

Advancing a Victim-Centered Approach to Supervising Sex Offenders: A Training Curriculum





INTRODUCTION

Background

- This resource was designed to inform and guide the implementation of a victim-centered approach to supervising sex offenders in the community.
- It was developed in partnership by the Center for Effective Public Policy's Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM), the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), and the Resource Sharing Project (RSP), and was funded by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW).

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BACKGROUND

Purpose of this Resource

Recognizing that probation and parole officers are uniquely positioned to implement victim-centered practices at various decision points, as they have responsibilities that begin prior to sentencing and continue throughout the term of supervision, and because sexual assault victim advocates and sex offender treatment providers, supervision officers largely embrace a victim-centered philosophy, but need additional information to apply this philosophy to their day-to-day practices, this resource should be used to:

- Facilitate supervision officers' understandings of the potential impact of sexual violence on individuals and communities;

Purpose of this Resource

- familiarize supervision officers with the key components and fundamental principles of the Comprehensive Approach to Sex Offender Management, with an emphasis on defining victim-centeredness;
- increase awareness among supervision officers about the roles and responsibilities of community- and system-based victim advocates and their complementary roles in responding to sexual violence;
- review principles, practices, and trends for specialized supervision with persons convicted of sex offenses, and assist officers with recognizing the various points at which they can play a role in promoting victim-centeredness; and
- encourage supervision officers with identifying specific steps they can take to incorporate victim-centeredness into their sex offender supervision practices.

(Center for Sex Offender Management, National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Resource Sharing Project, and Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, 2016).

Intended Audience

These materials are geared primarily to:

- Supervision agencies (i.e., probation, parole) with direct case management responsibilities.
- Sexual assault victim advocates and other victim service providers, given their pivotal roles in a victim-centered approach.
- Agency leaders, managers, and supervisors, as they are influential in setting the tone and culture within their agencies.
- Other stakeholders with a role and stake in sexual violence prevention, including policymakers, the courts, professionals who conduct specialized evaluations and deliver treatment interventions for perpetrators, practitioners within and outside the criminal justice and correctional systems, and the public.

Focus of this Curriculum

- This resource focuses on adult males who have committed sex offenses.
- Since adolescents who offend sexually differ from adults in significant ways, strategies for adolescents should be considered separately (see, e.g., Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, 2017).
- Similarly, females — who represent roughly 10% of the persons known to offend sexually — require gender-responsive approaches.

Terminology/Definitions

For the purposes of this resource, the following terms are used throughout this curriculum:

- **Victim-Centered Approach:** A philosophy, principle, and practice that recognizes sexual assault victims as primary clients of the justice system, and whose safety, rights, and interests are a paramount consideration when designing and implementing perpetrator management strategies.
- **Sexual Violence/Abuse/Assault:** Terms used interchangeably when referencing behaviors of a sexual nature (contact and noncontact) that are directed toward another person without that person's consent, or toward someone who is unable to provide consent.

Terminology/Definitions (continued)

- **Victim/Survivor:** A person who has experienced sexual violence/abuse/assault. Terminology preferences may differ based on points in time, life circumstances, speakers, and contexts. For example, “victim” is commonly used in criminal justice settings to convey that this is the person who was wronged; in the counseling and recovery process, the term “survivor” may be used more frequently to convey a sense of strength and a regaining of personal agency.
- **Perpetrators/Offenders:** Used interchangeably to refer to adult males who have committed acts of sexual violence/abuse/assault, as defined above, and who have been convicted of acts of a sexually violent/abusive nature and are involved in the criminal justice system.
- **Secondary victims:** Individuals in addition to victims who are likely to be impacted by sexual violence (these might include spouses, partners, significant others, family, friends, or other members of the community).



SECTION 1: BACKDROP AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORK

Supervising Sex Offenders is a Challenge

It is commonly accepted that supervising sex offenders can be particularly challenging and the stakes are high in a number of ways, including the following:

- The intensely personal and intrusive nature of sexual violence, the complex dynamics involved, and the effects on victims are unlike most other crimes.
- Responsibility for victim and public safety weighs heavily on officers' shoulders, and high levels of scrutiny can lead to added pressure.
- Sex offender-specific laws and agency policies have “widened the net,” resulting in increased workload demands for officers, usually without additional resources.
- The potential for burnout and vicarious trauma for officers who work with these cases is heightened.

Sex Offender Supervision Officers Play a Critical Role in Supporting Public Safety

Professionals who accept the challenges of supervising sex offenders provide a valuable service to survivors and their families, the public, and sex offenders by:

- holding sexual abusers accountable for their behaviors and the harm caused to victims;
- enhancing victim and public safety through various risk management strategies;
- using evidence-based strategies to reduce reoffense risk and support lasting behavioral change among perpetrators; and
- helping ensure that supervision practices are responsive to — and do not run counter to — the rights, needs, and interests of sexual assault survivors.

Beginning to Think About a “Victim-Centered” Approach to Supervision

- The goals and roles reflected in the last slide describe a “victim-centered approach” to supervising sex offenders.
- This approach recognizes that the traditionally offender-focused nature of sex offender management inadvertently can create systems that appear indifferent to the interests of sexual assault victims.
- Some sexual assault survivors and their families may feel ignored, invalidated, or further traumatized by the system that is designed to protect and support them.

Understanding the Backdrop: The Importance of this Work

- A comprehensive sexual violence prevention framework also recognizes the importance of strategies needed after sexual violence is perpetrated (e.g., after offenders are convicted and are under community supervision) (Basile et al., 2016).
- Many officers who supervise sex offenders have long championed a “no more victims” approach. This reflects their recognition of — and commitment to — the role they play in preventing sexual violence and increasing public safety.
- The next several slides demonstrate why efforts to prevent sexual assault are so critical.

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need

- **Sexual violence affects millions of individuals in the United States annually, making it a significant public health issue.** Recent estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveal that approximately 1 in 3 women — and 1 in 6 men — experience some form of contact sexual violence over the course of their lifetime (Smith et al., 2017).

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need (continued)

- **Sexual violence cuts across age, socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and other lines.** Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable, but individuals across the life span experience sexual abuse. Disproportionately high rates of sexual violence are reported by members of groups who tend to be marginalized and whose perspectives are often underrepresented, such as women of color, individuals in the LGBTQ community, and persons with disabilities (Smith et al., 2017).

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need (continued)

- Sexual assault victims are most commonly abused by someone they know, such as a family member, intimate partner, or acquaintance, and the perpetrator is typically a male (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2010a). The overwhelming majority of child victims (as high as 90%) — and adult victims (upward of 70%) — have some level of familiarity with the person who perpetrated the abuse (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015; Finkelhor, 2012). Men are responsible for the vast majority (roughly 90%) of sexual assaults (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006).

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need (continued)

- **Most incidents of sexual violence are not reported.** Less than one-third of rapes and other sexual assaults of persons 12 years of age and older are reported to police (Truman & Morgan, 2015). Determining reporting rates among young children is more difficult, but recent estimates indicate that roughly 38% of child sexual abuse cases are reported (see, e.g., London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2003; Ullman, 2007). Many factors affect if, when, how, why, and to whom victims disclose their experiences.

