

A young child with curly hair is shown in profile, blowing a dandelion seed head. The child's eyes are closed, and the seeds are being blown away, creating a soft, ethereal atmosphere. The background is a light, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

**Addressing child
sexual abuse within
the circle of trust:**

**Child friendly justice
and treatment
challenges**

Experiences of Child Protection Center of Zagreb

**Strasbourg
June 18-19, 2015**

**Assoc.prof. Gordana Buljan Flander, Ph.D.
Director, psychologist and psychotherapist**

Disclosure of child sexual abuse (CSA)

- **many cases remain undiscovered** – some authors estimate only **1 in 10 children** disclose sexual abuse (e.g. Sanderson, 2005)
 - **85 – 95% of CSA cases occur within the circle of trust** (Berliner & Elliott, 2002; NCTSN, 2007; 1/3 by members of close family) – research done by Child Protection Center of Zagreb resulted in same estimates
- **average delay between abuse onset and disclosure** (McGregor, Coggan & Thomas, 2006; Read, McGregor, Coggan & Thomas, 2006; Somer & Szwarcberg, 2001)

**10-16
years**

Disclosure – hope or trauma?

The child protection system

- repeated interviews by different professionals, at different locations
- lack of well trained professionals
- length of the process



Significant **predictors of stress** during the court procedure, and clear examples of **child rights violation** (Gudbrandsson, 2005)

Family members

- disbelief, blame and pressure to deny the abuse
- CSA victims describe the disclosure as a partially traumatic experience (Hunter, 2011):
 - many felt that it **did not change anything**; or
 - stated that the **adults did not believe them** and showed **lack of support**

Child Protection Center of Zagreb

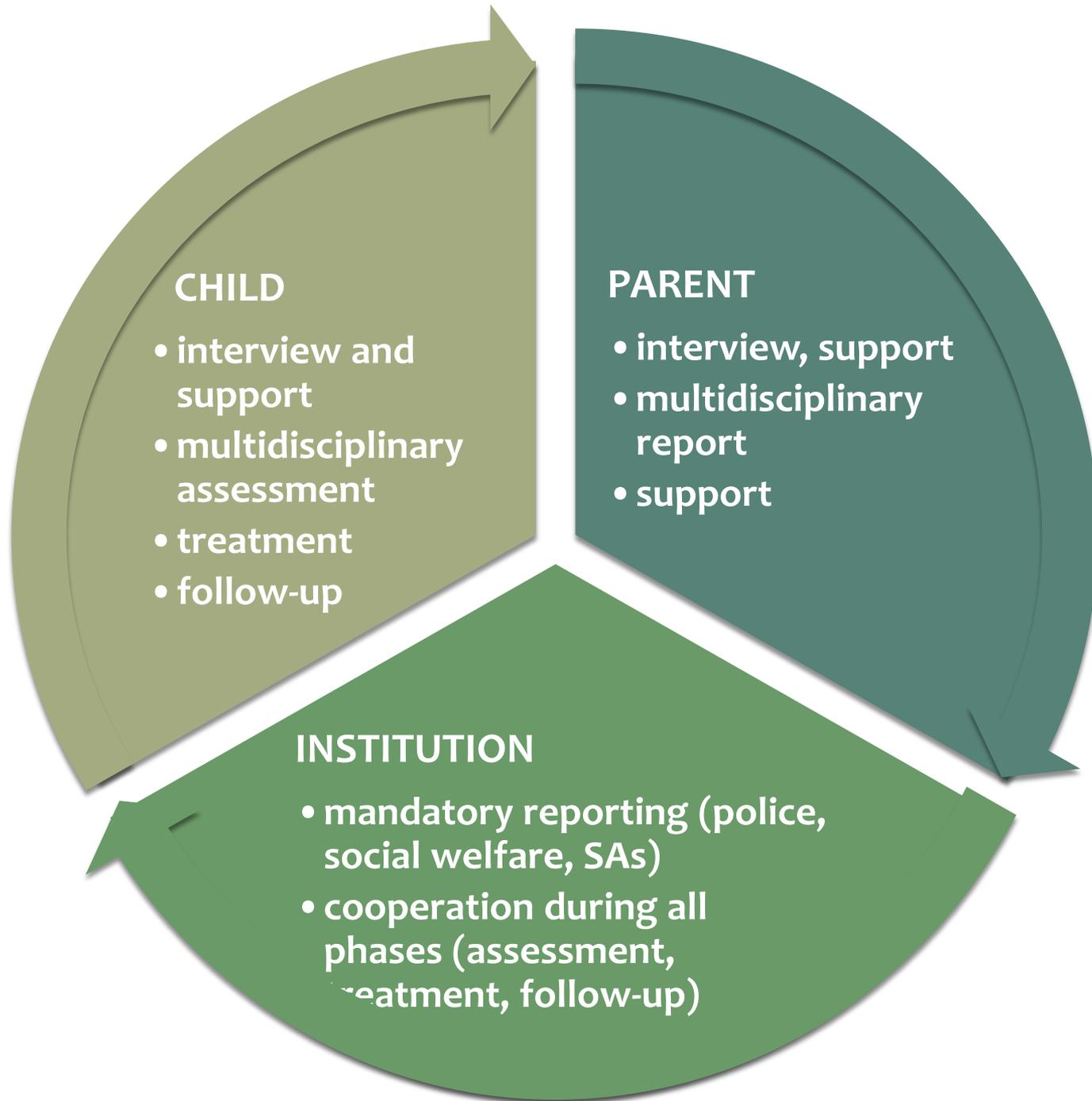
Purpose: providing help and support to neglected and abused children, as well as children at risk and their families, encouraging cooperation within system, with an emphasis on child friendly approach

