



Building a protective community for all children and adolescents

Best practices in sexual abuse prevention and
intervention



Presented by Jessica Martin, Project Manager and Trainer at Marie-Vincent
February 25, 2025

Our mission



Marie-Vincent supports children and youth who experience of sexual abuse by providing them with the services they need under one roof, in collaboration with our partners. We contribute to abuse prevention through education and awareness initiatives and by supporting children presenting problematic sexual behavior.



"When I arrived here, my heart was closed off. I was filled with sadness and anger. But now, there's an opening around my heart. My heart is happy."

Learning objectives

By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Better understand the problem of child sexual abuse and the importance of prevention through sexuality education and promoting healthy, equal relationships.
- Recognize the multiple consequences of childhood sexual abuse.
- Understand the specialized intervention model for sexual abuse developed by Marie-Vincent.
- Become aware of the impact of various legal proceedings on children and their families, and the importance of preventing secondary victimization

Presentation outline



1. The issue of sexual abuse against children and adolescents
2. Best practices in preventing sexual abuse
3. Foundations of the specialized sexual abuse intervention program
4. Empowering the child

1. The issue of sexual abuse against children and adolescents

Definition of sexual abuse

- **An act of a sexual nature, with or without physical contact, committed by an individual without the consent of the person involved or, in some cases—particularly with children—through emotional manipulation or blackmail.**
- An act intended to impose one's will on another person for personal gratification, through abuse of power and the use of force or coercion, or implicit or explicit threats.
- An action that violates fundamental rights, including physical and psychological integrity and personal security.

(Government of Quebec, 2008)

Sexual abuse against children and adolescents

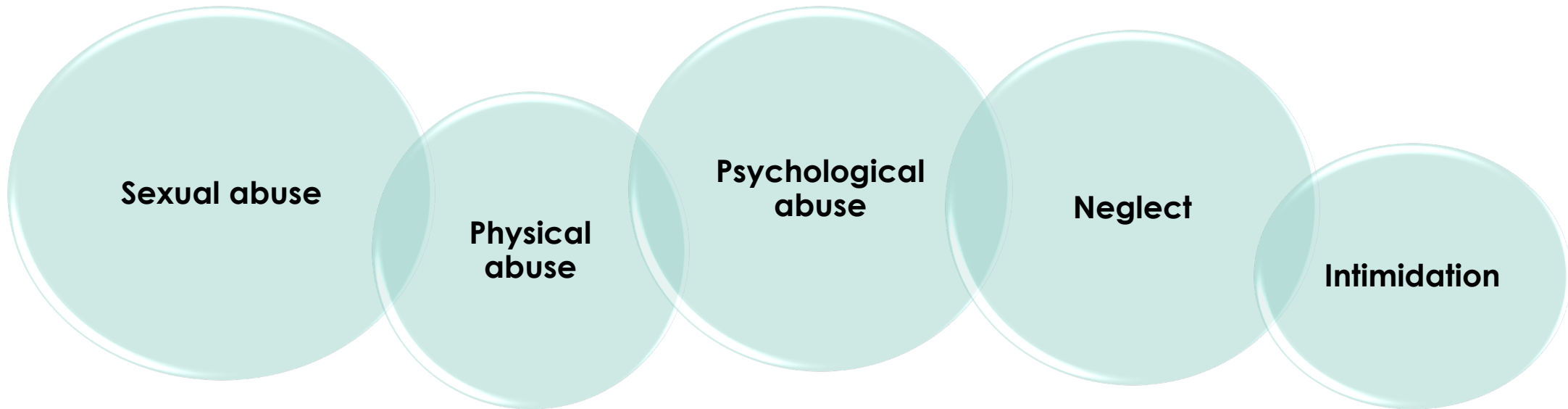


- Scope of the issue
- Prevalence
- Disclosure and reportings

(Bustamante et al., 2019; Collin-Vézina, 2019; Cotter, 2021; Québec Ministry of Public Security, 2019)

Polyvictimization

The young person experiences **more than one form** of maltreatment during childhood, either simultaneously or one after the other.



54% of young people monitored by Québec's youth protection services report having experienced at least four forms of maltreatment.

(Cyr et al., 2012)



Potential consequences associated with sexual abuse

The challenges related to SA appear along a continuum.



(Cohen et al., 2006)

What is resilience?



Positive adaptation despite
adverse life experiences

(Hébert et al., 2021; Jean Thorn et al., 2022; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000)

