

SECTION 3: ELEMENTS OF SEX OFFENDER-SPECIFIC TREATMENT

Learning Activity 3-1: Dealing with Sex Offenders' Cognitive Distortions

One of the domains of treatment is dealing with offenders' distorted attitudes about themselves, their offenses, and their victims. While the treatment provider is specifically working with offenders to identify and correct those thinking errors, supervision officers, offenders' families, and others will often be faced with those cognitive distortions. One rationale behind a team-based approach to sex offender management is that as members of the team share information, they make it more and more difficult for offenders to continue indulging in such distortions.

Set up for the Role Play

The trainer will seek two volunteers from the audience for this exercise. One will be asked to play the role of a family member while a second volunteer will be asked to play the role of a probation/parole officer. The trainer will play the role of the offender. Other participants will observe, and then will be asked to comment on the interactions.

The Offense

The offender has pled guilty to an offense involving inappropriate sexual contact with his 14-year-old stepdaughter. The victim impact statement indicates that this took place over a period of 12 months, while the offender, his wife, and his stepdaughter were living in the same home.

The Scenario

Imagine that the offender is meeting with his supervision officer and that his brother, who is aware of his offense and is supporting him in treatment, is also present. The offender will make the following observations:

- This only happened once. I've really gotten a bad deal here.
- In many countries, women are wives and mothers by age 14.
- My wife neglected me. I had to have my needs taken care of somehow.

Instructions for the Volunteer Participants

The participants playing the roles of the supervision officer and the brother will each ask the offender questions and respond to the offender's statements. The supervision officer should begin the role-play by indicating that s/he wants the offender to describe his offense, and the circumstances surrounding it, for his brother.

When the offender states the cognitive distortion, the brother and supervision officer should ask the offender to consider what might be faulty with his thinking, utilizing the

Socratic method by asking open-ended questions. This encourages the offender to change his views based on his own thought processes, rather than being told what to think. If the offender seems rigidly fixed in his beliefs, then the brother and supervision officer might suggest other points of view that reflect responsible thoughts and behaviors in opposition to the cognitive distortions. The essence of this role-play in sex offender treatment is that the offenders who are playing the roles of the brother and supervision officer must explicate what the faulty thinking is behind each cognitive distortion. This assists offenders to think about underlying reasons, rather than reflexively rejecting others' points of view, submissively accepting the therapist's perspective, or replying with an overly simplistic legalistic explanation, such as sexual behavior is wrong because it is against the law.