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need (continued)

- **Sexual victimization is linked to numerous adverse effects on survivors in both the short and long term** (see, e.g., NSVRC, 2010b). For example, in the immediate and short term, victims may experience a wide range of emotions, including confusion, shock, denial, fear, anger, numbness, shame, and guilt. Sexual violence can impact quality of life across multiple domains, including physical health (e.g., chronic pain, frequent headaches), mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD), intimate and other relationship functioning (e.g., mistrust, social isolation, withdrawal), and behavioral health (e.g., substance abuse, eating disorders, high risk sexual and other problem behaviors), and can shorten life expectancy (NSVRC, 2010b).

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need (continued)

- **The financial costs and economic impact of sexual violence are profound.** Recent statistics indicate that the estimated lifetime cost of rape is \$122,461 per victim, or a population economic burden of nearly \$3.1 trillion (Peterson, DeGue, Florence, & Lokey, 2017).

Preventing Sexual Violence is a Pressing Need (continued)

- **Some sexual assault victims experience trauma as a result of their encounters in the criminal justice system.** The dynamics of sexual violence commonly lead victims to have feelings of powerlessness and a loss of control in their lives. Shame, self-blame, fears of others' reactions, threats by the abuser, and cultural norms that condone violence or blame victims create an environment that is isolating and silencing. Being listened to, believed, and treated with dignity and respect, and receiving supportive services and advocacy, can help survivors feel empowered, regain a sense of personal agency, and promote healing.

System-Induced Trauma

- Unfortunately, for some victims, the “loss of choice and voice” — and other trauma — are exacerbated when they seek justice. This results when the system becomes almost exclusively focused on the rights and interests of the criminal defendants; victims may feel that their safety, rights, and needs are being ignored.
- Survivors and their families can also become overwhelmed by a system that is complex and difficult to navigate. These experiences can lead victims to feel retraumatized.

Mitigating Trauma Using a Victim-Centered Approach to Supervision

- A movement is underway to consider how to manage this population in a way that mitigates additional trauma to victims and, to the degree possible, prevents additional sexual victimization.
- The next section of this resource, “Making the Case: The Rationale for a Victim-Centered Approach to Supervising Sex Offenders,” provides the rationale for implementing a more victim-centered approach to supervising sex offenders under community supervision.



SECTION 2:

MAKING THE CASE: THE RATIONALE FOR A VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH TO SUPERVISING SEX OFFENDERS

Defining a Victim-Centered Approach

- A victim-centered approach to supervising sex offenders is defined as *“a philosophy, principle, and practice that recognizes sexual assault victims as primary clients of the justice system, and whose safety, rights, and interests are a paramount consideration when designing and implementing perpetrator management strategies.”*

Defining a Victim-Centered Approach (continued)

Victim-centered approaches ensure that:

- victim safety and well-being are at the center of policy and practice decisions;
- strategies are trauma-informed and facilitate healing, empowerment, and personal agency; and
- preventing further harm to victims — particularly system-induced trauma — is an explicit goal.

Defining a Victim-Centered Approach (continued)

- Victim-centered practices are an integral part of a comprehensive model of sexual violence prevention and take the form of crisis intervention, medical and legal advocacy, support groups, evidence-based treatments, and access to community resources (Basile et al., 2016).
- Such strategies are designed to improve outcomes for survivors and lessen the long-term risks for experiencing behavioral, psychological, and health consequences (Basile et al., 2016).

At the heart of a victim-centered approach to sex offender management is the question “What’s best for the victims and the community?” (English, Pullen, & Jones, 1996)

Why Is a Victim-Centered Approach to Sex Offender Management So Critical?

- **Because sexual assault victims are the persons most affected by sexual violence.** Arguably, sex offender management laws and strategies are designed with the interests of victims in mind. Yet victims are not generally asked about their needs or expectations for justice; the assumption is that all or most victims are seeking retribution (see, e.g., CSOM et al., 2016; Spoo et al., 2017). Sexual assault survivors have diverse experiences, interests, and needs. In a victim-centered approach, system actors do not presume to know what is best for a given survivor.

Why Is a Victim-Centered Approach to Sex Offender Management So Critical?

(continued)

- **Because mounting evidence reveals that some sex offender management strategies run counter to the “no more victims” and “what’s best for victims and communities?” goals.** Some sex offender-specific policies (e.g., residence restrictions, registration, notification) do not have the intended effect of protecting victims, reducing reoffending, or preventing sexual violence (see, e.g., Tabachnick & Klein, 2011). In fact, there is evidence that certain approaches actually increase victim and community safety and result in collateral consequences that are harmful to victims (see, e.g., Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

Why Is a Victim-Centered Approach to Sex Offender Management So Critical? (continued)

- **Because many sexual assault victims and their families experience negative encounters and are retraumatized when seeking justice, relief, or assistance.** This can occur at various points in the criminal justice system, beginning at the point at which an allegation is brought to the attention of the authorities. Examples include:
 - insensitivity or indifference from law enforcement investigators or medical professionals conducting sexual assault examinations;
 - questions or comments that suggest that they are not being believed or that they are being blamed or judged for what happened to them; and
 - little or no information provided to them about the steps in the justice system process, what their rights are, or what services are available and how to access them (Campbell, Fehler-Cabral, & Horsford, 2017; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Shaw, Campbell, & Cain, 2016).

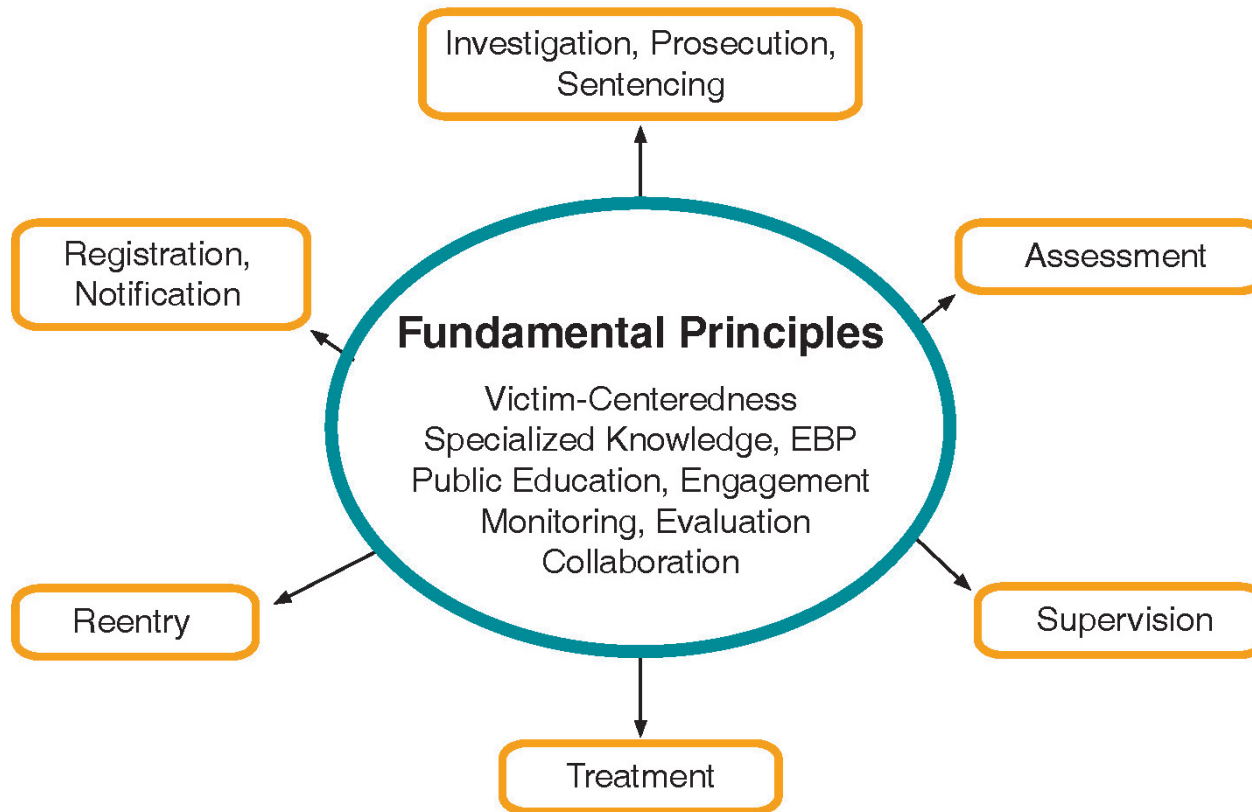
Why Is a Victim-Centered Approach to Sex Offender Management So Critical?

