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A story of stories

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General Discussion

The overall aim of this dissertation was to get a better understanding of the impact of caring for foster children with a history of child sexual abuse on everyday fostering family life, as well as the process of collecting data on this sensitive topic. To reach this aim, we studied foster families' life stories, social workers' reports on children's self-disclosure of sexual abuse, and researchers' logs.

Theoretical reflections

This dissertation illustrates that foster care is a complex, dynamic, and unique endeavor. It suggests that fostering a victim of sexual abuse impacts vital relational features of family life. More specifically, fostering a victim of child sexual abuse not only impacts individual family members on an intrapersonal level, it also affects the manner in which individuals relate to other family members and the family system. The relational features of fostering family life are suggested to be helpful and healing (for example, in disclosing abuse experiences or speaking of confrontational fostering situations), as well as possibly threatening (for example, in care-giving or intimate activities). Achieving a balance between the good and the bad of relationships seems an ongoing, ever-changing, dynamic process. Theoretical reflections on the relational features of fostering a survivor of child sexual abuse are presented in this section.

The intimacy of fostering

Several studies, including the studies presented in this dissertation, highlight the precariousness of the balance between a caregiver's needs, a foster child's needs, and a family's needs, a balance for which the caregivers are responsible (for instance, Hardwick, 2005; Pickin, Brunsdon, & Hill, 2011). Families face challenges in fostering children due to personal and systemic difficulties (Geiger, Piel, Lietz & Julien-Chinn, 2016). These personal and familial challenges cause foster parents to consider giving up fostering children (Brown & Calder, 1999). Moreover, placement success seems largely dependent on the interpersonal bond between foster family members and their foster child (Boushel, 1994; Hojer, 2004; Samrai, Beinart, & Harper, 2011; Southerland, Mustillo, Farmer, Stambaugh, & Murray, 2009).

“ Unsafety is a highly relational concept in the context of foster family life ”

This thesis illustrates that unsafety is a highly relational concept in the context of foster family life. Safety and unsafe feelings in foster families can occur in several family members simultaneously and may exist latently. Three types of unsafety were narrated: 'actual' unsafety,

experienced unsafety, and apprehended unsafety. These three types indicate that in experienced as well as less experienced families safety issues may arise in fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse. A source of unsafety in the process of caring for a child with a history of sexual abuse appears to be intimacy, either psychological (having a relationship) or physical intimacy (for instance, affection or intimate child-care). Pickin, Brunsdon and Hill (2011, p.72) state that caring for a foster child is 'unavoidably intimate' because this process requires the formation of a relationship between carers and child. Additionally, our findings suggest that living with a foster child with a history of sexual abuse evokes unsafety issues in carers, as well as in non-caring family members.

When reviewing unsafety from an attachment perspective, foster families can be viewed as the necessary 'secure' base from which children explore the physical and social world (Bowlby, 1973; Bacon & Richardson, 2001). However, the foster care relationship, or in other words, the relationship between a child and its 'secure base', is also a part of a child's exploration, especially in the case of children with sexual abuse histories. Steenbakkers, Ellingsen, Van der Steen and Grietens (2018) argue that foster youth with a history of sexual abuse first need to feel safe and be confident that their relationship will not be abusive, before a close relationship can be established. Several foster families, centered in our safety study, narrated their foster child's exploration process similarly, in terms of exploring psychological, physical, and sexual safety.

Family members' safety concerns mostly root in a foster child's current behavior or apprehended risky behavior. For instance, respondents narrated to be shocked because some foster children viewed behaving sexually as normal. These behaviors reveal how foster children remain dependent on the mental representations, ideas, and expectations about themselves and other people they have built in their abusive past (Bacon & Richardson, 2001; Kelly & Salmon, 2014). Kelly and Salmon (2014) argue the importance for foster parents to consider how the child's abusive past affects their current behaviors in relationships, as this can aid foster parents in attuning to those strategies a child needs in order to develop positive expectations of future relationships. Geiger, Piel Lietz and Julien-Chinn (2016) also describe how foster parents adapt their parenting approach more easily, when they understand the reasons behind a child's behavior, feelings, and thoughts. Similarly, in the process of relational recovery, male survivors of child sexual abuse described needing to learn what relational limits were and how to set them, as their own personal boundaries had been invaded so forcefully in the past (Kia-Keating, Sorsoli, & Grossman, 2010)