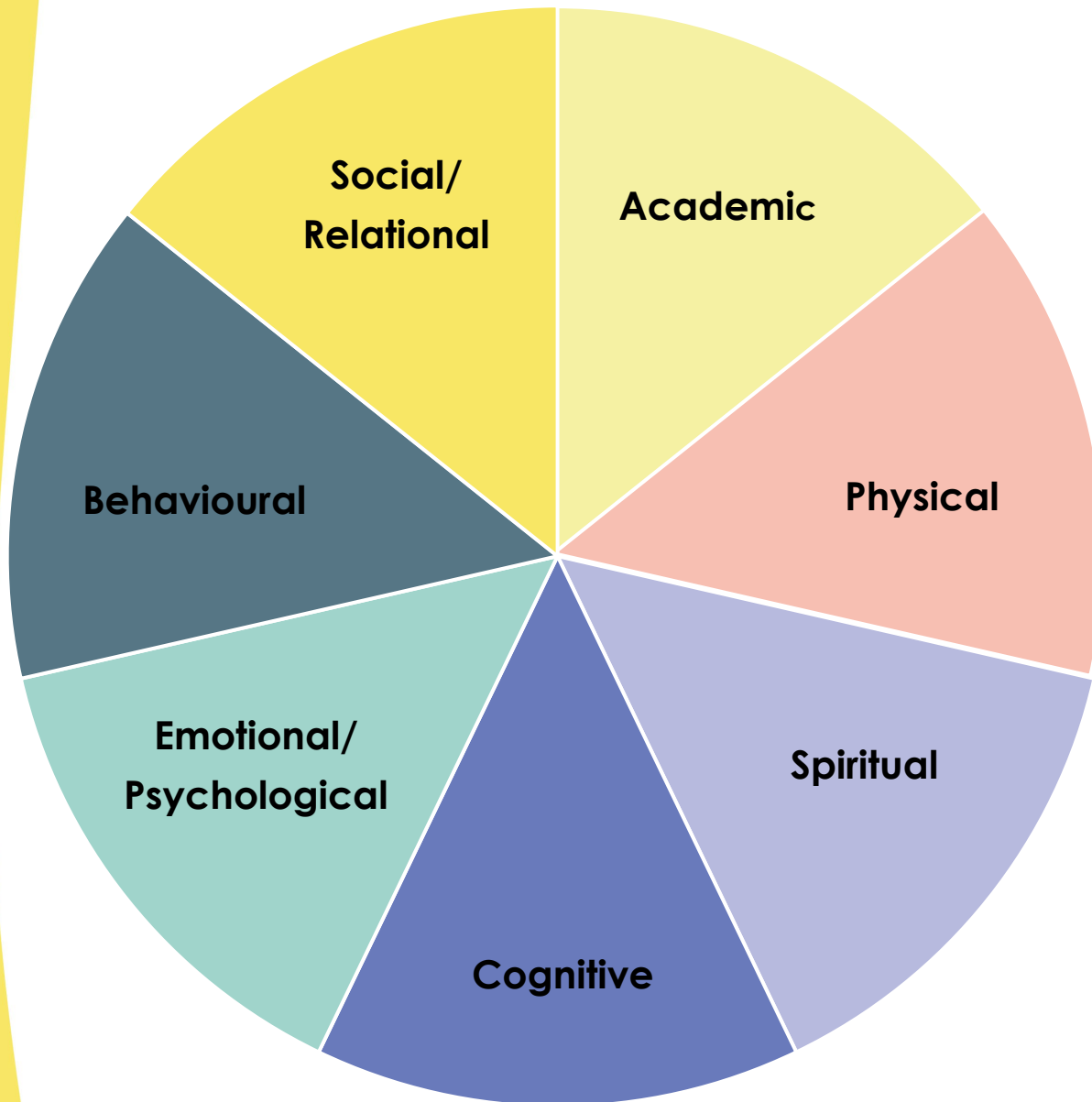
Factors explaining the absence of symptoms in youth who have experienced SA

Approximately 1/3 of children and adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse are asymptomatic

(Collin-Vézina et al., 2011; Daigneault et al., 2007; Hébert et al., 2006).

- Use of **effective coping strategies** and numerous internal and external **resources** (Marriott et al, 2014)
- **Avoidance** of SA, which masks the presence of difficulties (Hébert, 2011)
- **Latent effect** (deterioration occurring in 10-20% of youth, 12 to 18 months later) (Finkelhor and Berliner, 1995; Mannarino et al., 1991).
- **Sensitivity of research measurement instruments** administered to youth (Martin et al, 2010)

Areas that may be impacted by SA



(Wolfe, 2007; Hébert, 2011)

Consequences for the child's loved ones: a shockwave for everyone

- Feeling like a bomb has exploded
- State of shock, disbelief, and loss of bearings
- Sense of surrealism and confusion experienced by loved ones
- Survival instincts kick in



(Cyr et al., 2012)

Why engage in prevention?

Because :

- Children are particularly vulnerable to SA.
- The majority of children (82%) know the person who abused them (Québec Ministry of Public Security, 2021).
- SA is difficult to prove, as there are often no witnesses or visible signs of the abuse.
- Apart from a child's disclosure, there is no explicit indicator that can confirm with absolute certainty whether a child has experienced SA.
- Children's disclosures about SA are frequently met with doubt.