(continued)

- As a result, victims or secondary victims experience system-induced trauma and are less likely to participate in the legal proceedings or seek necessary assistance for themselves or someone else in the future (Campbell et al., 2017; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Shaw et al., 2016). When sexual assault victims are believed, validated, supported, empowered, and provided access to evidence-based, trauma-informed interventions, outcomes for victims are improved and serious long-term negative impacts are decreased (Basile et al., 2016; CSOM et al., 2016).

Victim-Centeredness as a Key Principle of a Comprehensive Approach to Sex Offender Management

CASOM Model



(Carter, Bumby, & Talbot, 2008)

Victim-Centeredness as a Key Principle of a Comprehensive Approach to Sex Offender Management (continued)

- The Comprehensive Approach to Sex Offender Management (CASOM) model provides guidance about the various components of a multifaceted sex offender management system, the range of stakeholders who must be involved, and the underlying principles that should guide sex offender management approaches, including victim-centeredness
- All system actors play a role in preventing system-induced trauma and promoting positive outcomes for victims and communities.

(Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008)

Operationalizing Victim-Centeredness in a Comprehensive Approach

For each of the CASOM model components (investigation/prosecution/sentencing, assessment, supervision, treatment, reentry, and registration/notification), there are multiple ways in which victim-centeredness should be operationalized, including:

- utilizing specialized, trauma-informed, collaborative sexual assault response teams during the investigation phase;
- consulting with survivors and their families when plea bargains are being considered (in the absence of such communication, the negotiated plea may send a message to survivors that offender accountability is not a priority, or that their perspectives are not important);

Operationalizing Victim-Centeredness in a Comprehensive Approach (Continued)

- providing prosecution-based victim witness specialists or victim advocates who support survivors, explain the court processes, and provide referrals for services;
- adopting vertical prosecution (i.e., a prosecutor follows a case from initial referral through prosecution) to ensure continuity and prevent survivors from being “handed off” and having to retell their experience;
- ensuring judges are well-versed in trauma-informed approaches and the diversity of victims’ experiences;

Operationalizing Victim-Centeredness in a Comprehensive Approach (continued)

- conducting assessments that take into account research-supported risk factors such as access to victims, the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, and offense-related interests or arousal;
- employing treatment approaches that challenge pro-offending attitudes and beliefs such as victim blaming and hostile attitudes toward women, and that facilitate perspective-taking and victim empathy;
- putting in place multidisciplinary case management teams that include victim advocates to represent victims' voices and interests and to assist with safety plans and perpetrators' supervision plans;

Operationalizing Victim-Centeredness in a Comprehensive Approach (continued)

- developing reentry plans that take into account post-release conditions that address the safety of victims and potentially vulnerable persons; and
- using risk-differentiated registration and notification approaches that are based on factual information about who commits sex offenses and who is most likely to be victimized.

Why are Supervision Officers Well Positioned to Facilitate Victim-Centeredness?

- **Most convicted sex offenders are, or will be, residing in the community under supervision.** Over 220,000 individuals are under criminal justice supervision for a sex offenses (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2017). Roughly one-third of all registered sex offenders residing in the community are being supervised by probation, parole, or community corrections agencies (Harris, Levenson, & Ackerman, 2014). And the vast majority of incarcerated sex offenders will be released to the community eventually.

Why are Supervision Officers Well Positioned to Facilitate Victim-Centeredness? (continued)

- **Over the span of sex offenders' supervision terms, survivors have many information needs, questions, and concerns.**

Survivors may want information about the status of the case, where the perpetrator resides and works, the conditions the perpetrator must follow, the person's compliance with supervision and treatment, mechanisms that are in place to protect them, and whom to contact or what to do if they have concerns about suspicious behavior or safety. Supervision officers are the logical resource to whom survivors can turn for this information.

Why are Supervision Officers Well Positioned to Facilitate Victim-Centeredness? (continued)

- **Victims' rights come into play at multiple points throughout offenders' periods of supervision and officers have a duty to uphold these rights.** Each state, tribal jurisdiction, and territory has codified victims' rights. While there are some variations, core rights for victims that are particularly germane to community supervision include the following:
 - the right to be treated with dignity, respect, and sensitivity;
 - the right to protection and safety;
 - the right to notification and information;
 - the right to be heard and provide input;
 - the right to be present at proceedings;
 - the right to privacy and confidentiality; and
 - the right to receive restitution

(American Probation and Parole Association, n.d.; CSOM et al., 2016)

Why are Supervision Officers Well Positioned to Facilitate Victim-Centeredness? (continued)

- **Sexual assault survivors have valuable perspectives and information that can inform supervision strategies.** Because sexual abuse is often committed by someone related to, intimately involved with, or otherwise known to the victim, survivors often have insights into the perpetrator's modus operandi, triggers, or precursors that signal risk. This information can be especially helpful for identifying supervision conditions, developing supervision/case management plans, and establishing and monitoring safety plans.

Why are Supervision Officers Well Positioned to Facilitate Victim-Centeredness? (continued)

- **As the lead case managers for sex offenders under supervision, officers have significant influence and reach that can leverage a victim-centered approach.** Supervision officers can be conveners and collaborators with representatives from other agencies and disciplines — including victim advocates and victim service providers — who bring valuable expertise, credibility, insights, and awareness of resources. For example, officers can:

Why are Supervision Officers Well Positioned to Facilitate Victim-Centeredness? (continued)

- coordinate multidisciplinary teams that include victim advocates to represent survivors' interests when making case management decisions;
- engage victim advocates to support survivors with developing victim impact statements or to assist with victim notifications; and
- bring together the various professionals necessary to make victim-centered and trauma-informed decisions about the viability and implementation of family reunification goals, when appropriate.

Victim-Centeredness in the Context of Sound Correctional Practice

- Sections 3 and 4 of this curriculum will help supervision agencies and officers ground themselves in the principles of evidence-based correctional practices and in specialized and victim-centered approaches to managing sex offenders in the community.
- Taken together, these approaches offer great promise in holding offenders accountable, reducing their risk to reoffend, and preventing additional victimization.