Although the narratives of participants in this dissertation highlight the value of experience-based learning, creating a safe living environment for all family members is a continuous task as

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each developmental phase of each individual family member affects the interpersonal relations. Moreover, family units also evolve. Thus, it seems family members' awareness of others' unsafe experiences as well as the awareness of dynamics underlying this unsafety could be beneficial to foster family management. This awareness improves interpersonal relationships.

Relationships as triggers

In addition to verbal disclosure, chapter four also illustrates the behavioral manners of disclosing a history of sexual abuse, as numerous children reacted unexpectedly to everyday life events. Allagia (2004) highlights the problematic nature of behavioral disclosures of sexual abuse, as interpreters might attribute disclosing behaviors to everyday stressors in a child's life. This dissertation illustrates the communicative value of behavioral cues in the context of foster care, as foster parents report the amount of triggers to traumatic behavior in everyday life to be 'infinite'. Briere and Lanktree (2012) state that many problems arise in trauma-exposed youth when stimuli and situations in their environment trigger traumatic memories. It can help children and youth to 'maintain internal equilibrium in his or her daily life by teaching him or her how to identify and address triggers in the environment that activate posttraumatic reliving' (p.98). A problematic feature in fostering victims of sexual abuse, however, is that triggers often are strongly embedded in daily life. For example, foster children seem to be triggered to recall their past in the context of nudity, still some caregiving acts require nudity to some extent (McFadden, 1989).

Physical intimacy is highly likely to trigger all child victims of sexual abuse. Briere and Lanktree (2012) identify a series of trauma-related triggers, some of which correspond well with the results presented in this dissertation. Firstly, people with physical or psychological characteristics that are similar to a past perpetrator can trigger children. Secondly, Briere and Lanktree discuss the triggering nature of sexual situations. This dissertation adds to this type of stimuli, more specifically, that of acts, objects, or persons being perceived as sexual. Sex as a trigger is vastly different from an act, object, or person being perceived as sexual. For example, our participants reported children being sexually aroused by kiwi fruit, advertisements for bathing suits, or pieces of furniture.

The relational approach to a conversation

As presented in chapter three, the process of disclosing past sexual abuse experiences is strongly dependent on the relationship between the teller (the foster child) and the listener or interpreter (oftentimes a foster family member), as some disclosures are more explicit than others. Victims

of sexual abuse test whether their choice of interlocutor is willing to explore what happened to them, thus, making the interlocutor an important feature in engaging in the disclosure dialogue (Flâm and Haugstvedt, 2013). However, recognizing an expression or a behavior as being a disclosure is a complex process. The complexity of this dialogical component (for instance, Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; Herskowitz, Lanes & Lamb, 2007; Jensen, 2005; McElvaney, Green, & Hogan, 2012; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005) becomes apparent throughout chapter four.

A beneficial component in problematic dialogues emerges from chapter four (on self-disclosure) and chapter five (on safety): dialogical safety. This type of safety moves beyond prior explicated concepts as rapport, as it implies more than a mutual understanding or a harmonious relationship. Dialogical safety is a social, relational construct, which implies an interlocutor to feel safe enough to engage in an open dialogue concerning sensitive issues. The need of this type of safety is apparent to foster children (in self-disclosing sexual abuse experiences) and birth children of foster parents (in sharing emotional, unsafe, or intense experiences with their parents).

