

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

**F-22**

### **Using Group to Treat Attachment Deficits and Promote Good Lives**

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Inspired by Marshall's attachment deficits theory<sup>1</sup>, research shows that sexual abusers suffer higher rates of insecure attachment, adverse childhood experiences<sup>2</sup>, loneliness, isolation, and intimacy deficits. New GLM research shows that "relationships" is the most prevalent and important "primary human good" pursued by sexual abusers, but it is often frustrated by restrictions and ostracization. Given these barriers, sexual abusers "overwhelmingly... found a sense of community and belonging in their treatment groups"<sup>3</sup>. Prosocial connection is essential to a good life and desistance from offending. Group therapy is an optimal environment for learning and finding connection.<sup>4,5,6</sup> This didactic and experiential workshop demonstrates practical, group-centered principles and techniques to promote attachment and good lives.

**Goals/Objectives:** This workshop will emphasize experiential learning of practical hands-on techniques for running effective groups for sexual abusers. Our belief is that learning is most effective when the audience is engaged and able to personally apply the concepts to their own clinical practice. Participants will be invited to share real-world examples of negative group therapy experiences and clinical cases that have been frustrating and challenging. (For this reason, the workshop is geared toward "intermediate" and "advanced" participants, who have had prior experience in leading sex offender-specific groups. However, beginners will also be able to grasp the material). Applied examples will be used to practice "diagnosing" difficult cases in terms of insecure attachment styles and used to re-conceptualize our understanding and interventions. We will frequently use "demonstration groups" (composed of participants portraying actual cases) to demonstrate the concepts, principles, and techniques in action. The six goals/objectives for the training are as follows:

- 1. Using "good" groups to promote Good Lives.** Explain GLM and how groups can promote the pursuit of primary human goods.<sup>2,7</sup> Restate GLM thesis in terms of group: "Criminal, anti-social and sexually abusive behavior results when individuals lack the **meaningful social bonds** necessary to satisfy their values using pro-social means. Therefore rehabilitation endeavors should equip offenders with the **interpersonal** knowledge, skills, opportunities, and resources necessary to satisfy their life values in ways that don't harm others."<sup>7</sup>

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- 2. Using “good” groups to address attachment deficits.** Explain Marshall’s etiological theory<sup>1</sup> of how attachment deficits may be rooted in poor early attachment experiences and then shaped by the developmental experiences of adolescence and young adulthood – but emphasize that attachment is expressed in how the client interacts in the group with his male peers here-and-now – and can therefore be understood and changed in an effective group.
- 3. Essential elements of an effective “good” group.** Learn to use a group-centered group approach<sup>5,6</sup> (rather than “individual-in-group”) to recognize, understand and capitalize on interpersonal dynamics and relationships – to promote prosocial values/relatedness and improve attachment.
- 4. Techniques for all types of insecure attachment.** Learn group techniques to establish group cohesion as the secure base for attachment, including: maintaining a safe and protected place; use of structure; elimination of harsh confrontation; demonstrating warmth and encouragement; pointing out altruism, connection and caring when they occur in the group; and reframing negative expressions of connection.<sup>5</sup>
- 5. Techniques for addressing different types of insecure attachment.** Learn the three types of insecure attachment style (avoidant dismissive, fearful avoidant, and preoccupied/anxious), how each style is negatively expressed in group, and how to address each style using group-centered techniques.<sup>5</sup>
- 6. Using the group for Good Lives planning.** Explore ways that the therapy group can be incorporated into the pursuit of primary human goods of “relationships” and “community” and can support related PHGs.<sup>7</sup>

### **References**

1. Marshall, W. (1989). Intimacy, loneliness, and sex offenders. *Behavioral Research and Therapy*, 27, 491-503.
2. Harris, D., Pedneault, A. and Willis, G. (2017). The pursuit of primary human goods in men desisting from sexual offending. *Sexual Abuse*. 1079063217729155.
3. Levenson, J., Willis, G. and Prescott, D. (2015). Adverse childhood experiences in the lives of male sex offenders: Implications for trauma-informed care. *Sexual Abuse*, 28, 340-359.
4. Jennings, J. and Deming, A. (2016). Review of the empirical and clinical support for group therapy specific to sexual abusers. *Sexual Abuse*, 29(8), 731-764.
5. Sawyer, S. and Jennings, J. (2016). *Group Therapy with Sexual Abusers: Engaging the Full Potential of the Group Experience*. Brandon, VT: Safer Society Press.
6. Sawyer, S. and Jennings, J. (2014). Facilitating group-centered treatment groups for sex offenders. In M. Carich and S. Mussack (Eds.), *The Safer Society Handbook of Sexual Abuser Assessment and Treatment*. Brandon, VT: Safer Society Press, pp. 125-150.

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7. Jennings, J. and Jumper, S. (2017). Good groups promote Good Lives: Using group-centered techniques to actualize GLM primary goods. Presentation to Illinois ATSA conference, Sugar Grove, IL (3/16/17).

**Jerry L. Jennings, PhD** is Vice President of Clinical Services for Liberty Healthcare. He has published over 50 journal articles, chapters and books on topics that include clinical and forensic psychology, domestic violence, group therapy, and treatment of adult and adolescent sex offenders. Dr. Jennings coauthored the first book devoted entirely to the topic of *Group Therapy with Sexual Abusers* (2016), as well as client workbooks titled *Responsibility and Self-Management* (2007) and *The Mindfulness Toolkit* (2014). Most recently he co-authored a comprehensive review of the empirical and clinical research specific to group therapy with sexual abusers in *Sexual Abuse*. Dr. Jennings has conducted workshops and presented on topics related to sex offender treatment at many conferences, including ATSA (2014, 2009), NOTA (2017), ILATSA (2017), MARATSA (2016), AGPA (2016), MATSA/MASOC (2015, 2014), NYATSA (2012), and NAPN (2003), as well as trainings for correctional/forensic audiences in Indiana (2017, 2008), Alaska (2016), Illinois (2016), and Virginia (2004). He has been a member of ATSA since 1999.

**Steven Sawyer, MSSW, LICSW** is the founder and President of Sawyer Solutions, LLC, a private clinical and consulting practice. He was a founding board member and Executive Director of Project Pathfinder, Inc., a founding board member and past chapter president of the Minnesota ATSA and past board member and chair of the Minnesota Board of Social Work. Mr. Sawyer has delivered dozens of lectures and trainings locally and nationally on sexual abuse prevention and treatment. He co-authored the first book devoted entirely to *Group Therapy with Sexual Abusers* (2016), and has published articles and chapters on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, group therapy with sexual offenders, sexual dysfunction in sex offenders, and sex offender treatment program outcome research a program for men who use prostitutes. Over the past 30 years he has assessed and treated hundreds of sexual abusers and supervised the treatment of several thousand more. He consults with Catholic religious orders on sexual abuse prevention and management, provides clinical supervision services for the State of Minnesota, operates a sexual abuse treatment program, and manages a program for men who pay for sex.