2. Best practices in preventing sexual abuse

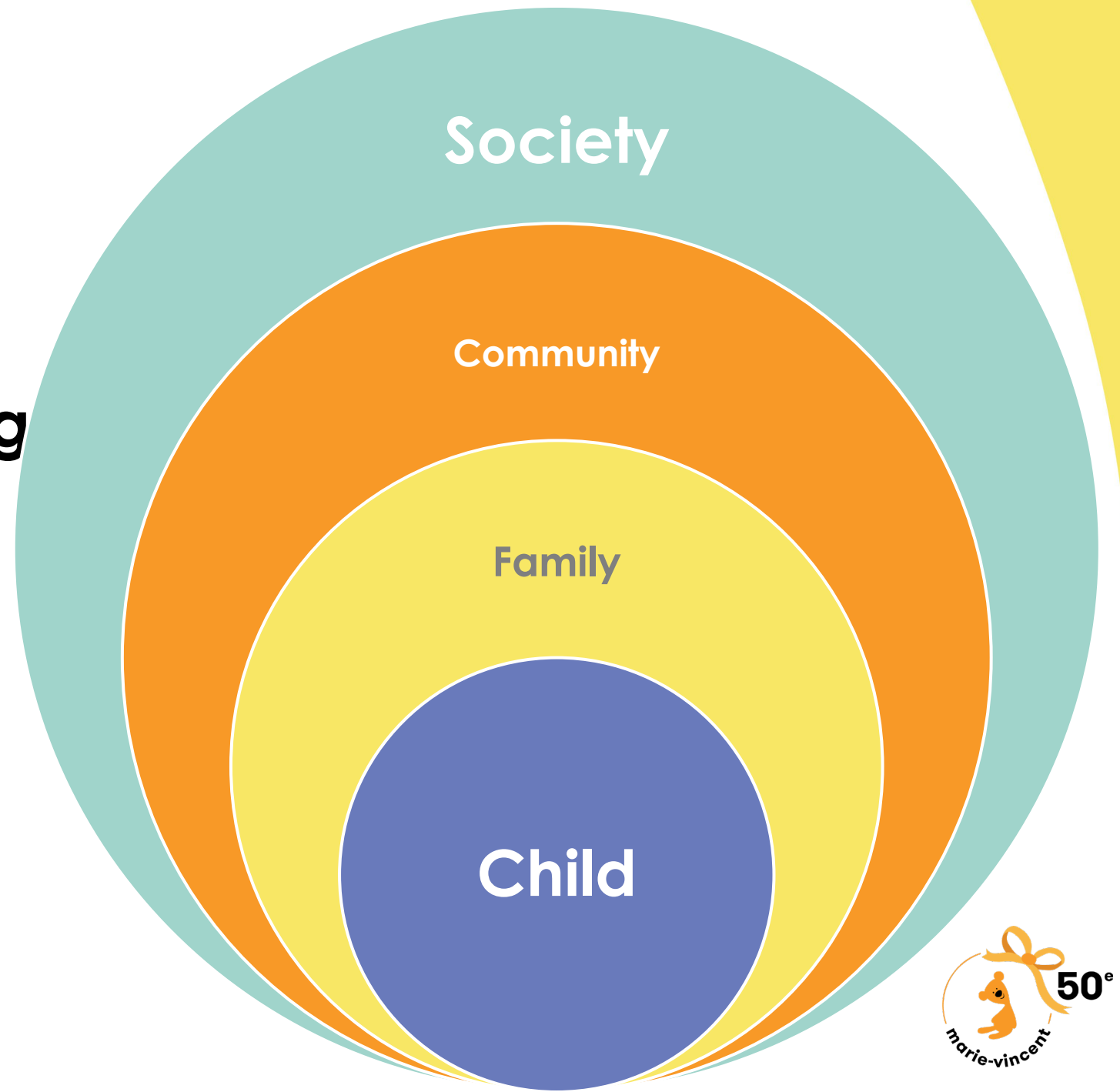


Development of prevention programs at Marie-Vincent

1. Needs analysis in the field and literature review
2. Development of an action plan
3. Creation of tools and training programs
4. Pilot implementation
5. Assessment by the Marie-Vincent Interuniversity Research Chair on Child Sexual Abuse

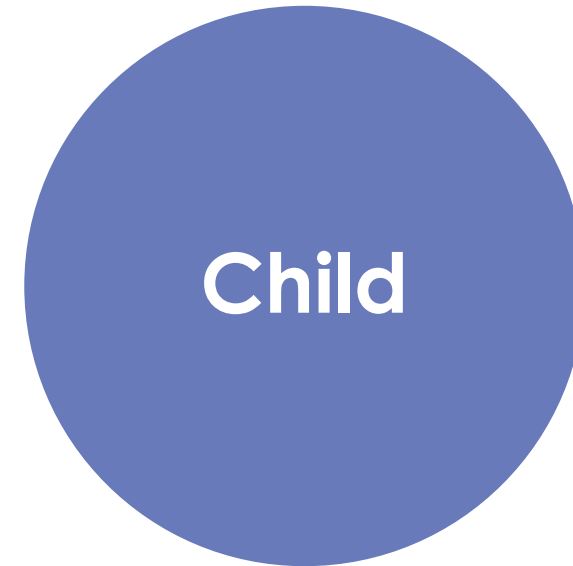
Two essential pillars:
sexuality education
and the promotion
of healthy and
equal relationships

The ecosystemic approach to preventing sexual abuse



Increasing the child's personal safety and giving them the tools to support their peers

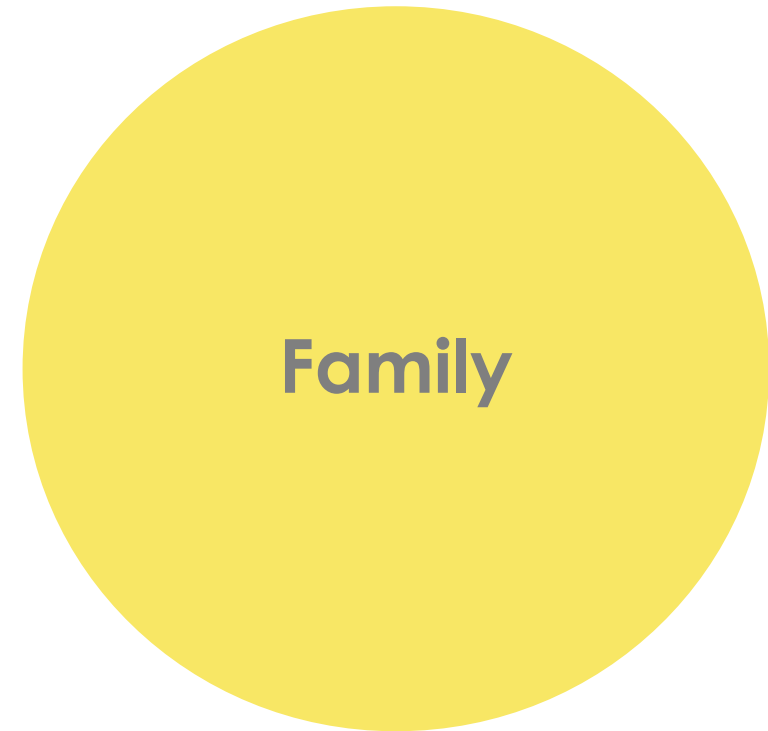
- Teaching protection skills
- Helping children recognize risky situations and perpetrator tactics
- Emphasizing the importance of disclosure
- Removing responsibility from the child
- Informing children about their rights