The importance of dialogical safety to foster children is illustrated in our study, and can be linked to other studies. The results of our case file study imply that children do disclose their past, but struggle to re-construct their abuse experience as well as their forced contribution in the abuse, as this would strengthen the traumatizing effect of feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame. Similarly, Jackson, Newall and Backett-Milburn (2015) describe that although children challenged the secretiveness surrounding sexual abuse, as well as “the stigmatized discourses of sex and sexual abuse that make it difficult for people to talk openly about it” (p. 325) by disclosing strikingly explicit, they did describe feeling ashamed of the abuse, as well as of disclosing the abuse. These results are in line with several other studies suggesting how children’s feelings of shame, blame, and guilt can hamper the disclosure process (for instance, Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; Herskowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007; Paine & Hansen, 2002).

In addition, traumatized children struggle to organize a coherent account of their traumatic experiences (Mossige, et al., 2005; Van der Kolk, 2014). Steenbakkers, van der Steen and Grietens (2016) found that foster youth ‘...wish to know a person for a longer period before disclosure, which gives them time to build a relationship and to decide if it is safe to share their story’ (p.7). Thus, to foster children, especially those with a history of sexual abuse, safety seems conditional to verbally disclosing or sharing their personal story. Children need adequate opportunities to explore the verbal accounts of their traumatic past, without feeling judged for the content or disorganized form of their narratives.

With regard to their birth children, foster parents narrated how dialogical safety was created explicitly in order to discuss shocking behaviors of their foster sibling. This seemed an easier task to foster parents, when birth children were in their teenage years. Wozniak (2001) reports similar experiences of foster mothers who, for example, described feeling concerned about the impression a foster child's behavior had made on their biological children. Some foster parents even deemed their biological children's maturity to speak about threats, risks or unsafe experiences necessary to continue fostering. Creating an emotionally safe space for all children to have an outlet seems important to many foster parents.

How to relate to the family system

The impact of fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse becomes apparent in the way birth children relate and remain connected to the family system. More specifically, this dissertation emphasizes the importance to consider, position, and support birth daughters and sons in their newly gained role or social position in fostering a sexually abused foster sibling. Firstly, the narratives of foster mothers and their birth daughters, as illustrated in chapter five, indicate they as females are perceived and positioned as safe. In many families they are positioned as risk-free persons, consequently, they are involved in specific caregiving activities to protect other family members. Chapter six illustrates foster mothers' great sense of responsibility, however, little is said by the birth daughters concerning the weight of their newly gained responsibility. Several daughters report being confronted with the sexualized behavior of a foster child in situations in which they were actively caring for the child. Generally these daughters seemed to consider their newly gained role a priority, making their own feelings secondary. The impact of the birth daughters new role, as well as the applied coping strategies should be considered.

Secondly, contrary to female family members, male family members narrated being perceived as unsafe. In addition, some experienced unsafety themselves in fostering certain children with a history of sexual abuse. These results indicate that fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse impacts the identity of all foster family members, as new dimensions to each member's identity are developed in relationship to each individual foster child. Foster parents' sons narrated struggling to accept being a threat to a family member. In addition, as their active involvement in the fostering process was perceived risky, very little means and psychological space remained to reform their identity actively. Their fathers, however, negotiated their role with the children actively: They foster within a more professional, distant framework. This facilitates the inclusion of the negative 'threatening' dimension in their identity as a foster carer, as this is 'simply' a part of being a carer. Birth sons, however, are denied the professional distance, as they are not put in

the position to carry out caregiving responsibilities. Thompsom, McPherson and Marsland (2016) describe how birth children attribute importance to their position in the family, moreover, this is a key element of the way in which they relate to their parents. Furthermore, the parent-birth child relationship can be stretched if the amount and weight of alterations are not taken into account. Having a foster sibling with a history of sexual abuse proved to impact birth daughters and sons, as their sibling's past or behavior required alterations of the original family roles, relationships, and ways of relating (Sulloway, 2007). Furthermore, in confrontation with their siblings' traumatic past, birth children involuntarily had to alter their view on people and the world.