Main activities

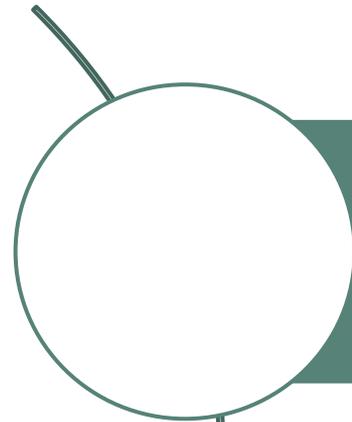
- assessment and treatment of children and families
- publishing and raising public awareness
- education and training of professionals
- research and scientific work
- forensic evaluations

Our team

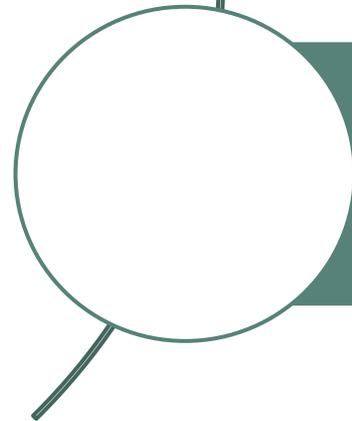
- 11 psychologists
- 4 psychiatrists
- neuropaediatrician
- 2 social workers
- 2 social educators
- speech therapist
- 6 nurses
- jurist



Focus



Child friendly approach



Treatment provided to
children and their families

Child-friendly justice

Child friendly justice

kind, friendly and reflective approach:

- ▣ enhances memory
- ▣ decreases suggestibility
- ▣ is most helpful to children and families

(Berliner & Conte, 1995)

Interview as a part of clinical assessment

- conducted by educated professionals
- with respect to avoiding multiple interviews
- based on contemporary scientific and clinical knowledgements about how to interview a child after sexual abuse

Forensic evaluation

- **initial forensic interview**
 - 1-2 sessions
- **extended forensic evaluation**
- several sessions
 - if the child has not disclosed the details of the abuse, while other data indicate that the abuse has happened, or if initial forensic interview requires clarification

Forensic interview at early stages of court process

- **we encourage judges to interview children on the center's premises**
 - one room: interviewer and the child
 - another room: SA, judge, other involved parties
- the whole procedure is audio and video recorded and can be used as an evidence in the court procedure



Trauma treatment

Trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy as therapy of choice in most trauma cases (TF-CBT)



PARENTAL SUPPORT AND CHILD'S ADJUSTMENT

Support from a non-abusive parent is one of the most important predictors of child's adjustment

(Cohen i Mannarino, 2008)

- more important than characteristics of the abuse itself
- more important than the form of treatment



Path from being the non-abusive parent to being a supportive parent - identification of the protective role

Leaflets for parents

- Signs and consequences of child sexual abuse
- Myths and facts about sexual abuse and abusers
- Treatment of the sexually abused child
- Family support of the sexually abused child
- Most frequent questions parents ask

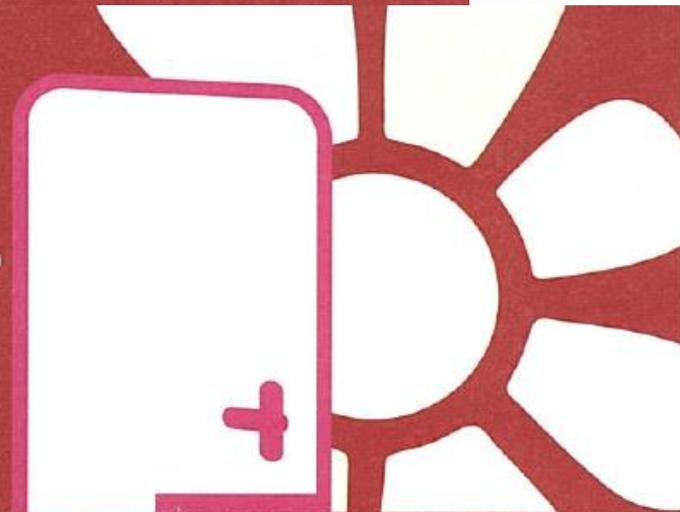


POLIKLINIKA
ZA ZAŠTITU DJECE
GRADA ZAGREBA

CHILD PROTECTION
CENTRE
ZAGREB, CROATIA

It's happened, what now...?