(Bergheul and Fernet, 2018; Bergeron and Hébert, 2012)

Raising awareness among loved ones about their role in preventing SA

- Informing loved ones about the problem of child sexual abuse
- Involving them in sexuality education and the promotion of healthy and equal relationships
- Developing their ability to support their child in situations of SA or problematic sexual behaviors (PSB)



(Kaufman et al.,2019; Rudolph and Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018)

Training for professionals who work with children

- Developing knowledge about the issue of child sexual abuse
- Raising awareness of their role in prevention by focusing on sexuality education and the promotion of healthy and equal relationships
- Strengthening their ability to identify risky situations and intervene in cases of disclosure

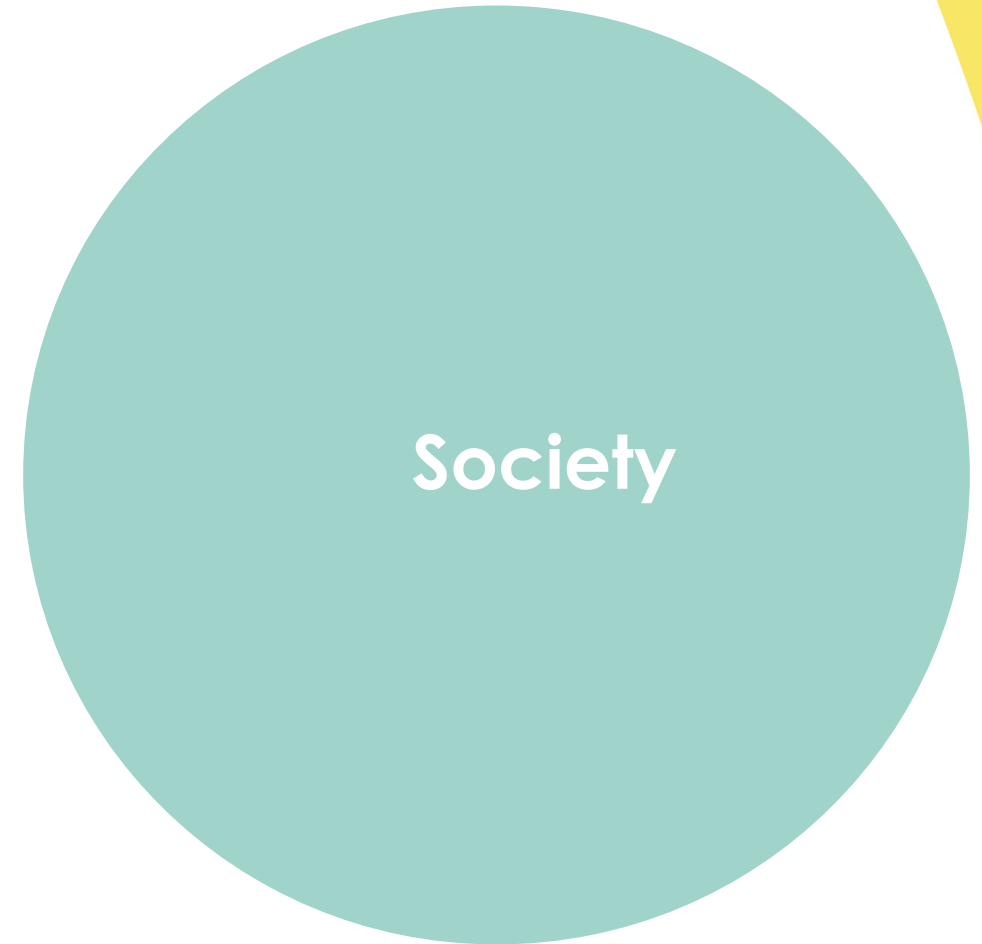


Community

(Reinhgold et al, 2015; Topping and Barron, 2009)

Raising public awareness and promoting social change

- Encouraging social norms that foster zero tolerance for SA
- Promoting gender equality in relationships
- Creating safe living environments
- Focusing on developing social skills in youth



(INSPQ, 2018)

Persistent misconceptions and lack of knowledge about sexuality education and sexual abuse prevention

- Myths about sexuality education:
"It will break their innocence, give them ideas...".
- Lack of knowledge about psychosexual development and the misconception that adult sexuality is the same as childhood sexuality.
- Personal beliefs and experiences of adults.
- Contradiction between the desire to protect and the act of educating.

The benefits of sexuality education for youth:

- Better knowledge of their rights
- Increased ability to communicate about sexuality (including with parents)
- Building healthy relationships
- Enhanced sense of self-efficacy in risky situations

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, 2022; Constantine et al., 2015b; Rohrbach et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2016c.

Prevention programs for children aged 0-12

Lantern (ages 0-5)



In 2023-2024:

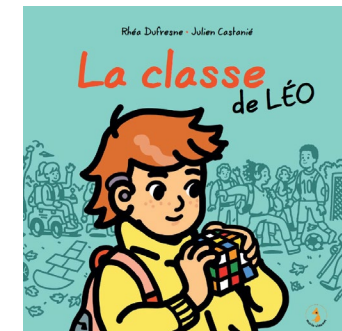
76 training sessions offered to over 900 home-based childcare providers

110 community organizations and 34 professionals trained

Compass (ages 6-12)



Pathways (ages 4-12 - children requiring additional support)



Prevention projects for adolescents

Preventing sexual abuse
and online sexual abuse

Web game [Sensitive areas]



