

TDI *Explainer*

How can we respond to known sexual offenders?

Many of us will have to deal with sex offenders in our work, whilst not being specialists in sex offender treatment. In this Explainer, we look at how day to day activities within our role can best support the wider principles of public protection and rehabilitation.

We are not therapists...

It may not be our role to manage offenders or deliver sex offending treatment programmes, but we can offer a lot to our service users, such as:

- A curiosity and vigilance about what they are doing, including when they are not with us.
- Providing emotional support, by effective, active listening and offering skills-based interventions.
- Supporting them in changing patterns of unhealthy behaviour.

Helping them reflect on their relationships with others.

Effective listening

The most important thing we can do with a service user is listen to them. This can also be one of the hardest things we do with them. This acrostic outlines the major principles we need to follow to be effective listeners:

L

Look at the service user ; **learn** by observing and hearing

I

Be **interested** and **involved** while maintaining you own **identity**

S

Sense and **support safely**

T

Trust the service user to **trust** you

E

Enable, **empower** and **empathise**

N

It is **not** about solving problems, but about hearing **needs**

TDI training can introduce people in support roles (both in day care and residential settings, including prisons) to a range of approaches which can support and help the rehabilitation of service users. Some of these have been tried and tested for decades, while others are part of the latest thinking on reducing reoffending. Here are some examples:

Motivation and change

Assessing how close service users are to making positive changes in their lives can help us determine the best ways to help them, both here and now and also by raising and sustaining their motivation in the future. We can also help them look at back at things they've successfully changed in the past, in order to build confidence for what is to come.

Strengths-based approaches

We all want to help our service users, but we should be careful never to define them only by their problems. Strengths-based approaches in social work (and, similarly, Desistance Theory in the criminal justice world) are becoming increasingly valued as they look also at the skills, qualities and social supports service users can bring to improving their own circumstances.

Remember: there are always risks

Whilst there is a lot we can do to engage and support offenders, raise their motivation and encourage their rehabilitation, we also need to remember that working with them can be stressful, occasionally dangerous and that sex offenders (in particular) will often deny or minimise what they have done, sometimes even trying to blame their victims. They may try to manipulate staff in various ways too. Thus our day to day practice needs to be a constant balance between offering support, paying due attention to safeguarding and public protection issues and also working with our colleagues to ensure our own safety and self-care. The next Explainer in this series looks at some of these staff care issues in more detail and should be read alongside this one.

Further questions you might want to think about:

"How does your role contribute to public protection? How do you fit into wider networks? What is the balance between support and risk-management?"



w: tdi.org.uk
e: info@tdi.org.uk
p: 07437 038 057
p: 07765 701 042
a: Suite 4, Adamson House,
65 Westgate Road, New
castle, NE1 1SG

TDI is a national charity which works to increase public protection by finding practical and creative solutions to the problem of sexual offending.

For over 25 years we have been at the forefront of the field, providing training, research, consultancy and public protection schemes to individuals and organisations across society.

If you've found this explainer useful, you may be interested in learning more through one of our training programmes. Contact us at info@tdi.org.uk to find out more.