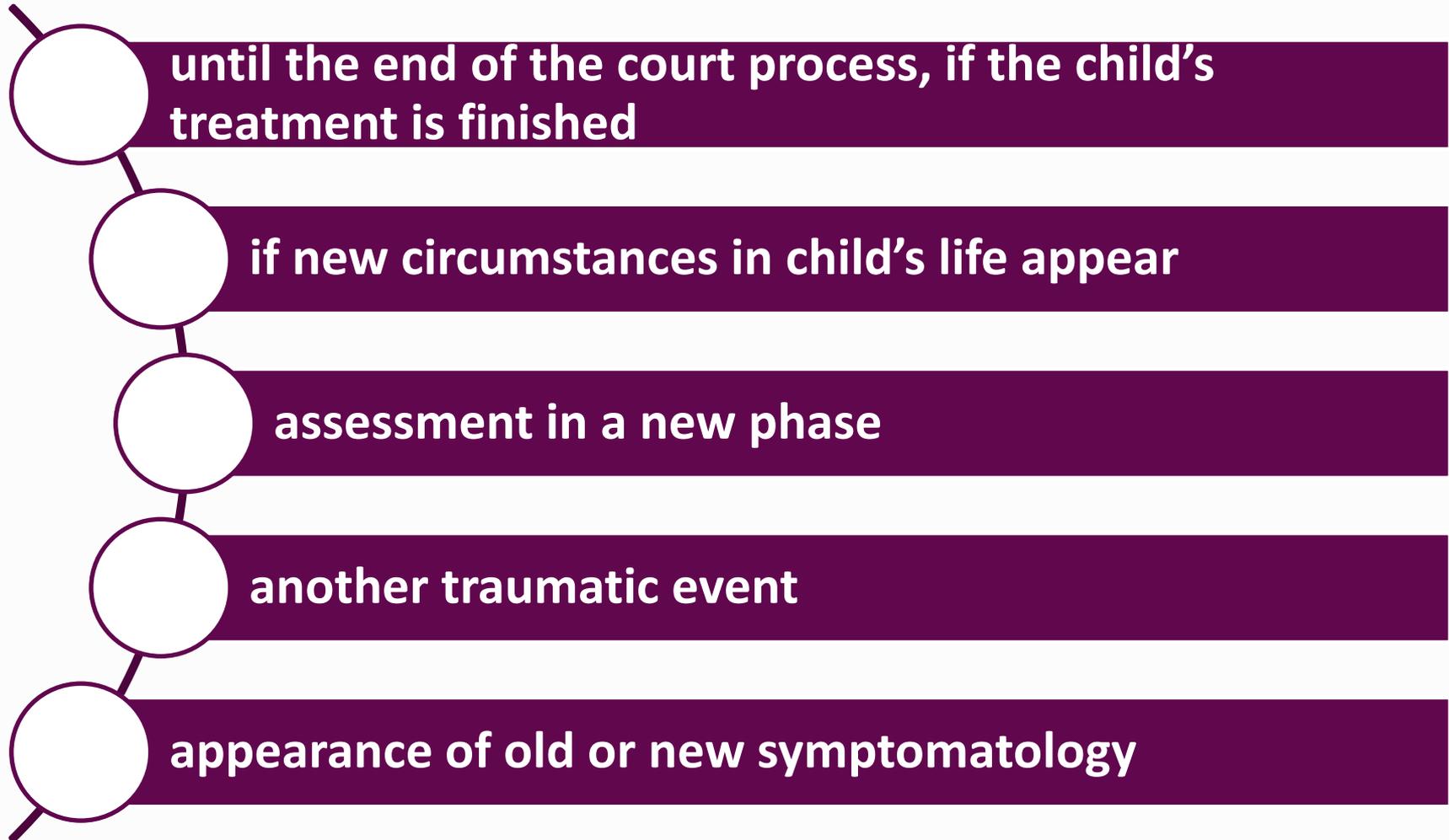
Leaflets for the parents of
sexually abused children



Importance of supporting other institutions within the child protection system

Educating different professionals within the child protection system (mental health experts, judges, lawyers, school and kindergarten teachers, social workers, doctors...) on child friendly approach

FOLLOW UP



What if the waiting period for the court process to finish is too long, and the child needs treatment?

FORENSICALLY SENSITIVE THERAPY

- court proceedings are unfinished, but the child needs immediate treatment
- most often cognitive-behavioural approach
- projective techniques and interpretations of child's play and drawings are avoided



**Main aim:
child
protected by
family and
the system**

**[www.poliklinika-
djeca.hr/english](http://www.poliklinika-djeca.hr/english)**

**[gordana.flander@
poliklinika-djeca.hr](mailto:gordana.flander@poliklinika-djeca.hr)**