

# A GUIDE FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS CONCERNED ABOUT CHILDREN'S SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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## NOW WHAT?

### *What to expect out of treatment*

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This guide is written for parents and other caregivers, such as grandparents, foster parents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and others who are taking care of children of all ages.

**We write this series of newsletters to share support, to let you know you are not alone, and to give hope.** It is produced by caregivers of children and adolescents who have had problematic or illegal sexual behavior.

Although we may not know your story, we have experienced and understand the impact of children's problematic sexual behaviors on caregivers, youth, the family, and others.

For this issue, we want to focus on treatment for families with children or teens with concerning or problematic sexual behaviors. Our goal is to provide assistance as to how to initiate services and discuss what treatment should entail. We share some of our thoughts with you and hope it is helpful.

*- Sincerely,*

*The Parent Partnership Board*



**NCSBY**

Additional information about youth with problematic sexual behavior can be provided from the  
National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth  
[www.NCSBY.org](http://www.NCSBY.org)

# HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

## WHAT HELPED YOU GET IN THE DOOR?

When a family is dealing with an issue such as a child demonstrating concerning sexual behavior, knowing where to begin can be confusing. We encourage you to ask questions about treatment beginning with the first contact with a program, therapist, child welfare, probation, or others involved. Here are some questions to consider asking if you have not yet been connected to a program or therapist who provides counseling for youth with problematic sexual behavior.

*"Honestly, complete and absolute fear got me in the door. When I heard the program was research based, I was sold."*

*"I needed to hear these things happen to many families, regardless of race, income, education level, whatever. We were not alone."*

## QUESTIONS TO ASK TO FIND A TREATMENT PROGRAM

1. What are the best therapy services in the community to help my child and family?
2. What is the next step so that we can start services as soon as possible?
3. Will there be costs associated with services and, if so, what are those costs?
4. What family members would be involved in treatment?
5. How long is treatment?

## TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM, CONSIDER ASKING:

1. What is the evidence supporting the programs available? What is the success rate?
2. What are the outcomes of children who are involved in your treatment program?
3. Is there research that supports the treatment that you provide?
4. What happens during treatment?

# WHAT SHOULD TREATMENT ENTAIL? HOW CAN YOU KNOW THE SERVICES OFFERED ARE APPROPRIATE?

We have identified seven key points to help ensure services are appropriate.

1. Therapy should be based on youth treatment models and plans.
2. The qualifications of the therapists are important.
3. Caregiver involvement is crucial.
4. A group setting is helpful.
5. Respect and support are key.
6. Youth should not be negatively impacted by treatment.
7. Be the child's champion.



*"Remember these are just kids."*

**1** Therapy should be based on youth treatment models/plans. Treatment for youth with problematic or illegal sexual behaviors should be developmentally appropriate. Treatment models for adults with sexual offenses are not appropriate for youth and have been found to be harmful to youth. Treatment should be based on a child's age and developmental level.

## CONSIDER ASKING:

Please describe the treatment program. What topics are addressed? How frequent are sessions? What days and times are available? What is the average time to complete the treatment program?

**2** The qualifications of therapists are important. The therapist's experience and knowledge about youth with problematic sexual behavior is also important to evaluate. It may be uncomfortable to ask therapists about their qualifications, but it is important to be informed so your child and family get the best services available. The treatment program should be led by a qualified therapist, which means one who is licensed or working toward becoming licensed. Therapists who agree to provide therapy to a family should have educational or training experience working with youth

and their families, as well as clinical experience working with youth who have problematic sexual behavior. The therapist should have an understanding of the current research related to the topic and know and use therapeutic approaches that are supported by research to be the most effective. If you're under court supervision, discuss if the identified treatment provider/program is approved by the court. If the provider/program recommended doesn't seem to be a good fit, advocate for something more in line with appropriate treatment.

## CONSIDER ASKING:

1. What are your qualifications to work with children and teens with problematic sexual behavior?
2. Are you licensed or under the supervision of someone who is?
3. What training did you receive in order to provide this service?
4. How do you keep up-to-date with the research on children and teens with problematic (and, possibly, illegal) sexual behavior?
5. I need help with safety planning. Can you help me right now?



*“The therapist needs to be the expert and in charge of the session. Families are there to learn and need the therapist’s guidance.”*

**3** Caregiver involvement is crucial. Caregiver involvement in their child’s treatment has been found to significantly improve treatment outcomes. Therapy should include caregivers so that they have the needed information to best assist their children. Caregivers should receive education related to supporting their child’s decision making, appropriate supervision, etc.

*“Therapists are only with the kids an hour each week. Caregivers spend many more hours with them. We are the ones with them each day and we need to be present for therapy to know how to help our kids.”*

*“This is family event, it is not isolated to the children, and it affects everyone. Because of that, the caregiver needs to be a part of services to learn and to heal.”*

*“Your involvement is crucial, your kid may not act the same way in session as they do during the rest of the week.”*

## CONSIDER ASKING:

How will I (caregiver) be involved in treatment?

