

The Investigative Window of Opportunity

The “*Investigative Window of Opportunity*” is an investigative Best Practice that describes **the optimum time to interview the child abuse victim**, which occurs either during or immediately after the initial outcry. It is during these precious minutes when investigators have the opportunity to glean the most detailed information. It is safe to say that, **for every hour that goes by after the initial outcry without coordinated multidisciplinary investigative intervention, information critical to case evaluation is being lost**. If days pass, that critical information is being lost **exponentially**.

There are other *Windows of Opportunity*, or optimum times for initiating an investigative response. Each of these has an optimum time period for producing the most detailed information that will have bearing on the case.

- interview of the non-offending parent
- crime scene evaluation
- medical evidence
- perpetrator interview
- corroborative points

Impediments to the *Window of Opportunity* include:

- lack of knowledge of dysfunctional dynamics of child sexual abuse
- lack of knowledge of child abuse reporting laws and processes
- lack of notification, or delay in investigator’s involvement in the case
- lack of collaboration (disciplines not working together in a coordinated manner)
- lack of coordination, or certain members of the MDT proceeding prior to other team members
- lack of preparation, coordination or training in child abuse investigation
- apathy – investigators or intervenors that just do not care

Multidisciplinary teams are challenged to review each case for the *Windows of Opportunity* in their investigative intervention. Doing so will identify habitual weaknesses in the investigations and will highlight issues to be addressed by agency administrators, policymakers, MDT coordinators and board of directors.

Simply stated, **the protection of children hinges on the CAC’s/MDT’s ability to acknowledge that children “outcry” for a multitude of reasons**. Their timing is neither contingent upon nor respectful of work schedules, caseloads, CAC protocols, investigative knowledge and ability. A properly prepared community has created an environment conducive to the child telling, and has a specially trained team of professionals prepared to mobilize when the child is ready to disclose.

Go to www.detectivemike.com to view full article, originally published in the National Child Advocate.