

WELCOME NOTE

For the last 29 years, the Network on Juveniles Offending Sexually (NOJOS) has been actively involved in developing and sustaining standards for the assessment and treatment of youth who engage in problematic sexual behaviors and sexually abusive behaviors. The first Standards and Protocols Manual [“NOJOS Manual”] was completed in 1994. The NOJOS Manual has been updated several times over the years as new research and the national standards indicate. The intention is to keep the NOJOS standards aligned with national best practice standards, and current research and evidence-based outcomes. This latest 2023 update integrates both new research and national standards with the goal of giving the youth and their families the best possibility of achieving healing and the healthiest, and safest, possible outcome.

Over the years research and experience has informed us and helped us to gain a better understanding of juvenile sexual development and how to provide sex-specific intervention without causing harm. We now know that well intentioned interactions, procedures, and interventions can be misdirected and even harmful without a proper understanding of what is normative and expected at differing stages of child and adolescent development (and specifically *sexual* development). We have also learned that even referring to youth as “juvenile sexual offenders” and/or referring to all problematic sexual behavior as “offenses” or “offending” has the potential to undermine efforts to assist the youth we work with to heal and fully return to a healthy developmental trajectory.

Indeed, as documented by the Adolescent Practice Standards by the Association For the Treatment of Sex Abuse:

Although the term “juvenile sex offender” implies a legal status in some juvenile justice systems, these kinds of labels have the potential to negatively shape a young person’s identity and self-concept during an important developmental period through which he/she might otherwise successfully navigate. Such labels are misleading, unhelpful, and at times harmful to the youth, his/her family, and/or the treatment process. ATSA selected the term “abusive” to refer to sexual conduct that is interpersonally harmful to distinguish it from other sexual behaviors that may be potentially problematic but do not harm another person. Finally, the term “adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior” describes rather than labels and denotes that this is a past behavior rather than a current or future one, which helps the adolescent, practitioner, and public expect correction of the youth’s harmful behavior. [Page 4.]

Importantly, members of the NOJOS community agree, this careful and intentional use of non-labeling terminology is in no way intended to minimize the harm caused to victims of sexual abuse or the egregious nature of sexually abusive behavior. Sexual abuse can cause grave harm, may have long-lasting impacts on the people victimized and their families and communities and may require legal interventions and specialized treatment. Effective clinical practice and public policy, informed

by sound research and an understanding of these youth, are essential to successfully address and prevent sexual abuse.

It is also important to note, research and evidence-based practice shows that sexually abusive behavior in adolescence rarely persists into adulthood. The vast majority of adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior do not continue to sexually abuse and are not on a life trajectory for repeat offending. Indeed, the majority of individuals who have engaged in sexually harmful behavior as a child or adolescent can, and do grow up, to be successful, prosocial, and happy individuals.

It is with this hope and possibility in mind that this updated version of the NOJOS Protocols and Standards have been written.

WITH THANKS

NOJOS wishes to express immense gratitude to the many individuals who have worked tirelessly with youth with problematic sexual behavior and who have contributed to the writing of this manual and all of its updating through the years. Without the passion, expertise, and commitment of these individuals, NOJOS would not exist. Thanks to each and every person who has contributed to this version and earlier versions of this manual.