

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

T-47

Helping Families Become Better Together: Group for Parents/Caregivers of Adolescents Who Have Sexually Offended

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Families are better together, but in the wake of adolescent sexual offending the impacts are wide ranging, affecting many people including parents/caregivers. Families can be fractured, and parents overwhelmed by the process that follows the disclosure, all while trying to cope with their own difficult feelings of anger, shame, guilt, and helplessness. At the same time, they are often expected to take on added responsibilities including increased supervision, managing legal proceedings, and supporting their adolescent's treatment for behaviour that is often stigmatizing and that few have any experience with. Furthermore, parents /caregivers experience additional stress when the sexual offense is intrafamilial; parents need to balance the needs of both the victim and the adolescent who offended, while dealing with their own conflicting emotions. Repairing relationships and helping families heal to become better together is supported by research indicating parental involvement in treatment reduces the risk of adolescent sexual reoffending (Worling et al., 2010; Latimer et al., 2003). It remains unclear how family involvement affects outcomes, though replacing negative parenting behaviours with more positive and encouraging practices may be beneficial (Bourgon & Bourgon, 2015). However, there is little research regarding the personal experiences of parents/caregivers of adolescents who sexually offend, or what interventions are effective to help them manage this experience (Jones, 2014).

Since 2011, the Durham Family Court Clinic (DFCC) has provided a Group for Parents/Caregivers of Adolescents Who Have Sexually Offended in the Durham Region of Ontario to respond to the lack of supports available to them. The group was developed by DFCC with the support and collaboration of community partners that included police, probation, child welfare, schools, and other agencies. The group is both psycho-educational and process-driven, with flexibility to shift focus depending on the presenting needs of the participants. Qualitative and experimental measures administered to the group have indicated that participants were initially hesitant to attend and experienced a great deal of shame, yet their commonality in having children who had sexually offended lessened the sense of aloneness they had. Participants have reported increased assurance from mutual support and described feeling less isolated, less ashamed, more hopeful, and better equipped to manage their children's adolescence and sexual offending. These reports suggest outcomes similar to those of another parent support group, as cited in Jones (2014).

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The DFCC parent/caregiver group is rooted in evidence-based practices, encouraging parental involvement to reduce sexual reoffending, providing positive parenting strategies, and provides the opportunity to help each other to heal, becoming better together.

This presentation will provide participants with an understanding of the process of developing and implementing the DFCC group. Additionally, participants will learn about common topics and themes, and through interactive activities, be provided with skills, strategies, and resources for intervention. Challenges and lessons learned will be shared, as will results of group evaluations. This workshop will encourage the sharing of information for best practice amongst practitioners already implementing parent/caregiver groups, as well as practical information for those considering the development of their own group.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will be provided with an understanding of the process of developing a group for parents/caregivers of adolescents who sexually offend, including community collaboration, training and education required, and strategies for successful implementation.
- Participants will be provided with skills, strategies, and resources regarding common group topics, agenda items and themes. Challenges and lessons learned will be shared, as will results of group evaluations.
- This workshop will encourage the sharing of information for best practice amongst practitioners already implementing parents/caregivers groups, as well as practical information for those considering the development of their own group.

References

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Jennifer Matesic, BA is a Community Support Team Counsellor who has worked with at-risk youth at DFCC since 2005, which includes the assessment and treatment of adolescents who sexually offend. Jennifer is an experienced co-facilitator of the DFCC Group for Parents/Caregivers of Adolescents Who Have Sexually Offended, and aided in the development and implementation of the group. Jennifer has delivered presentations in the community and at the Provincial Human Services Justice Coordinating Committee Biennial Conference (2017) to increase service providers knowledge of working with adolescents who sexually offend. Jennifer was the co-presenter of *The Role Unexplored: Taking the Office Out of Community Based Treatment* at the 2016 ATSA Annual Conference in Orlando.

André Chor, MSW, RSW has been working with youth in conflict with the law as a Community Support Team Counsellor at DFCC since 2008. He has received extensive training and provides assessment and counselling to adolescents who sexually offend and their families and has co-facilitated the DFCC Group for Parents/Caregivers of Adolescents Who Have Sexually Offended. André co-presented the poster *Finding Balance in the Chaos: Support Group for Parents and Caregivers of Adolescents Who Have Sexually Offended* at the 2017 ATSA Annual Conference in Kansas City.