

Sexual Offender Treatment Enhanced by Consideration of Learning Styles

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The majority of the residential and outpatient programs for juvenile sexual offenders (JSO) are based on psycho-educational models in which the JSO is expected to not only attain their treatment goals, they must demonstrate a thorough understanding of important concepts that are covered in their treatment programs. (for example, concepts such as thinking errors, consent vs. nonconsensual sexual behaviors, empathy, behavioral cycles etc.)

In some treatment programs, the JSO must demonstrate competency of the concepts by taking a written test before they can move to a higher phase in their treatment program. Their "progress" in the program can be adversely affected by the grade level of their academic skills, intellectual functioning, and their ability to sustain attention for the duration of their group sessions. In addition, some participants will have greater difficulties comprehending the important concepts if the treatment program uses a booklet and handouts as the primary tool to cover the important treatment issues.

Treatment providers should be cognizant of learning styles which facilitate the retention of important concepts covered in their treatment programs.

Visual learners

These adolescents tend to think in pictures and tend to rely on creating vivid mental images to retain information. Using pictures, videos, and handouts are effective tools for these clients. Adolescents with weaknesses in this area would have difficulties studying and understanding visual concepts (e.g. drawing of a behavioral cycle).

Auditory learners

These adolescents tend to be quite responsive in the talk therapies. They learn best through verbal lectures, discussions and listening to what others have to say. Written information may have little meaning until it is read to them. Adolescents with weaknesses in this area tend to be highly distractible in group situations.

Tactile & Kinesthetic Learners

These adolescents tend to learn best through hands-on approaches or doing an activity. They may find it hard to sit still for a long period of time. They tend to learn best through experimental learning, role-playing, or art therapy. An adolescent with weaknesses in this area tends to have a problem concentrating when they are expected to sit and read out of a workbook.

| Concept to be Learned | Visual Style | Auditory Style | Kinesthetic Style |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Behavior cycle | Charts and diagrams Excerpts for "Groundhog Day" (movie) | Self report in group Review journals | Art therapy Role Playing |
| Empathy | Observe role plays Doll work Videos depicting impact of sexual abuse | Victim Clarification Letters Readings and Videos Victim Impact Statements | Role playing Art Therapy Doll Work |