Section 3:
CREATING A SOLID FOUNDATION:
SPECIALIZED STRATEGIES WITHIN AN
EVIDENCE-BASED FRAMEWORK

Evidence-Based Principles and Practices in Offender Supervision

- Historically, officers responsible for supervising sex offenders have made efforts to manage or contain risk through the use of restrictions, external controls, and punitive sanctions.
- Research suggests, however, that supervision is more effective when officers employ a balanced model that pairs traditional risk management strategies with interventions that build skills, promote behavior change, and reduce recidivism risk.

(Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Latessa, Listwan, & Koetzle, 2014)

Evidence-Based Principles and Practices in Offender Supervision (continued)

- The core principles of effective correctional intervention — for both sex offenders and the broader justice-involved population — are the principles of risk, need, and responsivity (RNR).
- The RNR model indicates that interventions are most effective for moderate- to high-risk offenders; when factors linked to recidivism (i.e., criminogenic needs) are the focus; when effective behavior change methods are used; and when individual characteristics that may support or interfere with a given person's response to intervention are considered.

(Bonta & Andrews, 2017)

Evidence-Based Principles and Practices in Offender Supervision (continued)

These principles translate into evidence-based behavioral interventions commonly referred to as core correctional practices (CCP; Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008; Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Robinson et al., 2012) which focus on having officers:

- create a strong professional alliance with individuals on their caseloads;
- involve clients in the development of their supervision plans, which fosters internal motivation to change;
- model prosocial attitudes and behaviors, such as effective communication styles, in their interactions;
- capitalize on opportunities to teach concrete skills, such as effective problem solving, that will allow justice-involved individuals to achieve their goals and meet their needs in healthy, non-harmful ways;

Evidence-Based Principles and Practices in Offender Supervision (continued)

- reinforce supervision compliance, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and goal attainment;
- address supervision noncompliance effectively, using timely and proportional responses;
- link offenders to programs and services that can support stability, change, and risk reduction (e.g., sex offense-specific treatment); and
- work closely with offenders and others in the community to help create or strengthen positive offender support systems in an effort to build prosocial relationships and patterns of behavior.

Evidence-Based Principles and Practices in Offender Supervision (continued)

- The relational aspect of these evidence-based supervision practices may be particularly challenging for officers who supervise sex offenders, given social, cultural, and structural contexts.
- However, when officers engage in these core practices rather than using the majority of the time during face-to-face supervision contacts to focus on compliance with conditions, important changes in behavior and recidivism reduction are more likely to be achieved.

(Bailey & Sample, 2017)

The Dosage of Supervision and Other Interventions Matter

- Research has demonstrated that correctional programs and community supervision are more effective when the cumulative amount — or dose — of interventions (e.g., contact hours, units of service, duration) is proportional to individuals' risk level. Low-risk offenders require minimal dosage, whereas moderate- and high-risk individuals require higher doses.
- Studies show that risk-based dosage, particularly for moderate- and high-risk individuals, significantly reduces recidivism. However, there appears to be a point of diminishing returns, after which additional dosage does not continue to have a positive impact and potentially undermines effectiveness.

(See, e.g., Day et al., 2017; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Makarios, Sperber, & Latessa, 2014; Sperber, Latessa, & Makarios, 2016)

Integrating Sound Correctional Practice and Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision

In addition to sound general correctional practice, officers supervising sex offenders must also use specialized sex offense-specific approaches. Since this population poses different risk, needs, and stakes than the general population, implementing the specialized supervision approaches outlined on the following slides is critical.

(see, e.g., CSOM et al., 2016; Cumming & McGrath, 2005; English et al., 1996; Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2014)

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Training

Officers should receive specialized training on topics including:

- the dynamics of sexual assault and its impact on victims
- the diversity of sex offenders
- risk factors linked to reoffending
- assessing risk of sex offenders
- the state of the research on sex offender management policies and practices
- understanding sex offense-specific treatment
- the roles of victim advocates
- collaboration

Such training ensures that officers are trained to conduct high-quality pre-sentence investigations, develop appropriate case management plans, and provide effective supervision.

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Assessment Tools

- Sex offenders share a number of risk factors with the broader justice-involved population, but also have unique static and dynamic risk factors; hence the need for sex offender-specific instruments to assess their risk of reoffense.
- Several empirically validated, sex offense-specific risk assessments have been developed and are beneficial for informing supervision levels, conditions, and case management plans; assessing changes in risk during routine supervision contacts; and developing victim safety plans.

(see Gotch & Hanson, 2016)

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Pre-Sentence Investigations

- Pre-sentence investigations for sex offenders should include information above and beyond that covered in “traditional” pre-sentence investigations and should provide a comprehensive picture of the defendant — reflecting the unique “sex offender-specific” risk factors — and of victim interests and safety considerations.

(Cumming & McGrath, 2005)

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Pre-Sentence Investigations

- The specialized PSI should provide information about the sexually abusive behaviors that brought the defendant to the court's attention, the impact on the victims and secondary victims (the victim impact statement is an extremely important part of the PSI process), the defendant's sexual history, prior criminal behavior (including other sex offending behaviors), risk and protective factors, reoffense risk, strengths and assets, and current education, employment, finances, and housing status.

(Cumming & McGrath, 2005)

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Pre-Sentence Investigations

The analysis of this information leads to:

- comprehensive, well-grounded, victim-responsive recommendations to the courts that can promote effective sentencing decisions
- post-sentencing supervision and management strategies that address victim protection and safety, offender accountability and risk management, and risk reduction (e.g., sex offense-specific treatment and other behavior change interventions).

(Cumming & McGrath, 2005)

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Conditions

- In addition to standard or “general” conditions (e.g., curfew, reporting requirements, employment requirements), officers should use specialized conditions to reduce and manage risk and unique dynamics associated with sexual assault.
- Common examples of specialized conditions include:
 - **no-contact orders**
 - **required participation in sex offense-specific treatment**
 - **travel restrictions**
 - **GPS or electronic monitoring**
 - **prohibited or limited/monitored internet access**
 - **restrictions on housing and employment**

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Conditions

- Since each person and situation is unique, supervision conditions should be imposed selectively, based on factors such as the perpetrator's risk level, risk and protective factors, motivation, and amenability, and the survivor's rights, needs, and interests in a given case (Cumming & McGrath, 2005).

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Conditions

- A “one size fits all” approach — using blanket supervision conditions — can result in conditions that are not relevant for the person under supervision, may hamper their ability to be successful in meeting risk-reducing goals, and can mean that officers are not focusing their time and resources on the specific individuals and factors that pose the greatest risk to victim and public safety.

(CSOM et al., 2016; Cumming & McGrath, 2005; Lobanov-Rostovsky, 2014)

Specialized Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision: Collaborative Partnerships

- Supervision officers should collaborate with key stakeholders, including victim advocates, law enforcement officers, offense-specific treatment providers, and housing and employment representatives, whose complementary roles and responsibilities support shared goals.