Peer prevention
approach to online
sexual abuse

Preventing sexual exploitation
and trafficking among at-risk
young people

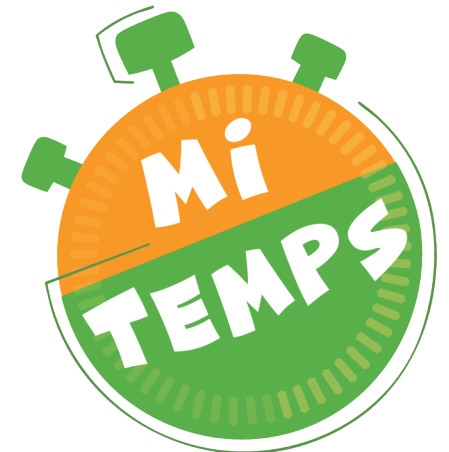
(Heads or tails) (ages 12-17)



+ Sexual exploitation
intervention kit

Preventing sexual abuse and online
sexual abuse among young athletes
(ages 13-17)

Mi-Temps Project [Half-Time]



3. Foundations of the Specialized Sexual Abuse Intervention Program



Marie-Vincent's Specialized Sexual Abuse Intervention Program



Reactions of Loved Ones

- Loved ones are **collateral victims** of sexual abuse.
- **Their psychological state** influences their ability to support the child and help them adapt.
- **Providing proper support** to loved ones enhances the well-being of children.



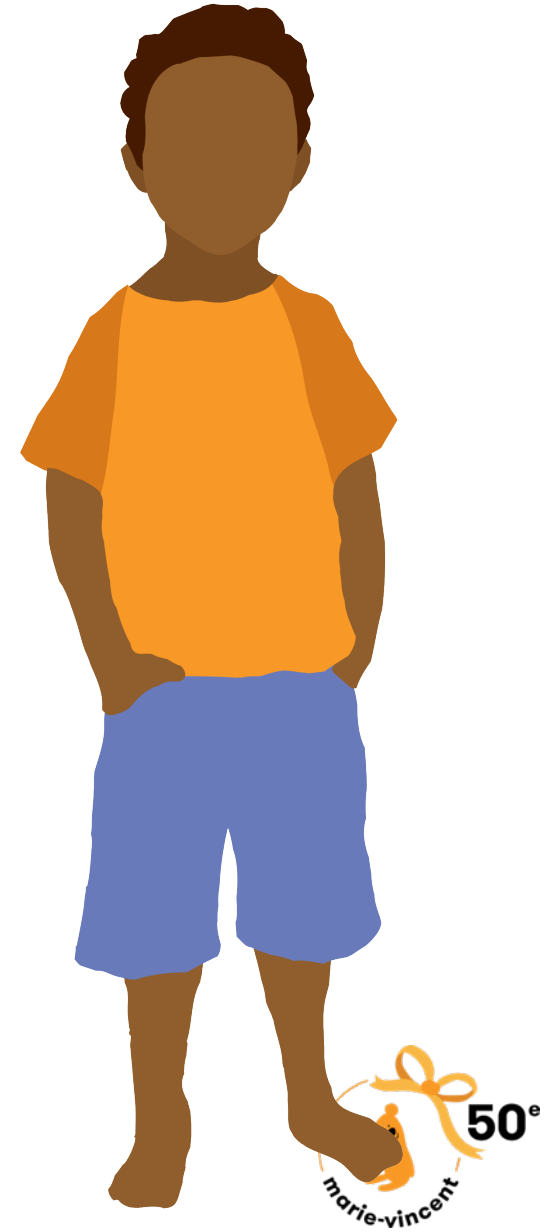
Immediate intervention

- **When:** Upon referral, following the disclosure of a sexual abuse situation, or after a police investigative interview
- **For Whom:** Loved ones of children/adolescents who have experienced SA, loved ones of children exhibiting problematic sexual behaviors (PSB) (upcoming service), adolescents who are victims of SA
- **Duration:** Up to 8 sessions



Psychosocial intervention

- **Approach:** Based on a cognitive-behavioral approach aimed at addressing the needs of the child/adolescent identified during the initial assessment
- **When:** Following the initial needs assessment
- **For Whom:** Children/adolescents who have experienced SA, children exhibiting PSBs, sometimes in collaboration with a loved one
- **Duration:** On average, 15 to 20 hours of sessions. Can be adjusted based on the needs of the child/adolescent



Individual psychotherapy



- **Approach:** Treatment is provided by psychotherapists and psychologists. It is based on a trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral approach (TF-CBT)
- **When:** Following the initial needs assessment
- **For Whom:** Children/adolescents who have experienced SA, children exhibiting PSBs
- **Duration:** Determined based on the needs of the child/adolescent

Group psychotherapy

Approach: Offered by two clinicians – a psychotherapist and a psychosocial worker - this service is based on trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (TF-CBT)

When: Following the initial needs assessment

For Whom: Children/adolescents who have experienced SA, grouped by age range

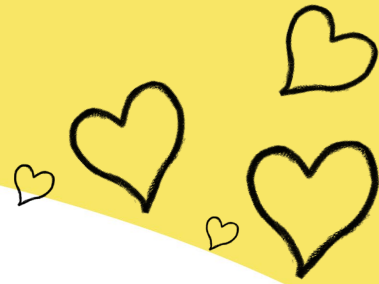
Duration: 14 to 20 sessions, each lasting 2 hours



End of follow-up

- Post-treatment/post-follow-up assessment
- Summary report
- Internal or external referral



