

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Getting To Know Each Other Better

Goals

- Verbalize positive feelings about therapy
- Identify with Cory to reduce feelings of isolation
- Increase ability to communicate openly about self and about the sexual abuse
- Learn and implement healthy coping skills

Materials

- Large scrapbook to hold the client's copy of Cory's Story as well as other work completed in sessions
- Tokens (or coins, carnival tickets, beads or Lego)
- Box filled with inexpensive prizes
- Ziplock bag labeled with the client's name to hold the tokens (or beads or Lego)
- Colored fine-tip markers or colored pencils
- Camera (optional)
- Game Cards: Five Favorites (included)
- Two small candies
- Bag
- Two copies of "Getting to Know Each Other Better" (one copy for the child's scrapbook, one copy for the parents)
- Letter for parents

Advance Preparation

Cut out the eight game cards (use version that is appropriate to the age of the client), fold each card several times, and place them in a bag.

Guidelines and Process Issues

The focus of the first chapter of Cory's Story is on fostering engagement. The importance of the therapeutic relationship cannot be overemphasized. Children who have been sexually abused or who are complexly traumatized often have difficulty perceiving the therapist as safe and trustworthy. By establishing a warm, accepting environment and using cognitively and developmentally appropriate interventions, even the most guarded and resistant clients may feel safe and trusting enough to engage in therapy (Kenney-Noziska, 2008).

Cory's Story can be a helpful tool to facilitate therapeutic engagement. The focus of the first chapter is to introduce Cory (the main character) to the child. Through the story, the child realizes that he/she is not alone—that there are other children who have been sexually abused.

Cory's Story can be introduced as follows: "Today we're going to begin reading Cory's Story. This is a story about a girl (say boy if client is male) who is kind of like you. It's important that you listen carefully as there are questions for you to answer about the story. We will write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided. You get to choose which color to write with. You get a token (or point) for each question you answer correctly. Each time you earn 10 tokens (or points), you can pick something from my prize box." The use of prizes helps to lower defenses and incorporates an added level of engagement to therapy.

The Five Favorites Game provides an engaging way for the practitioner and client to get better acquainted. The game facilitates bidirectional sharing, playful physical interaction (high-five or thumb war) and a small reward (candy), which can be particularly helpful in the engagement phase. The game can be played standing up with children who have difficulty sitting and focusing.

Teaching stress management is an essential element in trauma treatment. Relaxation techniques are introduced in the initial chapters of Cory's Story so clients can master these skills prior to facing anxiety-provoking material in future sessions. In this session, the child learns Robot-Ragdoll, a progressive muscle relaxation strategy. This technique helps the child learn the difference between muscular tension and relaxation, and how to control muscle tension in his/her own body. This relaxation strategy is particularly helpful for children who are hyperaroused, have difficulty falling asleep, or have somatic symptoms. If possible, invite the parents into the session at the end so the child can teach this newly learned technique to them. The parent letter encourages parents to coach the child to practice the technique each night.

It can be helpful to take a picture of the client in the first session to put on the cover of his/her scrapbook. This personalizes the scrapbook and serves as a visual reminder for the child in later years when he/she is looking through the scrapbook.

As indicated in the Introduction section of this book, it is important to include gradual exposure in each session. Therefore, in this first chapter, the sexual abuse is briefly mentioned to help the child begin to face the issue. The story also refers to "some terrible things happened to Cory" so children who have been exposed to multiple trauma will relate to the story.

Some clients, especially complexly traumatized children, will need additional sessions devoted specifically to building engagement. While the engagement process goes beyond simply using a game or activity, playful techniques help create a safe and positive therapeutic environment for young clients. There is a wide variety of creative engagement techniques to choose from in the literature, including Rock, Paper, Scissors (Cavett, 2010); Ice Breaker (Kenney-Noziska, 2008); Button Button (Vernon, 2002); Can You Kazoo? (Chalker, 2010); and Funny Faces (Snailham, 2011). While these activities provide useful strategies that can engage children, it is the practitioner's use of self that is the most powerful engagement tool. The practitioner's warmth, consistency, patience, and unconditional acceptance of the child are the key ingredients to put children at ease and help develop a therapeutic rapport.

Fostering a positive and caring parent-therapist relationship is essential to maximizing the therapeutic results for the child. The parents must develop confidence in the practitioner and in the treatment plan. The parent session, then, is an important component of the engagement phase. The session reviews the treatment approach and goals of therapy (a more thorough explanation of the therapy process and model should have been provided prior to the initial session with the child) and discusses ways the parents can help make therapy a positive experience. The issue of client reluctance to attend subsequent sessions is also addressed in order to "preemptively validate the parent's experience" (Scheeringa, Amaya-Jackson, & Cohen, 2002, p. 14). (Some information from Scheeringa, Amaya-Jackson, & Cohen, 2002, has been included in the parent letter.) A hopeful message is provided to reassure parents that the child can heal from the trauma.

