

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,

As we approach the 5th anniversary of the NEARI Press Newsletter, we challenged ourselves to identify the key changes in the way we work with children and adolescents over the last 20 years.

We each came up with a list of five, compared them and then agreed to the five listed here. We also linked to the NEARI Newsletter research article that formed the foundation of our choices. So if you missed a key article, this is your opportunity to go back to review it now.

We fully recognize that our readers might identify other equally or more important changes than our chosen five. If you have a different opinion, we would love to hear what YOUR TOP FIVE changes would be and if you can, let us know the key research that describes your suggestion. If we use your submission in the next newsletter, we will send you a NEARI Press book as a thank you for your contribution.

Please see our website for more information at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413-540-0712 x14.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

Five Significant Changes of the Last 20 Years

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

Twenty years ago, we had little or no understanding of children and adolescents who sexually abused. In the past, we may have just treated them as we would adults. We did not always look at their own trauma history, and we advocated for strict sentencing (which now may put many teens on the sex offender registry) so that the behaviors would not be dismissed as "boys will be boys." Thankfully today, we now have more experience and research to guide today's effective clinical practice.

Given what we know now, what significant changes have we seen in this field over the last two decades? The developments have been extraordinary, and with some difficulty we selected five that we felt were the most dramatic changes.

1. Adolescents are not little adults.

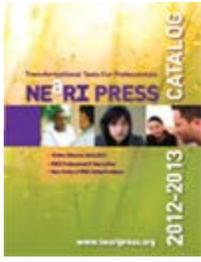
Research shows that children and adolescents who have sexually abused have more in common with other children or adolescents who get into trouble with the law rather than any similarity with adult sex offenders. Initially, the treatment for teens was a scaled down version of what was used to treat adult sex offenders. Today, effective assessment, treatment and placement of an at-risk child or teen needs to be based upon a development framework that looks at the trauma history of the child before any intervention is considered. While our methods have changed our commitment to preventing any further abuse by any child or adolescent remains steadfast.

Citations:

- Letourneau, E.J., & Miner, M.H. (2005). Juvenile Sex Offenders: A Case Against the Legal and Clinical Status Quo. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 17, 293-312. Reviewed in the [November 2008 NEARI Press Newsletter](#).
- Blaustein, M. and Kinniburgh, K. (2007). Intervention beyond the child: The intertwining nature of attachment and trauma. *British Psychological Society briefing paper*, 26, 48-53. Reviewed in the [September 2012 NEARI Press Newsletter](#).

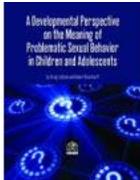
2. Most adolescents do not re-offend sexually.

We fully recognize that most sexually abusive behavior is never



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FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES



A Developmental Perspective on the Meaning of Problematic Sexual Behavior in Children and Adolescents

by Craig Latham and
Robert Kinscherff

Children and adolescents develop in dramatically different ways; a developmental context is essential to understanding a child's or teen's sexual behavior or abusive problems. This booklet lays out a developmental framework with vivid case examples that brings to life this vital developmental treatment and risk management perspective. In a few short pages, Latham and Kinscherff will open your eyes to the story behind the development of sexual behavior problems.

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reported. However, known re-offense rates for adolescents and children who have abused are very low and many of these children and adolescents will never re-offend sexually. Making the false assumption that all adolescents and children are at high risk to abuse again harms their chances to live healthy lives and ultimately harms our communities and future generations. Adolescents who have sexually abused require guidance in developing a clearer sense of who they are, who they can be, and who they want to be as well as teaching them the skills they need to prevent future abuse. This guidance must include clear information and guidance about sexual health, sexual relationships, and responsibility.

Citation:

- Caldwell, M.F. (2007). Sexual offense adjudication and sexual recidivism among juvenile offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 19, 107-113. Reviewed in the [October 2008 NEARI Press Newsletter](#).

3. Assessment remains complicated. Current measures help, but are not stand-alone instruments.

Accurately assessing an individual client requires up-to-date knowledge of research-based risk factors, careful differential diagnosis and a well-versed developmental perspective. Despite very promising advances in developing risk assessment measures, there is still great variability across studies. Professionals need to be extremely careful about assessing re-offense risk for an individual client, and take the time to obtain specialized knowledge in this area. Given the low base rates of sexual re-offense, the use of measures to guide safety, risk management, and treatment plans might be a better way to proceed than simply making statements about risk.

Citation:

- Viljoen, J. L., Mordell, S., & Beneteau, J. L. (2012, February 20). Prediction of Adolescent Sexual Reoffending: A Meta-Analysis of the J-SOAP-II, ERASOR, J-SORRAT-II, and Static-99. *Law and Human Behavior*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/h0093938. Reviewed in the [June 2012 NEARI Press Newsletter](#).

4. The right person-centered treatment can make a difference.

Until quite recently, many professionals believed there was "no known cure" for sexual abuse and that even teenagers faced a lifetime of work managing their deviant impulses. Now we know that treatment can work, and understanding child and adolescent development, including the latest neuroscience-based understandings of the brain are central to accurately describing an individual client and to constructing appropriate interventions. While adult models can work in certain selective cases, community-based and cognitive-behavioral approaches seem to be most effective.

Citation:

- Reitzel, L.R., & Carbonell, J.L. (2006). The effectiveness of sexual offender treatment for juveniles as measured by recidivism: A metaanalysis. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 18, 401-421. Reviewed in the [May 2008 NEARI Press Newsletter](#).

NEARI Press is again offering FREE webinars by our nationally recognized authors. Robert Longo will be presenting his material about *Head Injury, TBI and Its Impact on the Brain: Applications for Clinical Practice* on December 4th at 2 PM EST. As recent research suggests, 4-15% of adolescents who abuse sexually may be struggling with this often misdiagnosed and very significant disability. To register for this webinar, [click here](#).

After registering for the webinar, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

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5. Therapist qualities make a difference in outcomes.

Twenty years ago, many professionals thought that adolescents and even children who had sexually abused needed no-nonsense, tough-on-crime approaches to treatment and management. What was completely ignored in the "one size fits all" approach was the impact that the treatment provider had on the success of the children and teens.

Citation:

- Marshall , W. L. (2005). Therapist style in sexual offender treatment: Influence on indices of change. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research & Treatment*, 17(2), 109-116. Reviewed in the [August 2012 NEARI Press Newsletter](#).

Implications for the Field

Where programs once treated sexual abuse as a singular phenomenon, study after study describes the many factors that contribute to sexual abuse. There is a growing consensus that adolescents who sexually abuse are in most ways like other adolescents who are delinquent. Professionals will therefore need to have both specialized knowledge about youthful sexual aggression and general knowledge about adolescent development.

In the upcoming years, the challenge to our field is how to develop an integrated and holistic approach to working with adolescents who sexually abuse that incorporates all aspects of treatment unique to this population. If the field started with a gross overweighting of adult concepts, we now recognize the value of looking at children and adolescents through an entirely different lens. The low base-rates of sexual re-offense, combined with a growing understanding of the risk factors that can lead to re-offending, should help us focus our most intensive interventions on the highest risk youth.

However, as we proceed, it is vital to remember that youth are more influenced by their environment than adults and require a greater level of guidance. Therefore, the findings indicate that there is a large opportunity for prevention programs that find ways to utilize this information when working with adolescents. These findings show that while teaching sexual health and respect is vital to prevention, it is essential that these curricula also address past traumatic and other adverse experiences. Ultimately, these findings offer a sense of hope to all of us when applied to strategies for preventing sexual abuse.

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