

PREPARING CAREGIVERS

- Many parents need education that their child's experience in court will not resemble what they have seen on court television programs.
- Parents need reassurance that testifying in court is not necessarily traumatizing to children. Caseworkers can tell them about recent research that has shown that with proper preparation and protection, testifying in court does not cause most children significant emotional trauma (Lipovsky & Stern, 1997). Caseworkers can also promise parents that they will be sensitive to children's needs.
- Parents may be overwhelmed by rage, guilt, or denial because of the abuse, and caseworkers may need to meet with them separately to allow them time to vent.
- Inappropriate parental reactions toward the child victim, such as the belief that a child was to blame for the abuse or has been damaged beyond repair, should be addressed well away from the child victim and siblings.
- Cultural issues must be respected. Parents from certain traditional or recent immigrant subcultures may have reason to believe that their sexually abused child has been spoiled for any potential marriage within that culture. These issues need to be addressed respectfully. For example, in subcultures where the "ruin" of a girl's sexual innocence is regarded as worse than death, caseworkers need to ascertain that the child is safe staying in her home. Speaking with the mother about these issues away from the presence of male relatives is recommended if the family permits it. Finding a therapist from the child's culture who is experienced in working with child victims is highly recommended whenever possible.
- Many parents, especially those with unresolved abuse histories of their own, should be referred for treatment.
- Parents need to be educated about court proceedings, including the possibility of delays and adjournments.
- Parents must be told not to question or coach their children about what they are going to say in court.
- Parents should be told to avoid expressing their own worries about the upcoming trial in their child's presence or where the child can overhear. For example, children may attempt to listen in on parental telephone calls.
- Parents should be educated about how to respond to their child's questions about the abuse.