

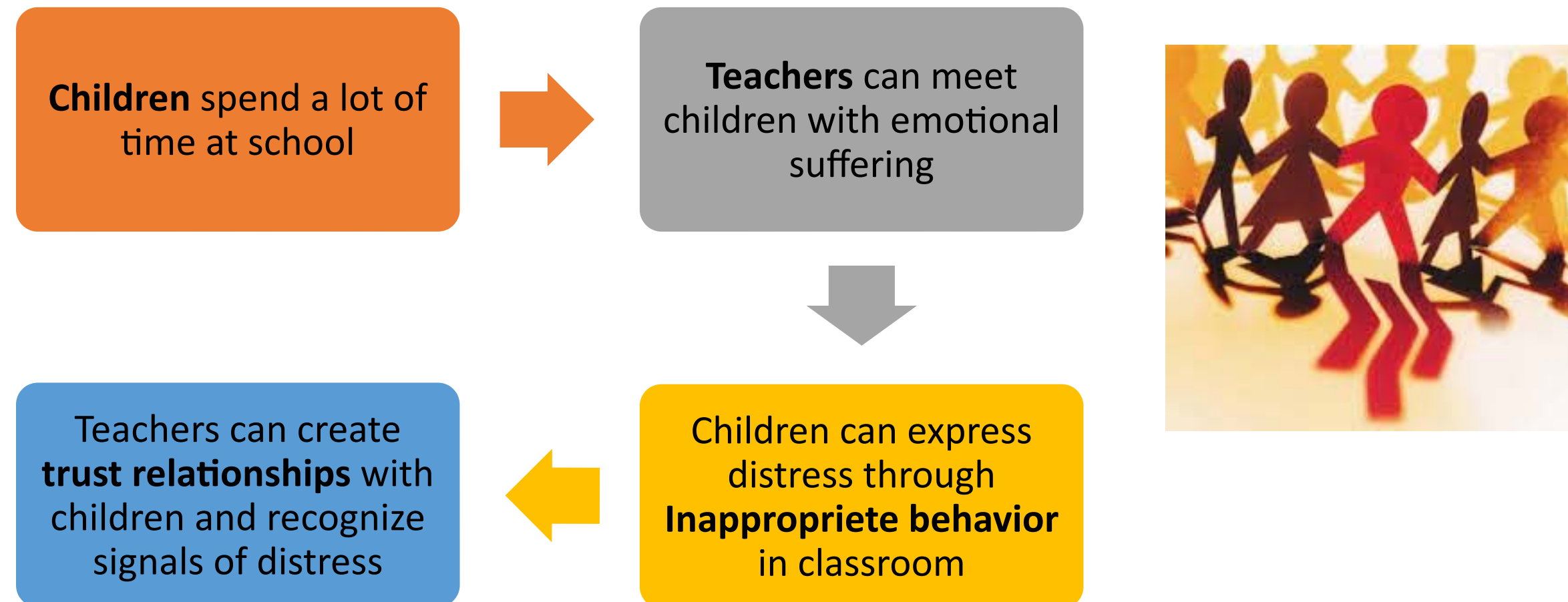


BRIGHTER
FUTURE



*A guide for **teachers** on how to cope
with early adversity and
sexualized behavior in children*

Importance of the school for children who faced ACE



Sexualized behavior in classroom

Sexual abuse

sexual abuse is the most difficult to detect and is also the most unthinkable for an adult to imagine

Behavior as language

children often do not speak about sexual violence but instead express themselves through their behaviors.

What can I do?



Wide spectrum of teacher emotions

- Anguish
- Powerless
- Anger
-

Key questions

How can they successfully manage their **feelings** and avoid becoming harmful?

What **skills** do teachers need to better cope with these sensitive situations?



For teachers is important

to recognize

- what child sexual abuse is
- Short and long term consequences for children

to understand that

- no child is born “bad”
- inadequate behavior could be a result traumatic experiences
- this child can be helped

For teachers is important

to recognize

- their own emotions
- To know how to manage them

to learn that

- they should not act alone
- they should **share their observations** with the school management
- They can activate a **support network**

What is child abuse

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activities, even if not characterized by explicit violence.

It can be made by an adult who is **almost always an authority figure** for the child, both within the family and in non-family relationships (places of aggregation, sports activities, school).

What is child abuse

A sexual abuse can also be perpetrated on the child through **falsely playful and ambiguous method**, almost always by an adult who has a significant relationship with the child

The **affective relationship is exploited** by using sexual communication that is totally inappropriate and harmful to children.