# 4

A group setting is helpful. Cognitive-Behavior Therapy can be successfully implemented in a group setting for both caregivers and youth. Many caregivers feel isolated due to the nature of the issue. A group setting connects caregivers with other adults trying to navigate through a similar set of concerns. Some cases will benefit from family therapy and in some areas, a group treatment program may not be available.

*“Group (therapy) helped me connect with others who are going through a similar thing. I didn’t have to worry that they wouldn’t understand because we knew we were there for similar reasons.”*

*“It helped talking with others who have walked in the same shoes as me.”*

Youth also benefit from treatment in a group setting. Surrounding youth with peers in a structured setting can help decrease isolation and shame.

*“Group (therapy) shows youth that they are not alone. If they are by themselves they could be thinking ‘I’m the only one dealing with these issues.’”*

*“It benefited my child because they could see other children who maybe didn’t look like them but had similar issues.”*

*“Having the youth together also provides social support. They are there to help themselves, but they also help each other.”*

# 5

Respect and support are key. When you are in services, you should feel supported, respected, and heard. This will help you share and invest in treatment. The therapists should provide messages of hope and the potential of progress. You may not be completely comfortable during your first session, it can take some time. Confidentiality is important and should be upheld; the information you and others share in treatment is private.

*If you aren’t comfortable, you won’t get the full benefit or impact of what is being offered.*

*“So, ask questions and for clarification.”*

It is helpful for you to know what makes therapy helpful and effective, as well as when to be concerned.

HELPFUL COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE THERAPY

Parents and other caregivers are actively involved in therapy sessions.

Open healthy communication among family members is encouraged.

Parents gain skills on how to talk about sensitive topics and manage their child's behavior.

The child gains knowledge and skills to make better decisions at home, school, and in the community.

Positive friendships and relationships are encouraged and supported.

Family is treated with respect. Child is seen as a whole child with strengths recognized.

Therapist believes the caregivers when struggles are shared, even when the child is behaving well during group.

Treatment only focuses on sexual behavior and what happened.

Child is not getting better.

Isolates the child.

You or your child does not feel safe.

You or your child feel ridiculed or disrespected .

No one talks to you or your child about past behavior or strategies to promote safety and support.

Therapy uses aversive measures, such as pairing something harmful with pictures of sexual behavior.

REASONS TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE TREATMENT

Youth are expected to be respectful during therapy. Sessions should be comfortable for all youth participants. They should feel respected and are expected to be respectful to others. In group treatment, youth should be guided to demonstrate leadership skills to assist their peers.

*"The kids can develop leadership skills in group in a positive and powerful way."*

**6** The youth should not be negatively impacted by treatment. Youth should not feel full of shame as a result of services. They should also know they are not defined by this behavior. Treatment should be focused on developing new skills to assist in the prevention of future concerning sexual behaviors.

*"My daughter was nervous to start services but she left each session smiling. She felt encouraged."*

**7** Be the Child's Champion. Be your child's champion to get the best help available.

*"Be present. Be patient. Be positive."*



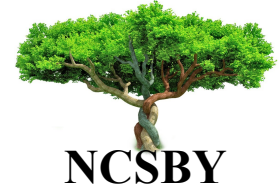
## TO LOCATE TRAINED SITES

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To locate sites trained to provide Problematic Sexual Behavior – Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (PSB-CBT) use this map:

<http://www.ncsby.org/content/contact-0>

The map only includes sites trained by a funding source through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). For questions regarding additional sites outside of OJJDP grantees, please email [OU-NCSBY@ouhsc.edu](mailto:OU-NCSBY@ouhsc.edu).



To locate sites trained in Multi-Systemic Therapy – Problem Sexual Behavior, see:

<https://www.mstpsb.com/teams>

Professional organization who keep directories of providers are:

Safer Society Foundation:

[www.saferociety.org/foundation/listings/](http://www.saferociety.org/foundation/listings/)

Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers:

[www.atsa.com/referral](http://www.atsa.com/referral)



## TO LOOK FOR PROGRAMS

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There are agencies who evaluate the evidence associated with treatment for children and provide summaries of these results. Information about treatments for problematic sexual behavior of youth can be found in the following websites:

Crime Solutions

<https://www.crimesolutions.gov/default.aspx>

California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare

<http://www.cebc4cw.org/search/results/?keyword=problematic+sexual+behavior>



## SUMMARY

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In summary, keep these key points in mind when selecting a successful treatment program for your family. Treatment should be focused on the behavior problem in a positive learning environment.

- Therapy should not be based on adult treatment models
- The qualifications of the therapists are important
- Caregiver involvement is crucial
- A group setting is helpful
- Respect and support are key
- Youth should not be negatively impacted by treatment



# NCSBY

**National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth**

**[www.ncsby.org](http://www.ncsby.org)**

Activities made possible in part by grant 2016-MU-MU-K053 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.