Fostering partners

Similar to Heslop's (2014) observations, our findings suggest that traditionally gendered relations are reproduced in foster families, as in most families the foster mother was determined the most safe and risk-free, and, oftentimes she was the main carer of the child with a history of sexual abuse. Few exemplary experiences were narrated which challenged this view on the foster mother. However, the relationship of a foster child and its foster mother seems to be affected by the child's mental representations (Milan & Pinderhughes, 2000). Our study in chapter six shows that fostering a child with a history of maternal sexual abuse is complex, as foster mothers' responsibilities, expectations, and ambitions are continuously challenged. Although the foster mothers did not narrate feeling threatened, they often are confronted with direct sexualized or sexually explorative behavior of their foster child. Moreover, as they feel great responsibility to keep every other family member safe, their position becomes risky.

With regard to the foster mother's expectations and ambitions, we found the women to be challenged in reframing foster motherhood due to a child's specific behavior towards them. Similar to what Hojer (2004) reports, these women viewed themselves as capable, warm, and affectionate mothers. Although they desired to foster the victims of maternal sexual abuse similarly to other foster children, or even their biological children, they narrated how they had to adjust child-rearing practices and felt the need for a balance between the parental and professional dimension of foster motherhood. This intrapersonal challenge adds even more pressure to this type of motherhood, especially when others are not aware of these females' complex reality (Broady, Stoyles, McMullan, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2010). In being the most safe, yet isolated, person in a family system lies the risk of significant system stressors, for instance, foster carer burnout and social isolation (Boushel, 1994). It is important to reflect

and assess each fostering partner in a system, as family members can grow into or be forced into a role or position they did not expect or want.

Shifting between identities

Another relevant relational feature to be addressed concerns both fostering adults and researchers studying fostering family units. Foster parents as well as researchers within the Iris Project narrated struggles in executing their role as “a semi-professional foster parent” or “a personally involved researcher”. Firstly, foster mothers and fathers narrated how a certain amount of distance, a characteristic of professionalism, allowed and enabled them to care for their foster child with a history of sexual abuse. The studies presented in this thesis suggest fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse even requires some relational distance. This duality of foster parents’ identity is similarly described in prior studies (for instance, Blythe, Wilkes & Halcomb, 2014; Kirton, 2007; Nutt, 2002; Schofield, Beek, Ward & Biggart, 2013). Secondly, in studying these families systems, the researchers needed to be sensitive in establishing a research relationship to the individual participants as well as the family system participants belong to. In this process of attuning, however, the researchers were challenged to integrate professional and personal aspects in the research relationship, as is illustrated in chapter three. Studying the impact of a child’s history of child sexual abuse required the researchers to consider the balance of power in the research relationship (Hydén, 2013). Additionally, the persona of the researcher brought a unique aspect in each research relationship. Each interview challenged researchers to balance their professional roles, while not neglecting their personal emotions and values. Overall, foster carers and researchers are challenged in balancing professional and personal aspects while relating to the topic of child sexual abuse.

Methodological reflections

The stories of individual members as a part of a foster family system brought us insights in the impact of fostering a child with a putative history of sexual abuse. As illustrated in this dissertation, foster families are highly dynamic, ever-changing, and unique systems. Each chapter of this dissertation leans upon the constructivist’s conception of reality as a (co-) creation of an individual person. Thus, the results are not to be carelessly generalized, considering their contextual embedment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, this section provides a methodological reflection on the context in which the studies were designed, executed, and ‘translated’ into manuscripts.

Quality control

In the case file study and the narrative interview studies, attention was paid to various quality standards, among them internal coherence and transparency, intersubjectivity, and credibility. First, as the studies were explorative and descriptive of nature, the processes of data collection and analysis had an iterative nature. We considered and reconsidered the data collected, our influence on the data, and the preliminary interpretations, in order to come to a coherent, overall understanding of our data. In this iterative process, all researchers wrote logs and memos containing details on the data collection and analyses in order to achieve transparency (Yardley, 2000).