What is child abuse

A false belief: child abuse can only occur in multi-problematic households and in deprived socio-cultural contexts.

Unfortunately, sexual abuse of children exists and is a **widespread phenomenon**.

It is a phenomenon that **cuts across** all social classes, regardless of ethnicity, level of education and economic conditions.

What is child abuse

It is always a confusing and destabilizing **attack on the child's personality** and developmental pathway:

any gesture of violation of intimacy certainly produces discomfort in the immediate aftermath but will also have long-term **consequences well through adulthood**

Behaviours as indicators of sexual abuse

The child often uses **BEHAVIOURS** instead of words to ask for help

He/she identifies people close to him/her to communicate the abuse in which he/she lives



The teacher is most frequently this adult chosen by the abused child

He/she should have the **ability to pick up these signals,**



Behavioural indicators of sexual abuse

1. Early and improper sexualization

- age-abnormal knowledge of aspects of adult sexuality in children;
- tendency to eroticize relationships as a means of receiving and giving affection;
- compulsive search for sexualized games;
- drawings with sexual content;
- compulsive masturbation;
- sexual requests to adults or peers;
- ...



Behavioural indicators of sexual abuse

2 .Emotional distress

- sudden crying, irritability and outbursts of anger, sudden mood swings, despair, anxiety, hyperactivity, insecurity, aggression;
- sleep disorders (e.g. nightmares);
- eating disorders;
- excessive and inappropriate fears;
- refusal to undress during sports activities;
- speech and learning disorders;
- sudden drop in performance, school phobia;
- self-harming behavior;
- ...



Consequences of early trauma

Adverse events experienced in childhood can lead to **serious social and cognitive fragility** in children

They increase likelihood of developing **psychopathologies in adulthood.**

The **earlier the trauma is addressed** with protective interventions, the more it will be possible to guarantee a **healthy adulthood**

Sexualization: normality vs abnormality

In the field of sexualization there are **so-called 'normal' behaviors**

- playing doctor
- Imitation and role-playing games (kissing or flirting),
- comparing various intimate parts,
- occasional masturbation as an exploratory and/or consolatory act



Sexualization: normality vs anormality

Inappropriated experiences

- Sexual abuse
- viewing pornographic sites
- watching sex games

Possible behaviors

- strong early sexual knowledge
- sexually oriented drawings
- sexualized behavior that creates embarrassment



Teacher's emotions in cases of suspected sexual abuse

- Sexual abuse is **unthinkable**: a child can't be sexually abused by an adult close to him / her
- Emotions involved are generally painful and unpleasant
- Distress, feelings of inadequacy, frustration, helplessness, failure, anger, resentment, and disgust.



Teacher's emotions in cases of suspected sexual abuse

Emotional defense strategies

DENIAL: refusal to recognize the problem even when the signs are obvious, (it's not true", "I didn't notice", "it's not my responsibility").

EMOTIONAL DISTANCE: indifference to what is acknowledged, e.g. "it's not us who have to deal with it, it happens, I have so many other problems to think about".

COLLUSION: is allying oneself with the adult instead of the child, typical of partners of abusers.



Teacher's emotions in cases of suspected sexual abuse

Emotional defense strategies

IDENTIFICATION with the VICTIM: the teacher is emotionally too close to the child, and feels powerlessness, despair, fear, anger of such strength that he cannot perceive and act effectively.



IDENTIFYING WITH THE AVENGER The desire to do justice and protect the child leads the teacher to step out of their role, create confusing situations both inside and outside the school.



Networking to support the teacher

- it is crucial **NOT TO ACT ALONE**.
- Emotional reactions that can arise and **possible protective intervention** are complex
- teacher can **SHARE** the child's situation and their own **management** difficulties with their school manager/superior in order to understand how to deal with the situation.
- If the child is already followed and known to **other professionals or services** in the region (psychologists, social service, etc.) teachers should share their observations with these professionals and activate a network.



Networking to support the teacher

Networking for

teacher's own **emotions management**, for example with respect to anxiety or frustration;



Design of intervention strategies with **professionals** to help the child feel better (neuropsychiatrists, psychologists, social services, educational day care centers)

If the indicators are very worrisome the teacher can ask for ac in order to make a report to **proper authorities**





Collaboration is necessary to build an **INTEGRATED INTERVENTION SOLUTION** to better assist and support children with traumatic experiences