Applying Evidence-Based Principles and Core Correctional Practices to Specialized Sex Offender Supervision

Applying evidence-based principles and core correctional practices as the foundation for specialized supervision strategies increase the effectiveness of supervision and lead to cost savings as a result of reduced rates of reoffending (Drake, Aos, & Miller, 2009). In order to progress toward these goals, officers would do well to:

- utilize reliable, sex offense-specific and general risk assessment tools to identify the recidivism risk of individuals on their caseloads;
- prioritize time and resources, including specialized technologies such as GPS/electronic monitoring and polygraphs (when warranted), for moderate- to high-risk sex offenders;
- provide risk-differentiated supervision dosage (e.g., contact hours, supervision length, referrals to risk-reducing programs and services), using greater dosage for higher-risk sex offenders;

Applying Evidence-Based Principles and Core Correctional Practices to Specialized Sex Offender Supervision (continued)

- selectively recommend or apply specialized conditions that address the risk factors identified for a given individual;
- ensure that case management plans and office and field contacts focus primarily on changeable risk factors linked to sexual, violent, and general recidivism;
- capitalize on supervision contacts as opportunities to promote change, utilizing techniques and strategies demonstrated by research to be effective in reducing recidivism;

Applying Evidence-Based Principles and Core Correctional Practices to Specialized Sex Offender Supervision (continued)

- engage clients in the development of success-oriented supervision plans that take into account approach goals, not solely avoidance goals;
- identify incentives and reinforce positive change and supervision compliance; and
- respond to all instances of supervision noncompliance consistently and in a timely manner, while taking into account reoffense risk and using strategies that are proportional to the nature and severity of noncompliant behaviors.

Incorporating Victim-Centeredness

- This section provided foundational information about the research that supports sound correctional practice and specialized sex offender supervision and the benefits of using those strategies.
- Section 4 will focus on how to integrate victim-centeredness into these approaches as correctional agencies work to avoid re-traumatization of victims and to prevent additional victimization.



Section 4:

GOING THE DISTANCE: IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES AND TAKING ACTION

Asking “What’s Best for the Victim?”

Implementing a victim-centered approach requires officers to capitalize on the various decision points and supervision processes that intersect with victims’ rights, needs, and interests and, at each point, to answer the question **“What’s best for the victim and community?”**

Progressing Toward Victim-Centeredness in Supervision

Officers can move toward victim-centeredness – and ask and seek responses to “what’s best for victims and the community?” by:

- recognizing sexual assault survivors as primary clients;
- building and maintaining partnerships with sexual assault victim advocates;
- adopting evidence-informed strategies that reduce reoffense risk and support positive change, not only for victims but also for those who perpetrate;
- respecting the voices and choices of sexual assault survivors;
- using a trauma-informed lens to guide interactions and interventions; and
- honoring victims’ rights.

Victim-Centered Actions

Operationally speaking, officers supervising sex offenders in the community can put the philosophy of victim-centeredness into action at the following specific decision points:

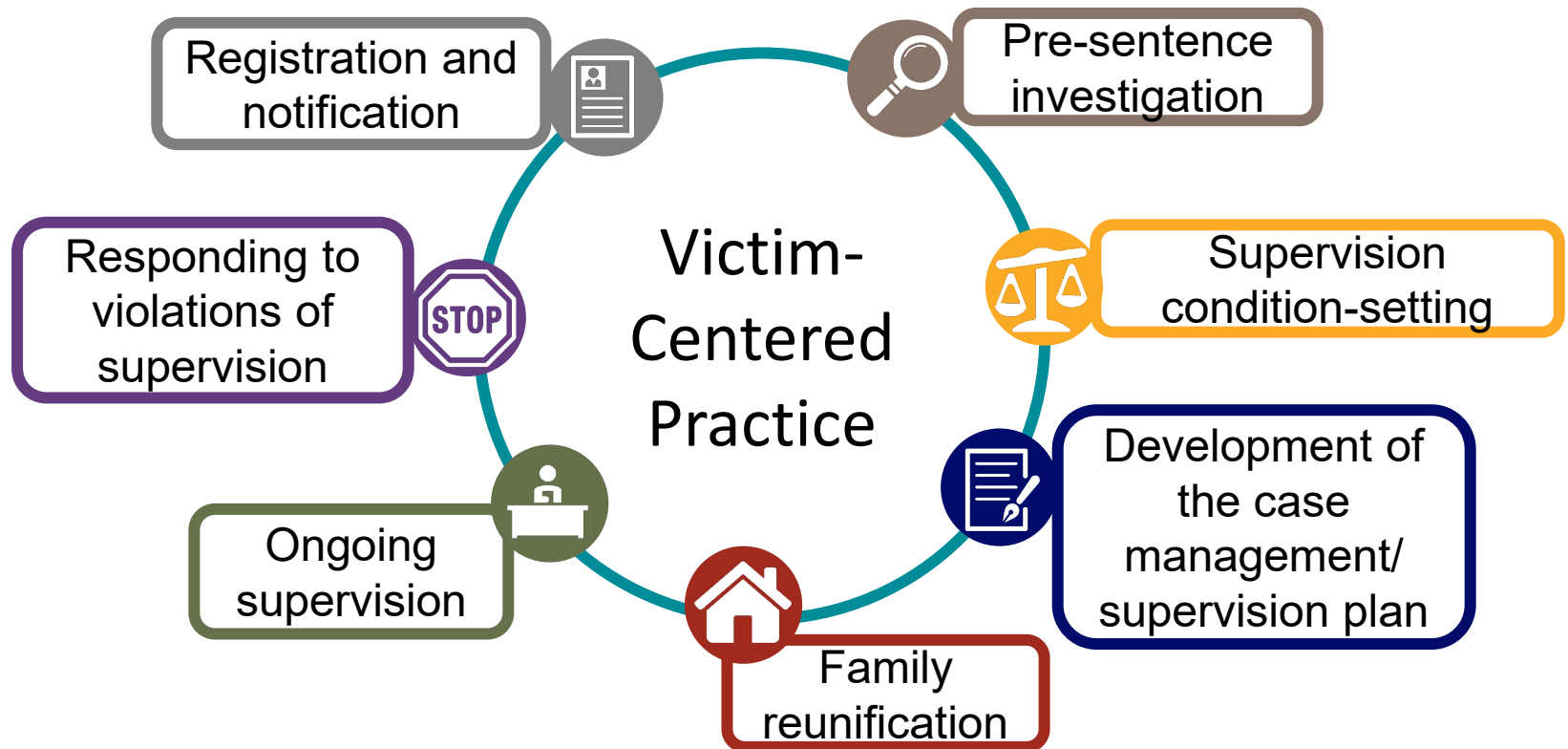
- Specialized pre-sentence investigations
- Supervision condition setting
- Development of the case management/supervision plan
- Ongoing supervision
- Family reunification
- Responding to violations of supervision
- Registration and community notification

Practicing Victim-Centeredness at Key Decision Points

An online version of a tool developed by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM),
“Opportunities
to Promote Victim-Centered Sex Offender Supervision”
can be accessed at

<http://csom.org/Opportunities-to-Promote-Victim-Centered-Sex-Offender-Supervision/>

Opportunities to Promote Victim-Centered Sex Offender Supervision



Practicing Victim-Centeredness at Key Decision Points

- It is important to note that the decision points described on the last slide are not mutually exclusive or necessarily linear; in fact, in some instances, they intersect and overlap.
- For the purpose of illustrating the different possibilities for victim-centered action, each phase or opportunity is presented separately in the slides that follow.

