

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



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Dear Colleague,

For many years, our field has focused on how best to eliminate negative sexual behaviors in children, teens, and especially in adults.

In this month's offering, we focus on how best to motivate adolescents to change through establishing positive goals towards which they aspire.

The treatment then is designed to help develop many dimensions of their lives that can lead to internalized self-control, and ultimately, an end to sexually abusive behavior. It is akin to the adult "whole lives" model and consistent with the developing research about what is needed to move youth from abusive to healthy, productive, non-abusive lives.

In the meantime, we thought you would appreciate a quote that was just circulated as the quote for the day by the NY Times:

"It just seems to me that if you are going to put someone who is 13 or 14 or 15 or 16 or 17 into prison, you ought to leave them some hope." --John R.

Taking a More Positive Approach in Treatment

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

The Issue

What is the most direct route to healthier futures for young people who have sexually abused? Older treatment methods often focused on what adolescents should avoid. Newer approaches look to add a focus on what they can do to become balanced, healthy people.

The Research

Jo Thakker, Tony Ward, and Patrick Tidmarsh discuss many of the developmental needs of adolescents who have sexually abused. They note that the traditional treatment approach of relapse prevention (based upon adult treatment methods) focused on a single pathway to repeated sexual abuse. Instead, the authors propose a model of four pathways to re-offense centered on self-regulation. The overall premise is that an adolescent may continue to abuse because they:

1. Lack life skills to prevent harm,
2. Misapply the skills they do have,
3. Have no reason to stop abusing, and
4. Abuse in an opportunistic or deliberately planned manner

Focusing treatment to develop self-regulation can help adolescents attain the "primary goods" that all human beings seek in various ways. These goods include health, knowledge, excellence in play and work, independence, inner peace, friendship, a sense of community, spirituality, happiness, and creativity. The authors provide examples of how sexual abuse can result from misdirected attempts to acquire these goods.

Thakker, Ward, and Tidmarsh recommend identifying risk factors and categorizing them as either those that predispose one to abuse (e.g., chaotic home life), precipitate the abuse (e.g., an argument), or perpetuate it (e.g., social isolation). These factors suggest primary goods that can serve as treatment goals. The authors also advocate

Blue, a retired judge, on inmates who are serving life sentences with no possibility of parole for crimes they committed as juveniles.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis



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[Promoting Healthy Childhood Development Today: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers](#)

By James R. Harris, Jr. (2007)

This text combines accepted child-rearing techniques and theory with contemporary approaches in caring for

identifying protective factors, other areas of importance to the adolescent as positive goals to strive for. The treatment process helps the adolescent to work through factors that may impede progress.

Implications for Professionals

Approach versus avoidance. Numerous studies show that all of us are more effective at working towards goals we can achieve than we are at avoiding bad things. This application of the good lives and self-regulation models will be helpful to professionals seeking to develop a more positive treatment approach. A focus on "primary goods" can be a powerful motivator for change in this positive people-centered treatment approach.

Development and context. One shortcoming of this approach with adolescents is that it does not necessarily look at the environment and the context in which adolescent lives. Basing treatment goals on long-term primary goods can overlook short-term pressures (e.g., living in a violent family or neighborhood). The model offers little guidance for living with circumstances common to adolescents who have sexually abused, such as underlying psychiatric issues, the changing desires of adolescents, or the possibility of long-term group care.

Implications for the Field

Proceed with caution. The field of assessing and treating adolescents who have sexually abused has an unfortunate history of importing adult models carelessly. Often, these models have not considered the fact that the treatment needs of an adolescent can be very different from those of an adult. In this chapter, it is clear that the authors are sensitive to many of the differences between adolescents and adults, however, the model has yet to receive extensive scientific study with adolescents of any age.

Reference

- Thakker, J., Ward, T., & Tidmarsh, P. (200X). A reevaluation of relapse prevention with adolescents who sexually offend: A good-lives model. In W. L. Marshall and H.E. Barbaree (Eds.), *The juvenile sex offender*, second edition (pp. 313-335).

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children. The guide promotes positive childhood development and offers support for the adult caregiver, whether parent, foster parent, or residential facility staff. Harris recognizes the importance of adults consistently demonstrating the desired behavior and intervening in the child's uncritical acceptance of negative media messages. Using charts and examples, the book covers common areas of concern and conflict with uncommon sense, including avoiding bedtime battles, curtailing aggression in children, discussing drugs and alcohol with youth, alleviating school-related anxiety, and protecting children on the Internet.

For more information, click the image of the book or go to the NEARI website at www.neari.com/press.

Paperback, 92 pages
ISBN #: 1-929657-30-7
Cost: \$17, plus s&h

FEATURED WEBSITE

Advocates for Youth

www.advocatesforyouth.org

Advocates for Youth champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. Advocates believe it can best serve the field by boldly advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health.

Upcoming in NEARI e-News

In next month's issue, we will explore the relationships between social goals, skills, and strategies and their effect on aggressive behavior among adolescents.

About the Author:

David S. Prescott, LICSW

[David Prescott website](#)

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.

Questions/Feedback

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