Second, intersubjectivity (Steinke, 2004) was an important quality standard. In the case file study both the data collectors and the analysts thoroughly discussed differences of opinion or interpretations in order to reach consensus. In the narrative studies the process of reaching intersubjective agreement was more comprehensive. More specifically, each interviewer wrote a log after an interview containing reflections on the conversation, observations, and preliminary interpretations. These logs were used to prepare following interviews as the interviewer and the main researcher reflected on the interview process. After completing a series of interviews, and a verbatim transcription of the conversations, the interviewer firstly conducted an inductive thematic analysis of all interviews per participant (Bazeley, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This iterative process of reading, re-reading, and coding of the transcripts, was followed by a discussion of the analysis by the main analyst and a second member of the research team. In these ‘intersubjectivity-meetings’ specific attention was paid to the accuracy of coding and the coherence of the analyst’s chain of thoughts. Additionally, the researcher’s assumptions, prior knowledge, and persona were considered in the process of analysis. The logs of the interviewer and analysis memos were also incorporated in these discussions. As a result, a book with synthesized narratives was written and discussed in the research team in order to grasp the realities of our participants.

Lastly, the participants of Project Iris were asked to check our synthesized interpretations of their narrated reality. This process of member-checking was designed to verify whether the constructions collected are those that have been offered by the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), thus establishing credibility of the study.

Narrative research: the work of humans

Overall, in valuing results of narrative research, either studies centering oral narratives or written information, it is of importance to not frame conclusions in terms of causality, instead, results

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should be presented as certain perceptions of reality. Thus, as every person involved in a study, participant or researcher, is considered an active party in constructing the outcome of a research process, we need to reflect on the involvement of the visible and 'invisible' persons in the various studies.

In the case file study, we analyzed information from foster children's files assuming each piece of information to be noteworthy to foster parents. Additionally, we assumed that the reporting social workers considered information to be worthy of describing in the children's files. In contrast to the study by Jensen et al. (2005), our study revealed that foster children rarely disclosed being genitally penetrated. Still, several files do report that some children had actually suffered this: The severity of the abuse as reported by the social workers, did not match the children's self-disclosure. One explanation of fewer disclosures describing penetration in our study can be found in the social workers' involvement in writing the case file. For example, could it 'simply' be too confronting to report or describe a child being genitally penetrated? Are the social workers withholding this graphic information out of fear of stigmatizing a child? Or is a self-disclosure on genital penetration not deemed a necessity to report, because a child's sexual abuse history is fully acknowledged already? The social workers, although they remain in the background, influenced the outcomes.

Although we are grateful to the 31 people who shared their story with us, it is necessary to consider the implications of the composition of the sample of Project Iris. For example, in our sample foster children are underrepresented, as only two foster children participated in the study. This could also be viewed as a result: Very few children wanted to be involved in a study regarding their traumatic past. Especially with regard to the themes safety and unsafety, their stories would have provided new leads to optimize and relieve their care, as the experience of safety and interpretation of behaviors have been proven to be highly personal.

Further, Fontes and Plummer (2010) state that persons' ethnic background, religion, and culture affect the process of child sexual abuse disclosure. Most of our participants are considered to be conservative and traditional in terms of beliefs about religion, culture, and gender. This may have influenced their attitude and thoughts on sexuality and the execution of familial roles. For example, literature reveals how sexual abuse confuses young male victims as to their sexual preference (for example, Kia-Keating, Grossman, Sorsoli & Epstein, 2005; Lisak, 1994). Homosexuality is a complex topic when it comes to religion.

Weighing the outcomes

One could argue that one of the overall conclusions of this study, that a child's history of sexual abuse mostly affects interpersonal relationships, is strongly influenced by our epistemological stance. Chapter two describes how this dissertation is written from the view on reality as a person's contextually and interpersonally constructed truth. This standpoint influenced the research design, the collection and the interpretation of data. Thus, we should wonder: Are we verifying our own assumptions or view on reality?

