

Childhood Disclosure of Abuse:

Unpacking the Complexities for Caregivers and
Advocates

Dr. Kate Watson

Agenda

- 5 min: Welcome and Introductions
- 15 min: Introducing Jeremy, Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse
- 15 min: Disclosure is a process, not an event
- 20 min: Adult responses to disclosure
- 20 min: Disclosure as an attachment issue
- 15 min: Wrap Up, Q&A, Resources, Contact Information

Introducing Jeremy Indika

What happened to Jeremy (5 min)



His work in schools (3 min)

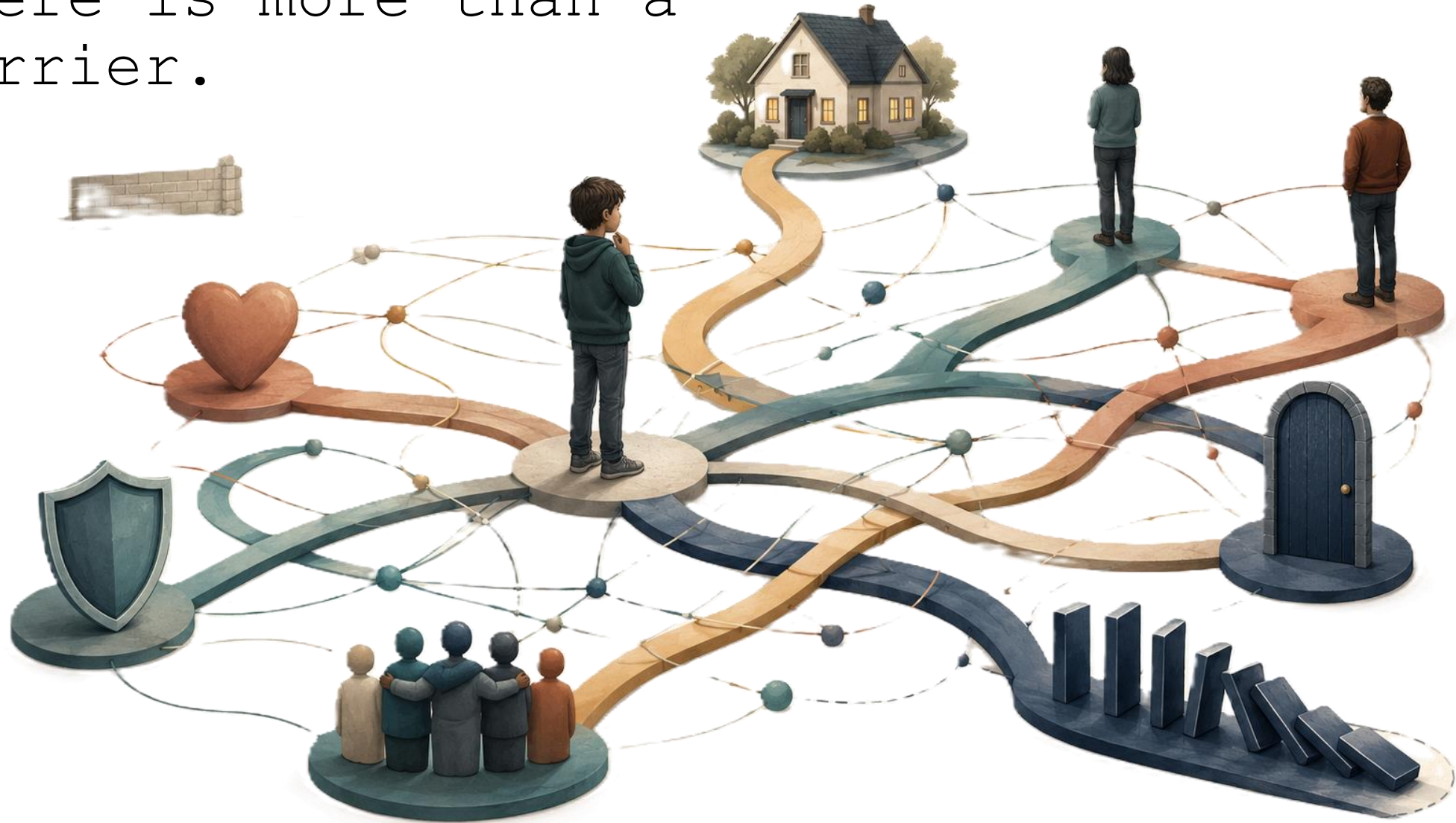


When does disclosure
begin?

Disclosure is a Process That Could Include:

- Internally recognizing that something was wrong
- Finding language for the experience
- Testing another person's likely response
- Making a partial or indirect disclosure
- Watching what happens next
- Adding, withholding, clarifying, or retracting information over time

There is more than a
barrier.



More from Jeremy



Let's Discuss!

Adult Responses to Disclosure

- Overwhelming distress may make the child feel responsible for the adult.
- Immediate anger may make the child fear what the adult will do.
- Excessive questioning may communicate doubt.
- Praise such as "You're so brave" may feel supportive to one child but create pressure for another to continue performing bravery.
- Promising that everything will be okay can undermine trust when difficult consequences follow.
- Declaring "I knew something was wrong" can unintentionally shift attention toward the adult's insight.
- Quickly taking control may repeat the child's experience of powerlessness.

Even “good” responses can have unintended consequences.

- **What might the adult mean? What might the child hear?**
 - **“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”**
 - The adult may mean: *I wish I could have protected you.*
 - The child might hear: *You did something wrong by waiting.*
 - **“Are you sure that’s what happened?”**
 - The adult may mean: *I want to understand accurately.*
 - The child might hear: *I don’t believe you.*
 - **“Don’t worry—everything is going to be okay.”**
 - The adult may mean: *You are not alone, and I want to reassure you.*
 - The child might hear: *You do not understand how serious or complicated this is.*
 - **“You are so brave for telling me.”**
 - The adult may mean: *I recognize how difficult this was.*
 - The child might hear: *Now I have to keep being brave, even when I feel scared, confused, or want to stop talking.*
 - **“That person is a monster.”**
 - The adult may mean: *What happened to you was completely unacceptable.*
 - The child might hear: *I am wrong for still loving, missing, or wanting contact with that person.*
 - **“You know this wasn’t your fault, right?”**
 - The adult may mean: *I want to relieve you of shame and blame.*
 - The child might hear: *Maybe there is a reason someone could think it was my fault.*

Disclosure as an attachment issue

- When the person who caused harm is also a source of affection, caregiving, approval, financial security, or family belonging, disclosure is not merely reporting danger. It may mean threatening an important attachment.
 - Children can simultaneously:
 - Love the person and want the abuse to stop
 - Fear the person and miss them
 - Want protection without wanting punishment
 - Feel harmed while also remembering positive experiences
 - Disclose and then try to protect the person they named
- Adults often expect a child's emotions to match the seriousness of the allegation. When they do not, adults may become skeptical.



Let's Wrap Up

- Reaching Out:
 - Email: Kate@AdvocacyAcademy.org
 - Visit: www.AdvocacyAcademy.org
 - Follow: @AdvoKateW
- Questions or comments?



Resources

- *What Happened to You?* (Perry & Winfrey)
- *A Therapeutic Treasure Box for Working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma* (Treisman)
- *Trauma Stewardship* (Van Dernoot, Lipsky, & Burke)
- *Help for the Helper* (Rothschild)
- Follow Jeremy Indika on LinkedIn (visit: www.JeremyIndika.com)