

Best Practice Standard in Treating Youth Who Engage in Sexual Misconduct

The standards in this manual represent the best practices as measured by current research, evidence-based practice and outcome measures. Goals include promoting healing, forgiveness, and respect for self and others. The best practitioners are warm and empathic, addressing all aspects of the youth's functioning, while maintaining a focus on those areas demonstrated to be associated with risk. Interventions that do not take the youth's family circumstances into consideration may well do harm in the long run.

The sex- specific treatment approach must be sensitive to the youth's developmental trajectory and how experience, development, environment, differing ability, society, and culture impact this trajectory and create dynamics, issues, and problems that placed the youth on a pathway to sexually offend.

“We do not know exactly what variables need to be present, in what combinations, in what relationships to each other, at what critical points of development, with what intensities, and in what context, in order for sexual abuse to occur and be maintained” (Thomas 2006). However, what is clear is that sexual acting out is a result of multiple, interacting factors (etiological and maintenance factors) that converge at a particular point in time in a given context. These factors “have a cumulative effect” on the youth (Prescott 2006) diverting their normative path of development. It is about the convergence and melding of these factors that creates a synergistic reaction (Ward, Polaschek, and Beech, 2006). Etiological and maintenance factors include: disruption and deficits in development, inconsistent and unhealthy environments, deficits in executive functioning and problems with self-regulation, cognitive distortions and underdeveloped values and morality, problems in emotional identification, expression and regulation, problems and deficits in self-concept, self-esteem and self-identity, social competency and social relatedness problems, childhood trauma and maltreatment, awareness deficits and other co-morbid mental health issues and learning disabilities.

Sex-specific assessment should help identify which factors, in what proportion, and at what point in development, youth were directed onto the pathway to offending. Additionally, treatment should assist the youth to increase competency and skills necessary to ensure their ability to control or eliminate the etiological and maintenance factors that influenced their pathway to offend, to re-establish a healthy developmental trajectory (in all developmental stages), to obtain their needs and human goods in a healthy way and to place themselves back on a healthy pathway towards becoming a functional, healthy and happy adult (Ward, T., Polaschek, D. and Beech, A. Theories of Sexual Offending, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2006).

National literature endorses the use of a holistic, integrated approach to treating youthful sexual abuse (Longo, 2001; Hunter & Longo, 2004). This approach blends traditional aspects of sexual-abuse treatment into a holistic, humanistic and developmentally-consistent model for working with youth. While cognitive-behavioral treatment methods appear promising, treatment must go beyond the sexual problems and address “growth and development, social

ecology, increasing health, social skills, resiliency, and incorporate treatment for the offender's own victimization and co-occurring disorders" (Developmental Services Group, 2000). Protective Factors can have a great impact on decreasing risk and helping the youth in making healthy life choices (J. Worling, 2013, DASH).

The primary aim in juvenile sex-specific treatment is to instill in the youth the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to develop and implement a positive and healthy identity revolving around personally meaningful ways of meeting their human needs and pursuing their interests. Thus, treatment is focused on factors related to the youth's developmental trajectory—the causal and maintenance factors that diverted the youth to a pathway to offend.

Treatment interventions need to help the youth to successfully re-enter a healthy developmental trajectory and build the competency, resiliency, and protective factors necessary to resolve and/or eliminate etiological and maintenance factors that led them to offend.

According to the "Good Lives Model," treatment should help the youth acquire (in a healthy way) the skills and primary human goods (healthy living, knowledge, excellence in play and work, excellence in self-agency, freedom from emotional turmoil and stress, friendship, community, purpose in life, happiness and creativity) required to be happy and healthy and live a good life (Ward, T.; Polaschek, D. and Beech, A. Theories of Sexual Offending, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2006, page 297-313).

As part of a holistic approach, treatment should integrate standard sex-offense- specific treatment components, such as development of full accountability for all offense behaviors, insight into offense dynamics and choice to offend, building realistic and effective self-regulation strategies and skills, develop a family safety plan, develop healthy sexual attitudes, boundaries, impulse control, sexual identity, and develop and sustain victim empathy and general empathy. Treatment should also include sex education and healthy sexuality skills. A psychosexual education emphasis is needed to provide the youth with information regarding maturation, human development, healthy sexual functioning, the current laws regarding sexual conduct, the elements of consent and a healthy sexual identity. Many of these youth also need opportunities to resolve their own childhood victimization with interventions apart from the focus on their sexual misconduct to assist them to resolve trauma, enhance emotional coping skills and develop a healthy sexual identity. Overall, treatment is about aiding these youth to understand themselves, their sexuality and sexual development, as well as own responsibility for their sexuality (thoughts, feelings, and behavior), further identifying that there are consequences for their choices, and develop competencies and skills to enter or reenter a normative developmental pathway for their sexuality and life.

While NOJOS philosophy supports the holistic treatment of adolescents and children who have sexually offended, NOJOS also supports the needs of those who experienced abuse and all treatment decisions will honor the healing of both those who sexually offended and those who were offended against.