Literature on fostering a victim of sexual abuse, similar to our findings, reports several relational challenges (for example, Farmer & Pollock, 1999, 2003; Hardwick, 2005; McFadden, 1989). Although these studies mostly do not describe their view on reality, the studies do center foster family members as their main informants. Moreover, we found several similarities between different families or members of different families. Thus, it is very reasonable to assume our findings are not completely idiosyncratic. Additionally, the importance of relationships has been illustrated throughout the literature on foster care. For example, attachment is one of the most explored topics in foster care literature. Especially in victims of sexual abuse attachment issues arise (Cairns, 2002; Howe & Fearnly, 2003). Relationships, however, also have healing powers, as Southerland et al. (2009) and Wells, Farmer, Richard and Burns (2004) argue.

In conclusion, we found that foster family relationships can be both healing and triggering for foster children, a result which corresponds with prior studies. The ambiguity of relationships is manifested in everyday life in both positive and negative manners. As individuals grow and evolve, relationships also need to evolve. However, this process of growth involves many strong, complex emotions, such as rejection, guilt, and shame.

Strengths of the study

Vanderfaillie, Van Holen, Carlier and Fransen (2018) found that foster care placements of sexually abused children broke down more often than placements of physically abused or neglected children. Various elements can lead to unwanted breakdowns, for instance, a foster child's challenging behaviors or allegations of abuse (for instance, James, 2004; Oijen, 2010; Vanderfaillie et al., 2018). The foster families centered in the current study narrate similar challenges, and highlight what they mean in their unique system. Thus, limitations to our studies notwithstanding, listening to foster families' stories on disclosure, safety, and parenthood, allowed us to gain some insights into their complex and challenging world in which placement breakdown is a common outcome. Creating awareness of the path towards a foster care breakdown is the first step in avoiding this negative outcome of placement. It is of the utmost

importance to value each foster family member and their stories to reveal those forces pressing on everyday family life. Still, as our findings are not idiosyncratic and show resemblance to other studies, we expect the findings to be of high ecological validity, as they can be generalized to real-life settings and to foster families outside the Netherlands.

Another strength of this study was the adopted narrative approach. Through collecting foster families' narratives we gained unique insights into the lives of an understudied group and

“ Through collecting foster families’ narratives we gained unique insights into the lives of an understudied group and an understudied topic ”

an understudied topic. All participant evaluated their involvement and our work during and after completing the interview. In these moments of evaluation we learned the value of conversing reflectively on multiple occasions. Following our

participants' lives during a number of months, we saw firsthand the continuous changes in everyday life. These influential occurrences were logged thoroughly. Meeting our participants multiple times was also beneficial in creating the necessary dialogical safety to discuss the sensitive topic of child sexual abuse and the impact of caring for a foster child with a history of sexual abuse on everyday life. Participants greatly valued the time we took to listen, and reported feeling respected in narrating the complexity of their lives.

Implications for future research

As illustrated in chapter two, narrative research can be defined in many ways, drawing from a variety of epistemologies, theories, methods, and types of analysis. In the Iris project, we focused on the content of the narratives, thus, our findings were constructed by a process of inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We did not, however, perform a narrative analysis. Due to practical challenges of time management and the great amount of narrative data, we choose to merely focus on the content of the participants' stories, instead of reviewing their structural components systematically. Still, the use of NVivo10 (QSR International, 2015) enabled us consider contextual factors (Bazeley, 2013) and “latent” themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thus, attention was paid to nuances in the narrative data.

Various scholars (for example, Hammack, 2010; Murray, 2002; Murray & Sools, 2015; Phoenix, 2013) argue how personal narrative accounts interconnect with larger societal, cultural narratives, or social representations. In narrative studies as the Iris Project this is important to consider as the thematic focus of the narratives is of sensitive nature. Moreover, conversations about sex, sexuality, and sexual abuse are always embedded in the cultural values and beliefs

on a macro-level of a society, as well as on the micro-level of a family or a persons' own views (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Thus, moving beyond the contents of the narratives and analyzing their structural, interactional, and dialogical components could provide deeper insights into the social, cultural, and societal context of foster families' narratives.