Getting To Know Each Other Better

This is a story about a kid named *Cory*. Some terrible things happened to *Cory*. One of the terrible things was sexual abuse (that means someone touched *Cory*'s private body parts). *Cory* had a lot of upset feelings about what happened. But we'll talk more about that another time. Let's find out more about *Cory*. *Cory* loves to build forts, watch TV, and go bike riding. *Cory* loves pizza, chocolate, and broccoli—yup, that's right, *Cory* loves broccoli!

What is the name of the kid in this story?

Was *Cory* sexually abused? (Did someone touch *Cory*'s private body parts?)

Cory loves to build forts, watch TV, and go bike riding. What are some of your favorite things to do?

Cory loves pizza, chocolate, and broccoli. What are some of your favorite foods?

Cory went to see a lady named *Ana*. *Ana* is a therapist. That means *Ana*'s job is to help kids with their upset feelings. *Ana* said therapy is a place to get help for problems and learn ways to feel better.

What is the name of *Cory*'s therapist?

What is the name of your therapist? (Hint: The person reading this story with you.)

What is a therapist's job?

Is therapy a place to get help for problems and learn ways to feel better?

Ana said, “Let’s play a game to get to know each other better. It’s called Five Favorites. Getting to know each other better will help you feel more comfortable coming here.”

You can play Five Favorites too! It will be a fun way for you and your therapist to get to know each other better. Follow the instructions below to play the game.

Five Favorites Game

Take turns picking a game card from the bag and sharing with each other your favorite things. For example, if you pick from the bag the card that says Movie, then take turns saying your favorite movie. When you pick one of the three special game cards, follow the directions on the card. Play until you’ve picked all the cards from the bag.

(Read after playing Five Favorites Game.) After you play Five Favorites, say one thing you learned about your therapist.

Ana explained, “When kids have been sexually abused, they have a lot of mixed-up feelings and worries. But you are getting help now so you can learn ways to feel better. One way to feel better is to do Robot-Ragdoll to relax your body.”

Ana showed Cory how to do Robot-Ragdoll. You can learn it too! Follow the instructions below to learn how to do it.

Robot-Ragdoll

Step 1: Stand up straight and stiff like a robot. Make all the muscles in your body from your head to your toes go really tight. Keep your body tight like a robot for 5 seconds.

Step 2: Make all the muscles in your body go loose and floppy like a ragdoll. Keep your body loose and floppy like a ragdoll for 5 seconds.

Step 3: Do the Robot-Ragdoll again, but this time, notice how your body feels tight when you are a robot and relaxed when you are a ragdoll. You have the power to make your body relax!

Cory liked doing Robot-Ragdoll. It was fun! Ana said, “If you do Robot-Ragdoll at bedtime, it will relax your body and help you sleep better. When you get good at it, you will know how to use Robot-Ragdoll to control upset feelings.” Cory wanted to sleep better. Cory wanted to control upset feelings. So Cory decided to do Robot-Ragdoll each night at bedtime.

You can practice Robot-Ragdoll at home too. Pretend it’s bedtime, then do Robot-Ragdoll 3 times to relax your body.

GAME CARDS

FIVE FAVORITES

(Version for 4-8 year olds)

ANIMAL

SNACK

MOVIE

SPORT

TOY

**GUESS MY
FAVORITE COLOR**

**GIVE EACH OTHER
A HIGH-FIVE**

**GIVE EACH OTHER
A CANDY**

GAME CARDS

FIVE FAVORITES

(Version for 9-12 year olds)

CELEBRITY

JUNK FOOD

MOVIE

SPORT

SONG

**HAVE A
THUMB WAR**

**HAVE A
STARING CONTEST**

**GIVE EACH OTHER
A CANDY**

Dear Parents,

Today I started reading Cory's Story to your child. Cory's Story will help your child learn important information about sexual abuse, and it will help your child process and heal from the trauma. I will read a different chapter of Cory's Story to your child over the next several sessions. Each chapter will highlight a different theme or issue.

The focus of this first chapter is on introducing Cory to your child. Your child will identify with Cory and realize that he/she is not the only one who was sexually abused. Although the issue of sexual abuse is introduced in this chapter, it is not the focus as children need to be eased into talking about difficult issues. This chapter helps to build a positive therapeutic relationship so your child will feel comfortable coming to therapy and being open and expressive during sessions.

The next few chapters will focus on educating your child about trauma and sexual abuse, and helping your child express feelings in healthy ways. Your child will also learn relaxation skills so he/she can cope better with upsetting feelings. Practicing these skills at home each night is a very important part of helping your child learn how to relax. When we meet, we will talk more about ways you can coach your child to practice these skills.

