

Read About *Why Our Investigative Interview Program Matters*:

Absolutely everything about her showed how closed off and angry Lilly was. Her arms tightly crossed against her body, her baseball cap pulled down low over her face, her eyes flashing defiantly from under the brim. “I didn’t ask to be here,” she informed SungateKids’ Family Support Coordinator as she sat in the farthest corner of the couch in the waiting room. “That’s ok, we’re still glad you came.” She asked Lilly a few questions – but not about the allegations, which caught the 14 year-old off-guard. Here was this grown-up, asking her about normal stuff. It felt almost weird.

Soon after, the Forensic Interviewer came out and introduced herself. Instantaneously, her guard went back up. “Whatever,” she said, and shrugged her shoulders. As she headed into the interview room with the Interviewer, Lilly dug her hands into the pockets of her jeans so no one could see how much they were shaking. Then the interviewer started to talk to her. Not like a little kid, and not at her – *to* her. She explained the rules, talked to her about telling the truth, and told her that she wasn’t in trouble. Lilly started to relax. She had imagined it so differently – more like on tv, with a “good cop” and a “bad cop,” but here was this Interviewer, who was calmly talking to her, one human being to another. Twice in one day.

“You don’t understand,” said Lilly. “No one understands. He loves me. I love him. My parents hate him just because he’s older than me, but they’re just jealous because they have a terrible marriage and we have true love.” The Interviewer didn’t look shocked when she said that, so Lilly tried to shock her. “He’s 39, you know. He says I have an old soul.” Still no reaction; the Interviewer just said “tell me more about that.” So Lilly did – she told the Interviewer about how they met online. And things progressed from there. She started sneaking out at night to see him. They were going to run away together, but then her parents saw some of their text exchanges.

As she talked, a strange thing began to happen. The more Lilly told, the more she wanted to tell. She started telling the Interviewer things about how scared she was, about how uncomfortable he made her, about how she didn’t want to do any of the things he asked her to do, but she didn’t want to disappoint him because he loved her so much and she was supposed to be in love with him, too. And pretty soon the words and the tears were pouring out of her and she was sobbing and she felt so terrible and at the same time so relieved – she’d been carrying this around for so long and she’d finally given it to someone else to carry. She was exhausted and exhilarated all at the same time.

Her parents sat in the waiting room, ashen-faced. But when they saw her walk out of the interview room with relief in her eyes, they knew their daughter had come back to them.

Not every child who has been abused will tell someone they trust. Some blame themselves. Some fear for their lives, or for the lives of their loved ones, if they talk about it. Some have told and weren’t believed, so turn inwards, thinking that no one else will believe them either. But the expert interviewers at SungateKids know that each child is different, and treat each child with the dignity, respect and professionalism he or she needs and deserves. With their extensive training and years of expertise, our interviewers know that when a child is ready to talk, they are ready to make that first step from victim to survivor to thriver. And the SungateKids team is there to support the child every step of the way.

Join us in helping children on this journey. Help us make a difference. With your support, we can restore childhood and make our community a better and safer place for children.

To learn more this program, please visit our website at www.sungatekids.org, or contact us at sungate@sungatekids.org or by telephone at 303-368-1065.