

Example Workshop Submission

Title of Presentation: Exploration of the Concept of Forgiveness among Female Incest Survivors

Presentation Track: Direct Practice

Audience: Social Workers; Students; Clergy; Human Services Workers

Content Level: Intermediate

Presentation Abstract:

The use of therapeutic forgiveness with incest survivors is a relatively new area of inquiry. Many studies have revealed promising results, including improvement of survivors' physical and mental health and personal relationships. However, many survivors still shun the concept. An increased understanding is needed of survivors' personal conceptualizations of forgiveness.

Presentation Description:

Sexual abuse can be a devastating crime to endure. The effects may be severe and long-lasting, with the effects of incest being potentially more damaging than other forms of sexual abuse (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Gil, 1991). Multiple therapies and coping strategies have been utilized in attempts to address the crimes' impact upon survivors, but one therapeutic intervention whose value is just recently coming to into clinical and scholarly view is that of forgiveness.

There have been a number of studies that have utilized forgiveness with a variety of violated individuals (e.g. Al-Mabuk, Enright, Cardis, 1995; Eastin, 1989; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl & Enright, 1993; Huang, 1992; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Moon, 1989; Phillipps & Osborne, 1989; Wilson, 1994) but only a handful that have examined or utilized forgiveness with survivors of sexual abuse (Eastin, 1989; Freedman & Enright, 1996, Freedman, 1999; Holeman, 1994; Holeman & Myers, 1998; Moon, 1989; Wilson, 1994). However, studies such as these and others have yielded encouraging results, not only that forgiveness can be successfully learned and applied to such personal situations, but also that other aspects of forgivers' personal health may improve as well, such as decreases in depression and anxiety, increases in self-esteem

and hope, etc. (e.g. Freedman & Enright, 1996, Hebl & Enright, 1993; Huang, 1992; Phillipps & Osborne, 1989).

Furthermore, successful forgiveness work by sexual abuse survivors may serve to not only increase the health of the individual survivors, but also to potentially effect the health and functioning of the survivors' familial relationships, either current family and/or family-of-origin (Elridge & Still, 1995; Freedman, 1999; Holeman & Myers, 1998; Morris, 1998). However, it is crucial that no one be forced or pressured into forgiving someone who has hurt him/her. If forgiveness is done at all, it should be by the personal choice of the survivor, and in his/her own time (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Smedes, 1996; Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990).

Research in this area thus far has largely focused on utilizing predetermined, scholarly definitions of forgiveness with subjects. However, many people shun the concept of forgiveness altogether based on their own definition of or previous negative experience with it. If the utilization of therapeutic forgiveness is to be considered more widely by incest survivors, one must explore how survivors themselves personally conceptualize forgiveness, what role, if any, it has played in their lives to this point, any attempts made to use it in the past, and perceived results. This may serve to form a more solid understanding for therapists and church leaders to enter such discussions with such survivors. This investigator is currently in the process of conducting a qualitative study to explore these issues. Results, therefore, are forthcoming.

Learning Objectives:

After completing this training, participants will be able to:

1. Summarize key findings from past forgiveness research, and articulate frequently-occurring variables in successful forgiveness interventions
2. Articulate several areas of an abuse survivor's life that may be effected by forgiveness
3. Identify 2-3 implications of the material from this presentation for therapeutic intervention which include forgiveness

Additional Examples of Learning Objectives

After completing this training, participants will be able to:

1. Identify 2-3 foundational principles which form the basis of restorative justice.

2. Articulate 4-5 approaches and strategies currently employed by social work administrators for integrating spirituality in the workplace.
3. Describe how to ethically address spirituality with clients following the NASW professional standards for ethical practice.
4. Define the concepts of burnout, compassion fatigue, and stress, and recognize 2-3 symptoms for each.