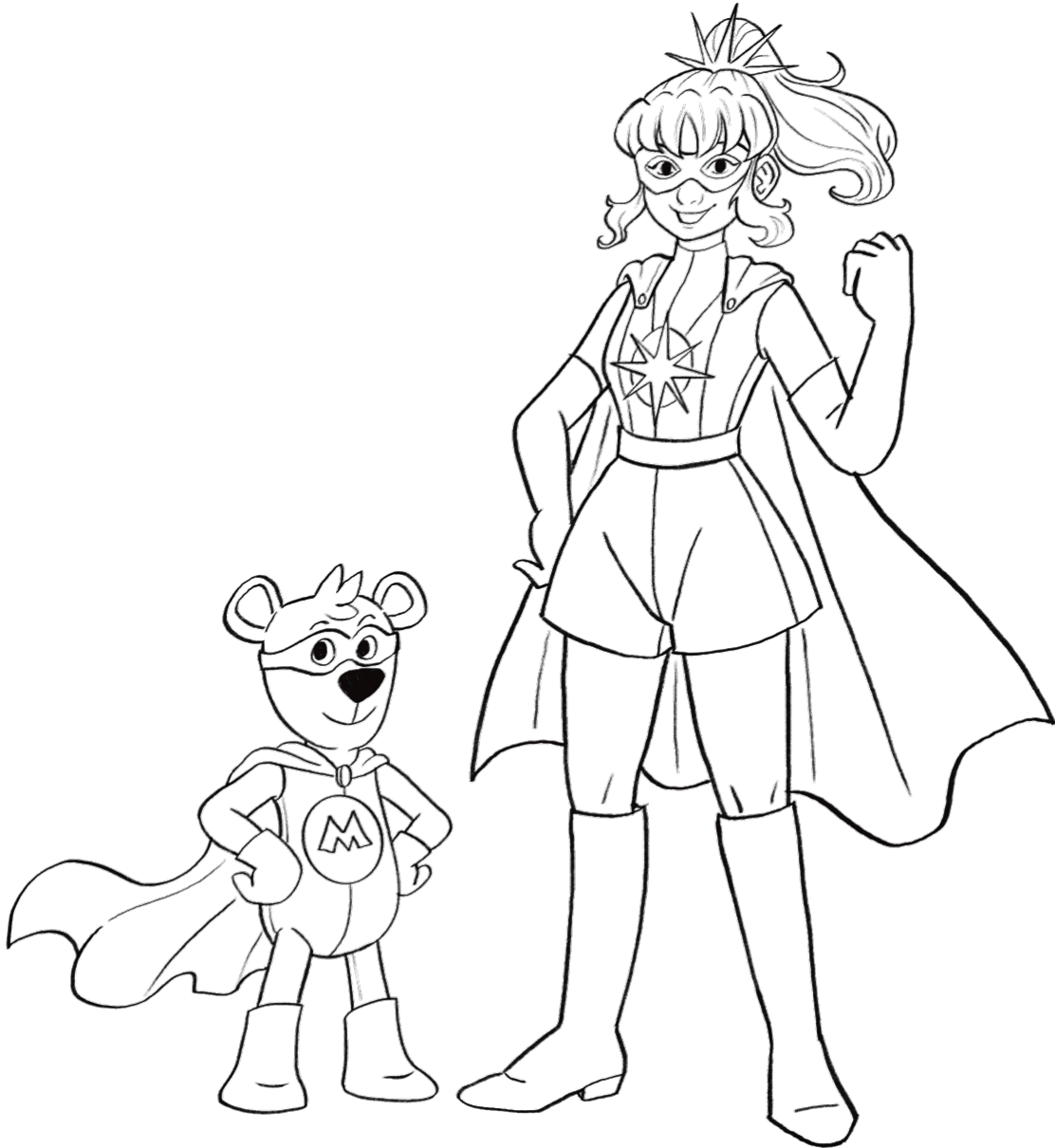


Child: "Because I am much happier than before, and thanks to this therapy, I was able to focus on myself and get rid of the feeling of guilt. I also feel much less isolated and spend more time with my family."

Child: "I learned that it wasn't my fault, that there are many ways to feel better, and that there will always be someone to help me."

Adolescent: "With strategies to feel better and also advice to recognize my emotions, understand them, and figure out what's wrong."

Adolescent: "Therapy helped me take a step back from situations, try to see them differently, and also think before I speak."