Future sessions will guide your child to talk about the sexual abuse and learn ways to cope with unhelpful thoughts and scary situations. Talking about the sexual abuse will be done gradually and through engaging activities to make this process easier for your child. Sharing details of the sexual abuse in a gradual way has proven to be effective in decreasing distressing feelings and reactions associated with the trauma. Sessions will include age-appropriate engaging activities to ensure therapy is balanced and paced to the needs of your child.

Additional chapters of Cory's Story will address healthy sexuality and teach safety skills. The last two chapters will review and celebrate therapeutic gains. A variety of therapeutic games, art activities, and other engaging interventions will be included in each session to make therapy a more positive experience for your child.

People of different religions, ethnicities, and cultures have different ways of expressing and dealing with trauma responses. I am eager to learn from you the traditions of your culture, religion, and family, and I will be respectful of these throughout our time together in therapy.

Bringing your child to therapy is an important step in helping him/her cope with the trauma of sexual abuse in a healthy way. Below are some ways **you can help** make therapy beneficial for your child:

- Tell your child that therapy is a safe place to get help with the sexual abuse and other problems and worries. Let your child know that he/she can talk about anything in therapy and he/she will not get in trouble for anything he/she says.
- Bring your child to therapy as scheduled and on time—children feel more secure and do better in therapy when they have consistent appointments.
- Try not to force or bribe your child to come to therapy or give punishments if your child refuses to come to sessions. If there is a problem bringing your child to therapy, please contact me to consult.

- Keep me informed of significant updates on your child and family so I can plan accordingly. It is best to contact me when your child is not present so concerns can be discussed freely. Whenever possible, please contact me well in advance of the session, rather than at the time of the appointment, so I can plan accordingly and so your child can benefit from the full session time.

Your active involvement in treatment is critical to your child's success in therapy and to your child's healing process. Your sessions will help you cope with your own thoughts and feelings, teach parenting skills, and provide ways you can respond effectively to your child's difficulties. While the work we do together will be mainly about helping you and your child cope with the sexual abuse, if there are other things you want to talk with me about, please let me know. You have a say in what our plan will be for our sessions, so we will talk more about your ideas and goals.

As therapy progresses, you may notice some changes in your child's behaviors and symptoms. For example, your child may experience an increase in some of the following: nightmares, angry outbursts, or difficulties concentrating. This is normal as your child begins to confront his/her difficulties. If this becomes a concern, please do not hesitate to discuss this with me so we can come up with a way to best support you and your child.

There may be times when you are reluctant to attend therapy. This might be because you don't want to face difficult issues, or because you don't want to expose your child to painful feelings related to the trauma. Many parents feel this way. Your child may also become resistant to returning to therapy, especially when sessions are focused on talking about details of the sexual abuse. However, the effectiveness of therapy depends on being able to tolerate short-term painful emotions. Therefore, my advice is to ignore this reluctance and come to sessions anyway! We can then discuss ways you and your child can get the support you need.

It is normal to feel concerned about how the sexual abuse might affect your child in the future. Please be reassured that when a child receives appropriate treatment, and when the parents are actively involved in therapy sessions and provide strong emotional support to the child, victims of sexual abuse can heal from the trauma and can become emotionally stronger and better able to cope with life's challenges.

In today's session, your child learned a relaxation technique called Robot-Ragdoll. If practiced daily, your child will learn this technique so he/she can use it to cope with fear and anxiety. It is best to do Robot-Ragdoll with your child each night at bedtime. This will help your child calm his/her body in preparation for sleep. **You can help** your child by establishing bedtime routines and integrating the Robot-Ragdoll technique into this routine. For example: bathe, brush teeth, put on pajamas, read a bedtime story while cuddling together, do Robot-Ragdoll three times, hugs and kisses goodnight. Some children will need additional measures to help them feel safe at bedtime (e.g., checking under beds or in closets, leaving on a nightlight, and sleeping with a comfort object). You can do Robot-Ragdoll along with your child—it will help your child learn the technique and it will reduce your stress level too!

Once your child has learned Robot-Ragdoll, **you can help** him/her do it when he/she needs to de-stress. You can follow this four-step process:

1. Pay attention to the signs that your child is getting overly scared or anxious and name what you see: "You're holding on to me very tight and you have a scared look on your face."

2. Coach your child to use Robot-Ragdoll to get calm (do Robot-Ragdoll too so your child can follow your lead): “Let’s do Robot-Ragdoll together to get calm. We’ll do it a few times until our bodies feel calm.”
3. Praise your child: “You just did a great job doing Robot-Ragdoll to calm your body.”
4. Empower your child: “You have the power to make your body get calm.”

Attached is a copy of the chapter from today’s session so you can better understand what was covered.