

TEAMING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY TO PREVENT SEXUAL ABUSE

Bridging the Gap: Bringing Sex Offender Treatment and Victim Advocacy Together To Inform the Work of Primary Prevention

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There are challenges on both sides of the prevention paradigm. For professionals who clinically treat persons who have sexually abused, there is a constant struggle for understanding with the public. For the victim advocate and prevention educator, there is a constant struggle for credibility that prevention is more than incarceration and registry. Bringing the two sides of this paradigm together not only fills in the gaps for the two professions – but it also completes a comprehensive picture for the community to more effectively implement prevention strategies.

This workshop will review the five-year history of two Atlanta-based program's work together to bridge the gap via strategic alliances and carefully placed public displays of organizational "affection." Presenters will share lessons learned along the way and facilitate an exchange of ideas with the audience. Presenters will also share the core components of a community education workshop developed to bring the expertise from the field of community management and treatment together with concrete strategies for primary prevention of child sexual abuse. Evaluation data of this workshop will be shared.

Talking To Your Community about Sex Offenders: Myths and Realities

Charlene Steen, Ph.D., J.D.

There is a mass hysteria about sex offenders in the U.S. today. Laws are being passed willy-nilly all over the country zoning sex offenders out of cities, preventing sex offenders from even vacationing in some of them, preventing sex

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offenders from attending college, etc. Private organizations are preventing sex offenders from entering their premises (such as Six Flags). Renters won't rent to them. And juveniles of all ages are becoming equal targets for the hysteria (e.g., registration and public notification of children of all ages).

What is true and what is myth? What are the actual effects of these laws on sex offenders and recidivism? How can we dispel the hysteria? How can we affect public opinion? How do we maintain an equilibrium between the extremes of ivory tower idealism and don't-even-try pessimism? How do we maintain our ideals and philosophy yet remain in the mainstream? How do we maintain motivation and determination?

Practical methods addressing these issues will be addressed, beginning with myths and realities, and how to present them to the public and get them to listen. How to educate, how to get to media, the criminal justice system, and the legislature, how to develop a cooperative working alliance with criminal justice, the courts, and the legislature, and how to function positively in this environment will be presented. Following is the format:

- I. Introduction to the problem
 - A. What's going on? -- an overview of some of the laws and policies
 - B. What are the practical effects of these laws and rules?
 - C. What can we do?
- II. Typical myths which fuel the hysteria (which will be dispelled with statistical data)
 - A. Sex offenders are strangers
 - B. Most sex offenders reoffend
 - C. Sex offenders are untreatable
 - D. Stranger offenders usually offend at nearby day care centers and schools
 - E. The restrictive laws we are passing will make us safer
- III. The educational process - broadening views and changing beliefs
 - A. Review of data about changing beliefs
 - B. Methods of getting views heard
 1. Public forums: speaking ideas
 2. Newspaper and periodical articles
 3. Media presentations
 4. Research presentations
 5. Writing recommendations
 6. Affiliation with professional groups
 7. Private talks with public people

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- 8. Training workshops for judges, attorneys, CPS and probation officers, etc.
- D. Additional techniques for gaining respect and acceptance
- III. Cooperation methods
 - A. Develop a positive working relationship with the criminal justice system personnel
 - 1. Making professional contacts
 - 2. Developing personal relationships
 - B. Develop cross agency protocols in sex offense cases
 - C. Utilize a team approach to sex offenses
- IV. Ways we can help ourselves
 - A. Develop a deeper understanding of our own beliefs and values
 - 1. Methods for self examination
 - 2. Ways of looking objectively at the surrounding world
 - 3. Weighing the effects of divergent views
 - B. Handling negativity about sex offender treatment (ways of taking care of oneself)