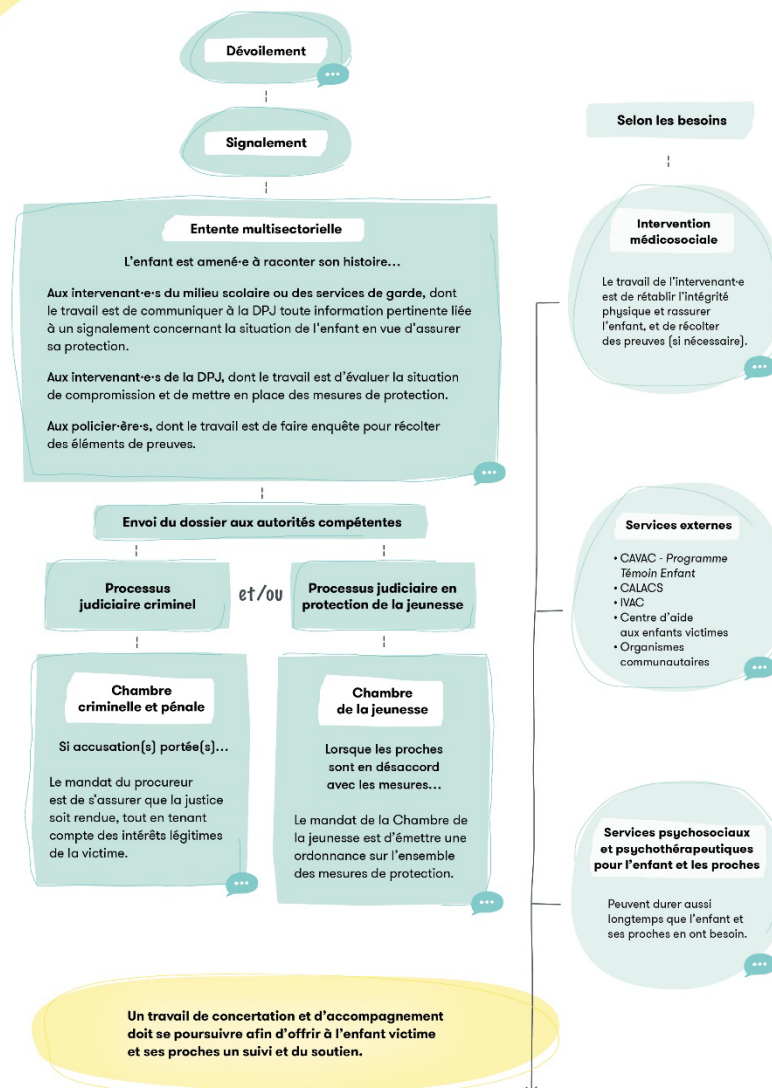
4. The child's reclaiming of power

Understanding each person's role in the victim's reclaiming of power

The sociojudicial trajectory



Trajectoire sociojudiciaire suivant le dévoilement de violence sexuelle d'un-e enfant



L'enfant peut être amené-e à répéter son récit à chacune de ces étapes, et même à plus d'une reprise pour certaines d'entre elles.

L'ensemble du processus peut durer de plusieurs mois à plusieurs années.

Definition

Secondary victimization is when child victims face negative reactions—whether received, perceived, or not adapted to their needs—from their loved ones and/or professionals in the sociojudicial system. This can contribute to increased suffering and trauma for the victim.



Secondary victimization therefore refers to causing a new psychological and emotional wound to the child victim.

Factors influencing the reclaiming of power

Clarity of their role: Providing information about the role of each person in the judicial process, including the child's role.

Presence of supports: Child witness program, remote testimony systems, support from court professionals, support dogs, etc.

Access to strategic information: Informing child about the different stages of the sociojudicial process.

Culture of the criminal justice system: Simplifying legal information based on the child's age and developmental capacity.

Considering the child

At Marie-Vincent, our practice has led us to emphasize the importance of considering the child as a key factor in helping victims reclaim their power.



- Believing their testimony
- Addressing the child directly
- Offering options for their well-being
- Respecting the child's choices

Seeking feedback from the child

Allows the child to:

- Express themselves
- Feel important and competent
- Recognize the progress made (the entire trajectory)

Allows professionals to:

- Understand the child's lived reality
- Adjust their practices
- Expand their toolkit (managing anxieties, resistance, questions, simplifying information, etc.)



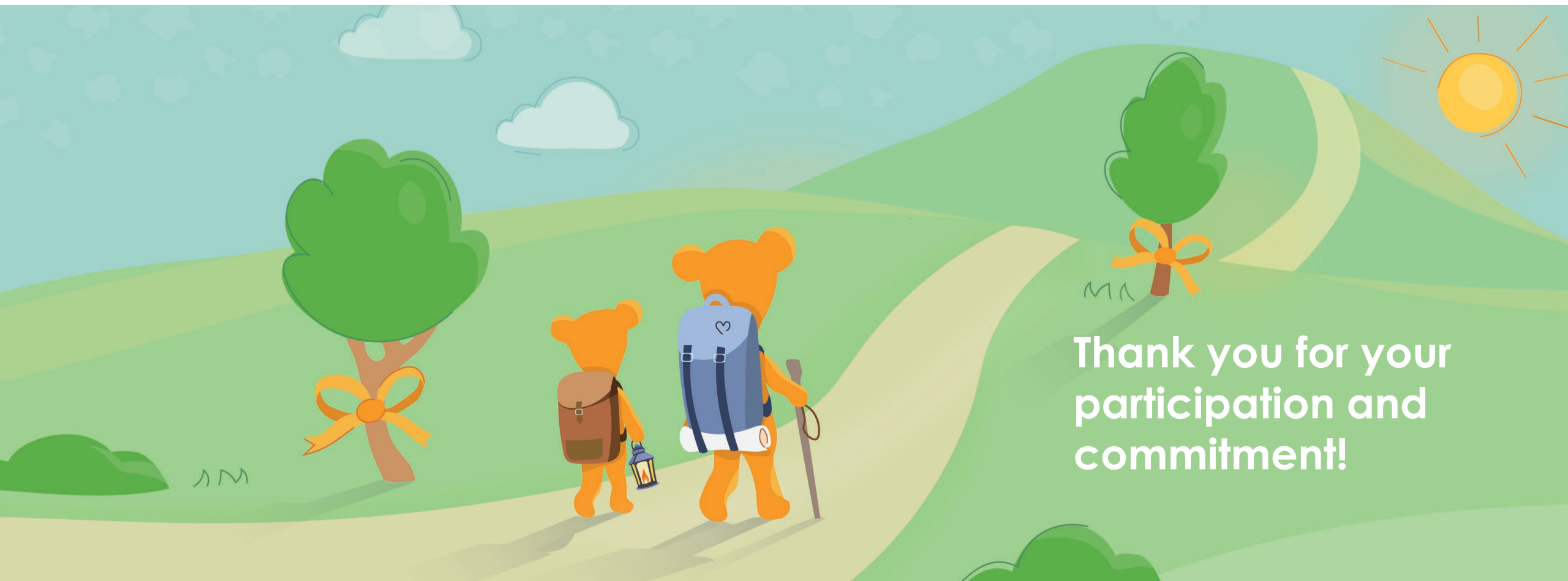
Key takeaway



The support provided by professionals (procedural justice) is more important and meaningful for child victims and their loved ones than the trial outcome itself (distributive justice).

(Wemmers, 2003; Van Camp and Wemmers, 2013)

Question period



Thank you for your
participation and
commitment!