Specialized Pre-Sentence Investigations

The first opportunity probation or court officers have to employ a victim-centered approach is through the specialized pre-sentence investigation (PSI) process.

- In addition to information related to the defendant and the offense, the PSI includes recommendations for probation conditions — should the person be placed on probation — as well as the victim impact statement (VIS).
- Although not required in all jurisdictions, specialized PSIs for sex offense cases are considered a best practice to inform sentencing and post-sentencing decisions because they address the unique and complex dynamics of sexual assault and allow victims to tell the courts about this very personal trauma and its impact on them (Cumming & McGrath, 2005).

Specialized Pre-Sentence Investigations (continued)

Officers can demonstrate victim-centeredness during this phase in the following ways:

- **Document the sexually abusive dynamics thoroughly in the PSI report, as the conviction of record may not tell the full story.** Many sex offense cases are resolved through plea agreements that reduce the original charges from sex offenses to non-sex offenses or from felonies to misdemeanors, or they may include fewer counts. This can send unintentional messages to survivors and others that the crimes were less serious, or harmful. Keeping sexually abusive dynamics visible in the report (as long as statutes or policies permit this) can help prevent system-induced harm to survivors and promote offender accountability.

Specialized Pre-Sentence Investigations (continued)

- **Elevate the sexual assault survivor's voice through the victim impact statement.** The dynamics of sexual abuse often have a silencing effect on victims. They can later feel unheard or invisible throughout the criminal justice system, despite being the persons most impacted by the sexual assault. Further, in the absence of critical perspectives and information that survivors provide, the sentencing decision, supervision conditions, and supervision and treatment approaches for perpetrators may not be as effective. Ultimately, this compromises victim and community safety.

Victim-Impact Statements

- The VIS is the mechanism through which officers and court officials uphold victims' rights to be heard. Survivors can convey to the court the trauma they experienced, how it has affected them, safety concerns, and any other information the sentencing judge should consider.
- Supervision agencies should ensure that their officers have up-to-date guidelines and instructions for obtaining a victim impact statement and including it in the PSI.
- In situations where the victim has not been afforded the opportunity to provide a VIS, it may be necessary for the officer to submit a request to reset the sentencing hearing.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

What should be included in the victim-impact statement?

- Emotional, psychological, physical, and other damage caused
- Impact on victim's intimate, and/or family relationships
- Medical care, mental health services, or other interventions needed as a result of the victimization
- Financial losses and impact (e.g., work leave, medical expenses, lost contributions to household income or benefits, lost child support, counseling)
- Restitution needs
- Potential collateral impact (e.g., social/community stigma or isolation, residential instability)
- Additional concerns or interests

For more information about victim impact statements, see <https://victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/victim-impact-statements> and https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/reports/impact/impact.htm.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- When initiating the process of obtaining the VIS for the PSI report, the investigating officer or other court official should:
 - **notify** the victim of their right to provide a VIS and explain how it is used;
 - **explain** options for providing the VIS (e.g., in writing, verbally, videotaped, other allowable methods) and who will have access to it;
 - **encourage** victims to share any questions or concerns;
 - **invite** them to complete a VIS;

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- When initiating the process of obtaining the VIS for the PSI report, the investigating officer or other court official should:
 - **offer** guidelines, resources, or other assistance that may be needed to complete the VIS (e.g., support from a victim advocate, language interpretation services, typing, transportation);
 - **allow** sufficient time for the victim to complete the VIS; and
 - **respect** their choice. Not all survivors will want to provide a VIS.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- **Provide recommendations in the PSI report that are specific to the victim's safety and other needs.** This is the point of adopting a victim-centered approach and seeking survivors' input: to demonstrate that the criminal justice system values them as a key stakeholder, that their voices have been heard, and that their interests are being considered.

If PSI recommendations are solely perpetrator-focused, survivors and others may be left asking,

“What's the point?”

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- **Engage victim advocates.** Completing a VIS can be cathartic and empowering, and it can contribute to a sense of personal agency for some sexual assault survivors. It can also be quite difficult for survivors who may be struggling with the effects of the abuse. Victim advocates are a valuable resource during the PSI and VIS processes.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- A victim advocate can:
 - assist probation staff with the initial outreach to survivors (including locating them) and notifying them about their right to provide a VIS;
 - serve as a liaison between the survivor and the officer, as some survivors may be more comfortable expressing themselves to a victim advocate or other professional;
 - provide support to the survivor should they choose to complete a VIS;
 - offer to be present with the survivor at the sentencing hearing for support; and
 - link them to community resources for survivors.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- At the system level, victim advocates can support the PSI process in sexual assault cases by:
 - providing training to officers about the VIS, what should be included, and ways to engage survivors effectively when seeking a VIS;
 - raising officers' awareness about the wide range of factors that can influence survivors' decisions to complete a VIS, the nature of information they choose to share, and the methods they prefer to use;
 - helping develop or adapt VIS templates, guides, informational materials/brochures, and processes that are culturally, developmentally, and otherwise relevant for diverse groups of survivors; and
 - identifying strengths and gaps in current policies and practices related to the PSI and VIS.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

- By ensuring survivors have the opportunity for their voices to be heard, officers can:
 - establish a tone of accountability and trust that can foster survivors' confidence and participation in the criminal justice system process,
 - validate victims' experiences and feelings, and support empowerment and healing, and
 - provide valuable information to encourage victim-centered decision-making at sentencing and post-sentencing, and throughout the supervision process.

Victim-Impact Statements (continued)

“When I read my victim impact statement in court, it was the first time I felt like anyone actually listened to me and was truly interested. I can’t speak for other victims, but that was a turning point for me.” – Anonymous Survivor

Supervision Condition Setting

- Specialized conditions for sex offenders are important. They can be mechanisms to enhance perpetrator accountability; provide safeguards for identified victims who may remain vulnerable or fearful and the public overall; and leverage perpetrators' participation in risk-reducing treatment.
- Conditions may be determined by the judge at sentencing, a paroling authority, or the supervision agency once the case has been assigned, depending on the jurisdiction. When judges set supervision conditions, it is often based on the recommendations from the probation officer or other person who conducts the PSI.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

There are several ways officers can approach condition setting to support evidence-based, trauma-informed, and victim-centered practices:

- **Invite survivors' perspectives about the types of conditions that will help make them feel safe, that they perceive to be just, and that they believe are important, given their knowledge about the perpetrator.** Some survivors desire strict controls and restrictions; others may have more punitive interests; and still others may want the perpetrator to be required to receive treatment to prevent them from reoffending. In some circumstances, such as when the person is a family member or intimate partner, survivors may have concerns about, or be opposed to, certain conditions being imposed because of the potential negative impact on themselves, children and other family members, or even the perpetrator.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

Note: Survivors' requests about specific conditions cannot always be accommodated for a number of reasons; however, in a victim-centered approach, all concerns, requests, and questions must be respected and responded to promptly.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

- **Recommend or impose victim-responsive, individualized conditions based on factors that are relevant to a given case.** The victim impact statement, other information from or about the victim, the police report, the psychosexual evaluation, risk assessments, and other data from the specialized PSI can help guide the supervision officer and/or the court in considering the most appropriate conditions to address victim safety, feelings of vulnerability, and other interests that survivors may have.
 - Conditions should be based on a given perpetrator's risk, intervention needs, and circumstances (which can change over time) and the safety needs, interests, and life circumstances of the victim (which can also change over time).

