Finding Solutions in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Donna Potter, LCSW
donnandjon@gmail.com
Meet 7 year old Jose and his mother Julia

• One fall night while giving the boys their bath, Jose’s mother Julia caught Jose putting his mouth on his younger brother’s penis in the bathtub. Julia was so shocked and angry she spanked Jose. Julia yelled, “What are you doing?” Jose told his mom, “That’s what Rick does to me when I take a nap.” Incensed, Julia immediately contacted the police and filed charges. She moved out of Rick’s trailer and into a family member’s home with her two sons.
• Since the night Jose told Julia about Rick sexually abusing him, Julia reported Jose has been extremely clingy to her. She complained, “He climbs in my bed every night, and he won’t even let me go to the bathroom by myself!” She reported he has been getting in trouble for fighting at school, and she has seen him masturbating on several occasions, something he had never done in the past. He also began fighting with his little brother more often.
Operationalizing:

• What questions does Nancy need to ask Jose’s mom to learn more about Jose’s sleep problems?
Two problems:
Nightmares and sleep avoidance
Functional Analysis

• What does Nancy need to ask Jose and Julia to figure out the best way to help Jose with his sleep?
Intervention

• Now that Nancy understands his symptom, what strategies might be helpful?
  • For Jose to practice
  • For Julia to practice
  • In the environment
In vivo desensitization

- Jose and his mother and younger brother generally have dinner together. After homework, Julia gives each child a separate bath, supervises them brushing their teeth, and then reads stories to both boys together. She then tucks each boy into bed in their own rooms. Jose reports and Julia confirms, that Jose spends the next 2 hours quietly playing with toys alone in his bed. Jose describes that he tries to lie down and close his eyes, but that his heart beats fast and his stomach begins to hurt and he begins thinking about Rick coming into his room and sexually abusing him. He then sneaks into his mother’s bed and sleeps next to her. Julia reports she is often too tired to put him back in his own bed, but will sometimes. She reports she feels like on the nights she puts him back in his own bed, it gets even worse because he will keep coming back into her bed and she eventually gives up and lets him sleep with her anyway.
In Vivo Desensitization

• Consider:
  • Proximity
  • Duration
  • Other related factors
Trauma Narration

• Jose does a fabulous job with his all about me chapter and is able talk about the arguing between Rick and his mom. He struggles to describe the sexual abuse though. Every time Nancy brings it up, Jose jumps up and says he has to go to the bathroom. He then finds a way to end the session.
Thanks for having me!