation activity will **NOT**:

- Emotionally manipulate or cause more harm to the abused child.
- Cause flashbacks or remind the abused child of the abuse in any way.
- Be used to “get revenge” against the youth with PSB.
- Be used for blackmail or extortion against the youth with PSB.
- If these or other unhealthy dynamics appear, the therapist must overtly acknowledge them and collaborate with caregivers to make improvements. The project will be put on hold until a positive exchange between the children is possible.

A Balanced Family

The caregivers must be verbally committed to the reparation project since they will help the youth with PSB complete the project at home. The adults are the ones who are reminding the youth with PSB to complete his/her tasks, not the child who was abused. It will be up to the caregivers to communicate with the therapists and seek assistance in order to avoid a one up/one down dynamic in the family. For example, if the child or teen with PSB is asked to do favors or chores for the abused child. This is the same dynamic involved in the original abuse, just changing the roles and is a coercive action against the youth with PSB. This will continue a perpetual up and down cycle with the children “keeping score” and an atmosphere in the family that does not reinstate balance. If the reparation project will include the two children spending time together working on a project, there must be adequate supervision and plans for addressing passive aggressive comments from either the abused child or the youth with PSB. The caregivers will need support, patience and time to persist with leading and managing the youth with PSB to complete the project in a timely manner.

Additional resources and articles that are intended to accompany this article available on www.sheryloverby.com

- Part 1 Understanding Reparation
- Part 2 Helping Youth take Accountability
- Part 3 Accountability Family Session
- Part 4 Caregiver Letter of Praise and Support
- Part 5 Apology Letters

Sources:

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2. A Collaborative Approach For Family Reconciliation And Reunification With Youth Who Have Caused Sexual Harm by Joann Schladale MS LMFT
<http://resourcesforresolvingviolence.com/publication3.pdf>
3. [NCSBY website, section on reunification. http://www.ncsby.org/content/reunification](http://www.ncsby.org/content/reunification)
4. OU Health and Sciences Center, CBT PSB training, helping caregivers write letters of support and encouragement, Carrie Swisher and Jane Silvosky.
5. Considering Family Reconnection and Reunification after Child Sexual Abuse: A Road Map for Advocates and Service Providers. <https://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-guides/considering-family-reconnection-and-reunification-after-child>