

Ten Principles for Successful Sex Offender Treatment

1. Therapy Cannot “Cure” Sex Offenders.

It is inappropriate to allow successfully treated sex offenders to have contact with or be placed in positions of trust over children. Sex offenders who place themselves, or allow themselves to be placed, in positions of trust are expressing more concern for their own wants than for safety, and increase risk to potential victims by denying their potential for recidivism.

2. Safety Comes From Accountability.

Sexual abuse can only occur in a context of secrecy. Becoming accountable for every aspect of abuse and lifestyle is the most important demonstration of safety. Sex offenders who are truly concerned about safety are also invested in other people's concern for safety and should appreciate being checked up on.

3. Mistrust, Suspicion, Scrutiny Must Be Appreciated.

Sex offenders are far less likely to re-offend while they are scrutinized. Because trust leads to a decrease in scrutiny and a corresponding decrease in accountability, sex offenders must learn to **appreciate not being trusted**.

4. Accountability and Safety are More Important Than Trust, Privileges, and/or Convenience.

Sex offenders who prioritize trust and privileges over safety and accountability place others at risk for betrayal by continuing to value their own desires over other people's right to safety. Trust places people at risk for betrayal. Sex offenders who are truly remorseful do not place others at such risk.

5. Increased Privileges Indicate Risk – Not Progress.

Increased privileges are often mistakenly viewed as a measurement of progress when they should be viewed as an indicator of risk. Unfortunately, privileges are often assigned for reasons other than progress. The increased autonomy that comes with privileges also increases the potential for secrecy and eventual return to abusive behavior. It is the sex offender's responsibility to demonstrate, in advance, that the level of risk is identifiable and manageable. Since privileges place others at risk, they are not given “diagnostically,” so that sex offenders may prove their safety (this would be like taking an alcoholic to a bar to see that he will not drink.)

6. Secrecy and Confusion are Indicators of Risk.

Members of the community who don't know of a person's history of sex offending may *feel* safer than those who do know, but this does not mean they *are* safer. In fact, members of the community who don't know of a sex offender's history may be at higher risk. Accurate accountability includes the ability and willingness to address any concerns that members of the community might have in the event they learn of a person's abusive history. Sex offenders must organize their lifestyles so that they can continuously invite other members of the community to aid in the monitoring and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle.

7. Sex Offenders Must Plan Ahead for Safety and Accountability.

Sex offenders have often practiced habits of secrecy and these habits do not easily disappear. For this reason, sex offenders must practice planning ahead for safety and accountability. This includes informing others of intentions and potential problems.

8. Sex Offenders Must Become Responsible in all Areas of Their Lives.

Sexual abuse is an extreme act that sex offenders do not arrive at easily or quickly. There are often many other important aspects of sex offenders' lifestyles that led to and served their abuses. Becoming responsible in all areas of living serves to buffer sex offenders from the type of irresponsible and secretive that supports abuse. Sex offenders cannot become healthy while continuing to act out in other ways.

9. Remorse and Empathy Must Be Expressed Through Accountability to Victims.

Accurate empathy is possible only after sex offenders become accountable to those harmed. Accountability must include controlling behaviors and intent to abuse. Remorse and empathy expressed in the absence of such accountability should be thought of as transitory guilt around getting caught, and the loss of trust and privileges. Empathy without accountability could be an indicator of manipulative charm and/or a destructive pattern of self-centered thought, feeling, and behavior.

10. Recovery Requires Thought.

Since abusive behavior begins with abusive thought, it is not enough to simply follow directions. Sex offenders must learn to *think* in terms of safety and accountability. Offenders who attempt to meet expectations without embracing the thought processes around safety reinforce the dangerous patterns of secrecy, manipulation, and deceptiveness that led to past abusive behavior.