- Alonzo-Proulx, Agnes & Cyr, Mireille (2017). Traitement des plaintes d'agression sexuelle envers les enfants dans le système de justice criminel québécois. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 59, 397-424. 10.3138/cjccj.2015.F05.
- Bergeron, M. and M. Hébert (2012). "La prévention et la formation en matière d'agression sexuelle contre les enfants", in M. Hébert and M. Cyr (eds.), *L'agression sexuelle envers les enfants*, tome 2, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, pp. 445-493.
- Bergheul, Saïd and Mylène Fernet. Les violences à caractère sexuel : Représentations sociales, accompagnement, prévention. 1 ed. Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2018.
- Bustamante, G., Andrade, M. S., Mikesell, C., Cullen, C., Endara, P., Burneo, V., Yépez, P., Avila Saavedra, S., Ponce, P. and Grunauer, M. (2019). "I have the right to feel safe": Evaluation of a school-based child sexual abuse prevention program in Ecuador. *Child abuse & neglect*, 91, 31-40.
- Cohen, J. A., Mannarino, A., & Deblinger, E. (2006). Treating trauma and traumatic grief in children and adolescents. New York, US: Guilford Press.
- Collin-Vézina, D., Coleman, K., Milne, L., Sell, J., & Daigneault, I. (2011). Trauma experiences, maltreatment-related impairments, and resilience among child welfare youth in residential care. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 9(5), 577-589.
- Cotter, A. (2021). Criminal victimization in Canada, 2019, [online], Statistics Canada, "Juristat", (accessed December 10, 2021).

- Daigneault, I., Hébert, M., & Tourigny, M. (2007). Personal and interpersonal characteristics related to resilient developmental pathways of sexually abused adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 16(2), 415-434.
- Daignault, I.V. & Hébert, M. (2009). Profiles of school adaptation: Social, behavioural and academic functioning in sexually abused girls. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33, 102-115.
- Daignault, I., Roy, A., Hébert, M., Cyr, M. & Collin-Vézina, D. (2023). Pratiques sensibles au trauma et agression sexuelle : l'apport et les défis des trajectoires de services centralisés. *Travail social*, 69(1), 49-69
- Domhardt, M., Münzer, A., Fegert, J. M., & Goldbeck, L. (2015). Resilience in survivors of child sexual abuse: A systematic review of the literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 16(4), 476-493.
- Finkelhor D, Berliner L (1995), Research on the treatment of sexually abused children: a review and recommendations. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 34:1408-1423
- Government of Quebec (2008/). Plan d'action gouvernemental en matière d'agression sexuelle. Québec: Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine.
- Hébert, M., Collin-Vézina, D., Daignault, I., Parent, N. & Tremblay C. (2006). Factors linked to outcomes in sexually abused girls: A regression tree analysis. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 47(6), 443-455.
- Hébert, M., Amédée, L. M., Théorêt, V., & Petit, M.-P. (2022). Diversity of Adaptation Profiles in Youth Victims of Child Sexual Abuse. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0001090>

- Hébert, M. (2011). Les profils et l'évaluation des enfants victimes d'agression sexuelle. In M. Hébert, M. Cyr, & M. Tourigny (Eds.), *L'agression sexuelle envers les enfants. Tome I.* (p. 149-204). Quebec City: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Hébert, M., Parent, N., Daignault, I., & Tourigny, M. (2006). A typological analysis of behavioral profiles of sexually abused children. *Child Maltreatment*, 11(3), 203-216.
- Herman, J.-L. (2003). The mental health of crime victims: Impact of legal intervention. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 16(2), 159-166.
- Kamiya, Y., Timonen, V., & Kenny, R. A. (2016). The impact of childhood sexual abuse on the mental and physical health, and healthcare utilization of older adults. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 28(3), 415-422.
- Kaufman, K. L., Erooga, M., Mathews, B., & McConnell, E. (2019). Recommendations for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in Youth-Serving Organizations: Implications From an Australian Royal Commission Review of the Literature. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34 (20), 4199-4224.
- Mannarino A, Cohen J, Smith J, Moore-Motily (1991), Six and twelve month follow-up of sexually abused girls. *J Interpers Violence* 6:494-511
- Martin, E.K., Campbell, C. & Hansen, D.J.. (2010). Child sexual abuse. In J.C. Thomas & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Handbook of Clinical Psychology Competencies, Volume III: Intervention and Treatment for Children and Adolescents* (pp. 1481-1514). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Marriott, C., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., & Harrop, C. (2014). Factors promoting resilience following childhood sexual abuse: A structured, narrative review of the literature. *Child Abuse Review*, 23(1), 17-34

- Rheingold, A. A., Zajac, K., Chapman, J. E., Patton, M., de Arellano, M., Saunders, B., & Kilpatrick, D. (2015). Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training for Childcare Professionals: An Independent Multi-Site Randomized Controlled Trial of Stewards of Children. *Prevention Science*, 16 (3), 374-385.
- Rudolph, J. and Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2018). Parents as protectors: A qualitative study of parents' views on child sexual abuse prevention. *Child abuse & neglect*, 85, 28-38
- Symonds, M. (1980). The "second injury" to victims. *Evaluation and Change*, 7(1), 36-38
- Topping, K. J. and Barron, I. G. (2009). School-Based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs: A Review of Effectiveness. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 431-463.
- Tourigny, M., Gagné, M-H., Joly, J. & Chartrand, M-È. (2006). Prévalence et cooccurrence de la violence envers les enfants dans la population québécoise. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 97, 109-113.
- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York.
- Van Camp, T., & Wemmers, J.-A. (2013). Victim satisfaction with restorative justice: More than simply procedural justice. *International Review of Victimology*, 19(2), 117-143.
- Wemmers, J. (2003). *Introduction à la victimologie*. Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.