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

- **Be strategic and selective when recommending or imposing specialized conditions.** Some argue that a blanket set of conditions for all sex offenders yields better outcomes for victims and communities. However, the “more must be better” and “better safe than sorry” approaches run counter to victim-centeredness; they fail to take into account the individual circumstances of a given case, including the needs and interests of victims and their families.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

Example: An individual who has been convicted of the rape of an adult may or may not present a risk to their own children. Similarly, some individuals who have sexually abused a child outside of the family pose a risk to children in their own home, whereas others may not. Imposing a blanket condition that prohibits contact with all children for all persons convicted of any sex offense is not always prudent. Some victims and families may desire ongoing involvement and contact, and may be able to establish a safe environment; others may not. Imposing a condition such as this should be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

- **Make restitution a priority for those survivors who report financial and other losses as a result of the sexual abuse.** This conveys to all parties that there is some type of accountability to the victim for the losses they experienced. For victims who are struggling to make ends meet, restitution can help prevent, or help them recover from, a financial crisis. Even when that is not a primary concern, restitution can contribute to a sense of justice and accountability.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

- **Provide survivors with information about conditions to uphold their right to notification and information, when they request to be notified.**
 - Officers should include as much detail as possible about the purposes of the conditions and about other safeguards that have been put in place to reassure survivors that their well-being is a priority.
 - In addition, officers should explain the rationale for imposing (or not imposing) specific conditions.
 - Survivors should know whom to contact if they have any concerns or are aware of potential violations of conditions.

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

As highlighted in previous slides, specialized conditions that can support a victim-centered approach to supervising sex offenders might include some of the following, depending on the individual case:

- no contact with the victim(s);
- prohibited, restricted, or supervised contact with minors;
- required approval for home plans (e.g., location, occupants);
- required approval for employment circumstances (e.g., type, location, coworkers);
- restricted travel or leisure activities;

Supervision Condition Setting (continued)

- GPS monitoring, and/or travel restrictions;
- prohibited, restricted, or closely monitored access to computers, phones, or other devices (e.g., for persons whose offense dynamics, victim access, and other risk factors are linked to such use, such as internet-facilitated offenses, cases involving internet stalking or harassment);
- sex offense-specific treatment and other relevant interventions (e.g., to address interpersonal violence, anger management, substance abuse); and
- restitution to victims for costs incurred as a result of the sexual abuse.

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan

The supervision or case management plan is the individualized “roadmap” that outlines the goals, terms and conditions, expectations, and strategies for the person convicted of the sex offense(s). In a victim-centered approach, developing the supervision plan is explicitly viewed as an opportunity to ensure that the victim’s safety and interests are being considered.

- Specialized risk assessments and psychosexual evaluations of the perpetrator are generally used to determine supervision levels, contact requirements, expectations and goals, and strategies to attain those goals.

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

Examples of ways in which officers can implement victim-centered practices when developing the supervision or case management plan include the following:

- **Seek survivors' input, recognizing that they may have unique insights and knowledge that can inform the supervision plan.** Depending on the nature of the relationship or their level of familiarity with the person who sexually assaulted them, survivors and their loved ones may be able to shed light on the perpetrator's behavior patterns, grooming techniques, and risk factors — as well as strengths and protective factors — that may not be readily apparent to the officers.

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

- **Assess suitability of housing and employment plans through the lens of victim safety.** These suitability assessments should take into account not only identified victims but also individuals who are potentially vulnerable, given the perpetrator's offense patterns, risk, and modus operandi.

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

Depending on the circumstances of the case, officers can develop strategies to mitigate this risk through supervision that addresses:

- proximity of the perpetrator's home to the victim's home or other at-risk groups;
- safety planning for victims and perpetrators; and
- recommendations for structural changes (e.g., door alarms) or "house policies" that address boundaries, operating norms, privacy, "eyes on" supervision, and bystander interventions.

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

- Include victim advocates on multidisciplinary case management/supervision teams. This helps to ensure that survivors' interests and perspectives are represented and to determine whether the strategies in the supervision plan realistically address victims' safety concerns or may have the potential for unintended collateral consequences.
 - Beyond the individual case at hand, having victim advocates on multidisciplinary teams can help team members think about supervision strategies and safety plans through a victim-centered and trauma-informed lens.

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

- **Recognize that alternative models of accountability may be appropriate, given the victim's relationship with the perpetrator.** In some situations, and with the victim's permission, it may be desirable to explore alternative models of accountability. Often, these alternative models are most appropriate when the victim and perpetrator know one another, or when they are from the same community (such as a college, neighborhood, or faith group).

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

- One alternative model is restorative justice conferencing programs. Restorative justice approaches can contribute to a victim-centered approach by acknowledging harm not only to the victim but also to the victim's loved ones and to the community.
- Another alternative model is Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA). COSA is a promising evidence-informed supervision strategy that utilizes well-trained community volunteers to support community reintegration and stability for high-risk sex offenders, particularly those who lack community supports (see, e.g., Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Prinzo, & Cortoni, 2007).

Development of the Case Management/Supervision Plan (continued)

- These models of accountability communicate that long-term, meaningful behavior change, reparation, and restoration — not punishment or banishment — can be important end goals for some.
- If ultimately determined to be an appropriate goal for supervision and treatment, such approaches must be very carefully planned and closely monitored to ensure that the goals are being met and that survivors are not further harmed by the process. This requires collaboration with victim advocates, treatment professionals, and others.

Questions to Ask When Setting Conditions and Developing Supervision Plans

Taking the time to establish conditions and develop supervision plans in the context of the questions posed on the following slides can help increase the likelihood of successful outcomes and promote a victim-centered approach.

- What safety concerns has the survivor or survivor's family expressed?
- What is the nature of the relationship between the survivor and the person who offended sexually? Does the survivor have — or wish to have — an ongoing relationship with the person who committed the offense?
- Does the survivor express a desire for alternative resolution/restoration strategies?

Questions to Ask When Setting Conditions and Developing Supervision Plans (continued)

- What information might the survivor have about the person's offense patterns and risk factors that could inform conditions or the supervision plan?
- Is this supervision plan likely to provide realistic assurances and adequate safeguards for the survivor?
- Are these strategies likely to help the offender lead a more prosocial life and regulate harmful behaviors?
- What are the victim's needs with respect to restitution?

Questions to Ask When Setting Conditions and Developing Supervision Plans (continued)

- What do the risk level, risk factors, motivations, history, and patterns of the perpetrator indicate about individuals who may be particularly vulnerable or at risk?
- What environmental factors need to be addressed in this case to decrease perpetration opportunities?
- What conditions or strategies can help address these issues?
- What safeguards are already in place?

Questions to Ask When Setting Conditions and Developing Supervision Plans (continued)

- Will any conditions place a hardship on the survivor or family members, or create other collateral consequences that must be weighed?
- What are the potential benefits and risks to survivors and others from imposing — or not imposing — certain supervision conditions?
- Are the conditions relevant, realistic, and enforceable?