Implications and recommendations for practice

Strong and safe relationships with trusted adults can help survivors of child sexual abuse to recover (Kia-Keating, Sorsoli & Grossman, 2010; Marriott, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Harrop, 2014; Southerland et al, 2009). With regard to healing from trauma, Van der Kolk states that “restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being” (2014, p.38). The development of a strong relationship between a foster parent and a child can improve interpersonal functioning of the child and initiate a developmental catch-up, helping children to develop more adaptive behavior (Southerland et al., 2009). Still, Hardwick (2005) argues that when physical and emotional intimacy is discontinued, the potential of a foster family member's therapeutic relationship with a child is impaired. Thus, similar to what this dissertation illustrates, it is necessary to balance between keeping everyone physically and emotionally safe while engaging in a fostering experience.

A reflective stance is useful in fostering children with a putative history of sexual abuse. During our interview process with the 11 families we, together with our participants, experienced the value of looking back and forward. Thus, a first recommendation to the practice of foster care is that of reflecting and communicating on past challenges, current issues, and apprehended trials. Bessel van der Kolk (2014, p.38) recommends language as an important tool: “language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning”. However, as discourses of sex and sexual abuse are stigmatized (Jackson, Newall and Backett-Milburn, 2015) making it difficult to speak openly, meta-communication could be helpful to all concerned. This means fostering adults or those guiding them, actively work on creating dialogical safety by giving each other, as well as the children to be raised, the message that an open dialogue always is possible (Hardwick, 2005). In meta-communication, for example, expectations, feelings, and worries can be addressed. However, this joint reflection requires time and undivided attention, which in the current societal and political environment is not always provided or possible. Awareness of the lack time and energy to intensively counsel foster families should be an incentive for politicians and policy makers to make the necessary changes.

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The relationship a foster child has with (temporary) carers and trustworthy persons has the potential to change previous attachment patterns (Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsi, 2016). However, past experiences of apprehended unsafety in foster family members can disturb the fostering process, thereby possibly limiting the change of a foster child's mental representations. Thus, it seems of importance to take appropriate measures to establish physical, emotional, and relational safety in foster families caring for a child with a history of sexual abuse. Again, a first step in families is to become aware of each person's experiences of (un)safety, and the effects of these experiences on familial relationships, as on the family as a unit. These experiences should be discussed with all family members, adults, as well as minors. Even the youngest family members should be asked to review their experiences of safety. In addition, social workers can aid in reviewing the 'hot zones' of actual, experienced, or apprehended unsafety from the perspective of all individual family members. Again, each fostering individual deserves time and attention to express feelings of unsafety or perceptions of being unsafe for another family member.

In foster children with a history of sexual abuse unsafe memories can be triggered by everyday life activities. Foster family members should be prepared with the knowledge that a child can have a strong reaction to everyday life aspects, as many things are known to trigger sexually abused children. An analysis of the triggering nature of activities, persons, locations, or objects is helpful in preventing, reducing, or ceasing a child's exposure to them. In addition, when everyday life aspects are known to trigger a child, a foster family can decide which member is the designated person to handle a situation or help a child reduce stress. Moreover, understanding the impact of traumatic events on a child, and their manifestations in a child's behaviors, will help foster family members to handle situations more effectively for all. Dealing with a foster child's traumatized behaviors, however, can evoke strong (negative) emotions in foster family members. Awareness and acknowledgement of these feelings can aid family members in planning to handle future situations.

Profound intrapersonal, relational and familial changes take place in or due to the fostering process of caring for a sexually abused child. Some of these changes remain latent, as priorities lie elsewhere. Still, these changes will manifest in due time, for example in disengagement or isolation in the fostering process. Hence, it is of great importance to reinforce families and provide opportunities of relationship-building among individuals (i.e. fostering partners, parents and biological children/foster children, and biological and foster siblings).

Lastly, our participants illustrated the need for respite, as everyday fostering life sometimes takes a toll. As fostering individuals are at risk of secondary traumatization, as well as foster care stress and burnout (for example, Banyard, Rozelle & Englund, 2001; Boushel, 1994; Brown &

Calder, 2000; Hannah & Woolgar, 2018; McLain, 2008) respite will provide a time to relieve stress and to invest in self-care strategies.

