

Sexual offenses

Offense: Rape, child molesting, indecent exposure

Juveniles responsible for big chunk of sexual assault

Sexual offenses represent a continuum of behavior that may be directed against younger children, peers, or adults, and may or may not involve other forms of aggression. Research indicates that juveniles are responsible for 30-60% of all cases of child sexual abuse and 20- 30% of sexual assaults committed against adults. Females are a growing percentage of perpetrators of child sexual abuse, primarily against other girls, but also against boys.

Dual status

Many youth in juvenile justice have the dual status of being a victim of sexual abuse, as well as a perpetrator of assault on others. Early exposure to domestic violence, as well as prior sexual victimization are predictors of becoming a perpetrator of sexual abuse.

Risk factors

Other risk factors include impulsivity and substance abuse, especially alcohol use. There is disagreement about how much influence media imagery has on sexual behavior. At the least, pornography and music videos that glorify sexual exploitation desensitize offenders to the impact of their behavior on victims. Polygraphs have shown that most sex offenders are deeply ingrained in their behavior by the time they come into contact with the criminal justice system. Trying to change their behavior is a difficult task. Obviously it can't be accomplished by few multimedia tutorials, even evidence-based ones.

What Ripple Effects software can and cannot do

Ripple Effects software can be a useful supplement to live interventions. It can provide evidence-based training in empathy and impulse control. It can challenge norms that minimize the impact of sexual assault. It can prompt youth to reflect on their own history and report abuse to a trusted adult. It can educate them about the connection between alcohol and impulsivity. It can increase their ability to bring critical analysis to cultural imagery. Ripple Effects software cannot substitute for a program of containment and monitoring. It cannot force young offenders out of denial in the way that polygraphs can. It cannot compensate for cultural imagery that portrays sexual exploitation as a form of entertainment. It cannot cure psychopathology, or heal deep characterological wounds.

Primary value is preventive intervention for those at risk

Because most sexual offenders "succeed" many times before getting caught, the primary value of the Ripple Effects program is as a preventive intervention for detained youth who may have risk factors for becoming offenders, even though they have not yet been cited.

Goals of intervention

Youth will:

- Understand what constitutes sexual abuse and sexual assault
- Internalize norms against sexual assault and exploitation
- Know why empathy is essential to non-exploitative relationships
- Be able to take the perspective of their victim
- Master techniques for impulse control
- Report their own abuse to a trusted adult
- Understand the connection between alcohol and impulsivity
- Find constructive ways to direct needs for power and control
- Approach cultural imagery with a critical eye

A suggested scope and sequence

SKILL BUILDING

Impulse control

Stopping reactions
Predicting consequences

Empathy

Understanding feelings
Perspective taking
Resisting stereotypes

Assertiveness

Communicating feelings

Knowing yourself

Beliefs and values
Norms
Power

Social Values

Restorative justice
Honesty

CHALLENGES TOPICS

Rape

Molester

Aggression
Alcohol
Domestic violence
Dating violence
Drugs
Mistakes
Sexuality
Sexual abuse

A special note about the the role of media analysis in treatment of sexual offenses

It is unlikely that youth could be shielded from the deluge of sexually explicit material instantly available to them, especially through the Internet. Less explicit, sexually oriented material that reinforces gender stereotypes, treats rape as seduction, and glorifies sexual or gender dominance also helps normalize sexual exploitation. Media analysis is an optional component of every tutorial, reached through the “into the world” button at the bottom of the screen. We recommend you make these exercises mandatory for this group of youth offenders.