

Talking Points for Journalists:

Adolescents Who Have Engaged in Sexually Abusive Behavior



- **ATSA recognizes sexual abuse as a complex public health issue that impacts everyone – individuals, communities, institutions, and society as a whole.**
- **ATSA encourages and supports a comprehensive public health approach to sexual abuse as this focuses our efforts on prevention of sexual abuse both *before* and *after* it happens. Too frequently our current response to sexual abuse almost solely focuses on intervention and prevention *after* an assault.**
- **Sexual abuse is a broad term that includes any sexual or sexually motivated behavior that results in someone being forced, coerced, or manipulated into witnessing or experiencing unwanted sexual activity without their consent.**
- **Although adolescents (age 13-17) account for approximately 25% of all sexual crimes, research has shown that the majority of these youth do not continue to engage in sexually abusive behavior nor are they on a life-path for repeat offending.**
- **Adolescents adjudicated for sexual crimes are not “mini-adults” and they differ from adults convicted of sexual crimes in many ways. These developmental differences not only influence the behavior of adolescents, they also increase the potential for successful intervention with these youth.**
- **Research has shown that, once detected, the majority of adolescents adjudicated for sexual crimes respond well to interventions and do not continue to engage in sexually abusive behavior.**
- **Adolescents who engage in sexually abusive behavior are a diverse population and many factors related to general delinquency in adolescence (e.g., violence within the home, neglect, physical/emotional abuse) are also related to sexually abusive behavior by youth.**
- **Research has shown that adolescents adjudicated for sexually abusive behavior have experienced higher rates of sexual victimization when compared to non-offending youth or youth who have offended with non-sexual crimes.**
- **The vast majority of adolescents adjudicated for sexual crimes do not continue sexually abusive behaviors (i.e., reoffend), and the rate of sexual reoffense (i.e., arrest and/or reconviction) is low.**

- **Effective treatment and early interventions for adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior is an important component of a comprehensive system to prevent sexual abuse.**
- **The high level of diversity within the population of adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior indicates that the interventions needs of individual youth will likely be very different from one adolescent to another. Thorough assessments will best determine whether additional interventions are necessary and, if so, the appropriate type, intensity, and duration of interventions.**
- **Optimal treatment for adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior requires specialized programming that incorporates family involvement; takes into account that only a small minority of adolescents have abuse-related sexual interests; and is individualized based upon the specific needs, developmental level, and risk for other forms of crime or misconduct by the adolescent.**
- **Community based treatment programming has been identified as the most effective for the majority of adolescents adjudicated for sexual crimes, indicating that residential treatment should be reserved for the minority of youth with higher levels of immediate risk and need.**
- **Prevention of sexual abuse requires:**
 - **community involvement;**
 - **a well-planned, comprehensive, interdisciplinary response founded on evidence based strategies and policies that both protect communities and support the rehabilitation of adolescents who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior; and**
 - **ongoing education, collaboration, and participation of everyone – community members, violence prevention professionals, victim advocates, law enforcement professionals, treatment professionals, journalists, and policy makers.**
- **Through treatment, prevention and management, the elimination of sexual abuse can become a reality.**

To learn more about the above topics, please see:

[Statements for Journalists: Adolescents Who Have Engaged in Sexually Abusive Behavior](#)

[Adolescents Who Have Engaged In Sexually Abusive Behavior](#)

[8 Things Everyone Should Know about Sexual Abuse & Sexual Offending](#)

To learn about children (age 12 and under) with sexual behavior problems, please see:

[Children with Sexual Behavior Problems](#)

[Report of the Task Force on Children with Sexual Behavior Problems](#)