Ongoing Supervision

Over the course of the perpetrator's term of supervision, when officers are responsible for the routine and ongoing implementation and monitoring of the supervision plan, there are many opportunities to implement victim-centered practices.

- Honor survivors' rights to information and notification. Many survivors have a variety of questions, concerns, and information needs that arise while the perpetrator is under supervision.
 - Common questions pertain to the perpetrator's current status in the system, the goals and strategies used for supervision, any changes in the person's conditions of supervision, and their compliance with requirements and expectations.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- For some survivors, having this information can offer a level of control or predictability, help them feel empowered, and provide reassurances. It can increase their confidence that the system views them as stakeholders whose voices are heard and respected.
- Depending on information and the way it is presented, it can sometimes trigger traumatic memories or even raise safety concerns; therefore, some survivors may choose not to receive any further information about the person who sexually abused them once the sentence has been ordered.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- To ensure that they uphold victims' right to information and notification throughout supervision, officers should take the following steps:
 - **Provide the initial notification** about the sentencing decision and respond to any questions, concerns, or needs victims may have, such as safety planning, and provide information about local resources, services, and supports for victims, as well as contact information should they have further questions or concerns.
 - **Ask survivors if they would like to receive ongoing notifications.** If they would, ask them about the best ways to be in touch.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- **Frame field contacts as an opportunity to assess in “real time” any potential risk factors that may compromise the safety of victims or other vulnerable individuals.** Field contacts, particularly home visits, are essential to observe or collect information that otherwise may not be readily accessible. Supervision officers can demonstrate to survivors and perpetrators that they are committed to protecting victims, holding offenders accountable, and promoting change.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- **Assess the safety of the victim and others** who may be vulnerable or at risk in the context of the perpetrator's offense history, modus operandi, and risk factors.
- **Observe the interpersonal dynamics between individuals in the household** in cases where the perpetrator returns to live at home and has a history of abusing intimate partners or children in the home. Identify ways to engage survivors and others in the household privately to explore how things are going.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- **Build and maintain relationships with community supports and volunteers.** This network of collateral contacts can provide officers with additional “eyes and ears” in the field.
- **Review and support behavior management and safety plans with the offender.** Inquire about any challenges, support problem-solving to reinforce relapse prevention plans, engage community supports, and promote behavior change. Help offenders practice coping skills; model healthy boundaries; and reinforce those who are challenging victim-blaming or offense-supportive attitudes.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- **Honor privacy and maintain the confidentiality of victim information, including where the information is kept and who has access to it.** Victim information should be limited to those with a “need to know.” Where automated systems are in place, ensure that victim information is kept separate from offender file information (see, e.g., APPA, n.d.).
- **Support restitution fulfillment.** Supervision officers can help perpetrators understand the value of fulfilling restitution obligations. Doing so is a way for perpetrators to repair some of the damage that they have done, and to demonstrate commitment to a prosocial lifestyle. Officers can work with the offender to identify ways that they can fulfill restitution obligations.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- **Respond effectively to disclosures about additional victims over the course of supervision.** As perpetrators engage more fully in the change process over the course of supervision and treatment, they may become more insightful about their patterns of behaviors, recognize the impact of those behaviors, disclose additional victims, and become more motivated to ensure that these victims are able to receive any assistance they need.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

Note: Disclosure is a complex situation that requires careful consideration as survivors have their own reasons for coming forward or not, may not realize that what happened was abuse, may not be able to communicate that what they experienced was abuse, may be in an environment that is safe and supportive and not want to revisit the abuse, or may not want others to know.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

Policies must be in place so that officers know what to do when perpetrators disclose additional victims. These policies should include information such as the following:

- Supervision officers are among those professionals required to report sexual abuse and assault.
- Engage victim advocates and service providers to find out what victims might want/need.
- Consider carefully the dangers of cold calling a newly disclosed victim. Remember that victims didn't disclose for a reason; this should be approached very carefully.

Ongoing Supervision (continued)

- **Partner with victim advocates during the supervision phase.** Advocates can help supervision officers understand behaviors and dynamics that frequently occur with victimization; shed light on the needs of victims and on specific goals (such as whether they desire an ongoing relationship with the perpetrator and, if so, under what circumstances) that will contribute to healing, safety planning, and supervision strategies, recognizing that victims' needs may change over time; and provide insights that may help the supervision officer better manage other similar cases.

Family Reunification

When sexual abuse is perpetrated within a family unit or household, the dynamics can be particularly complex and challenging for all parties to navigate.

- The extreme violation and betrayal of trust can cause irreparable damage to relationships, leading some victims and other family members to sever ties completely with the perpetrator.
- Others may be less certain and need a temporary break to feel safe, begin to cope with the effects, and consider next steps.
- Many want to maintain some level of relationship with the person who committed the abuse, but they want the abuse to stop, want the abuser to receive treatment, and need help restoring relationships and creating a safe and healthy environment.

(Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016)

Family Reunification (continued)

- Some perpetrators pose a low risk, families may have many protective factors, victims are ready to reunify, and safety plans are already in place. In order for family reunification to occur, decisions and practices must be grounded in a trauma-informed and victim-centered approach.
- The process of reunification must be deliberate, and incremental; it should be flexible and responsive to changes in the perpetrator's risk, protective factors, progress in treatment, and compliance with supervision, as well as to changes in survivors' and family members' lives and healing process or stage of their reactions to the abuse; and it should address victims' comfort, needs, and safety.

(see Gilligan & Bumby, 2005; Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016)

Family Reunification (continued)

Family reunification requires collaboration among advocates, treatment providers, victim therapists, and supervision agencies. It should only be considered if all the professionals involved agree that the parties are ready to embark on the process, that safety can be maintained for everyone in the family, and that reunification is a positive decision for everyone involved.

(see Gilligan & Bumby, 2005; Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016)

Family Reunification (continued)

In the context of family reunification, supervision officers can support victim-centeredness in multiple ways:

- **Acknowledge the harm** caused to all parties by the perpetrator's behavior (Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016).
- **Understand the circumstances surrounding the abuse.** This may include the nature of the relationship, how long the abuse was perpetrated, and the extent to which the perpetrator takes responsibility and commits to change (Cumming & McGrath, 2005).
- **Seek to understand, acknowledge, and respect survivors' beliefs and values regarding reconnection or reunification.** Survivors may have conflicting loyalties. There are many factors that may affect their desire to reunify, including cultural or religious influences, emotional attachments, and reliance on the perpetrator for social, family, emotional, or financial support (Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016).

Family Reunification (continued)

- **Appreciate the potential benefits and healing value of reconnection and reunification.** Reconnection and reunification can benefit some survivors' and families' healing process. It can strengthen skills and protective factors, enhance family stability and functioning, build self-efficacy and empowerment for those who were harmed, and leverage accountability and meaningful change for the person who committed the abuse (Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, 2014; Gilligan & Bumby, 2005; Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016).
- **Establish a relationship with the survivor and other affected family members.** It is important that the relationship be built on trust so that survivors and other affected individuals are able to express safety and other concerns.

Family Reunification (continued)

- **Employ a trauma-informed, gradual, incremental, collaborative, deliberate approach.** As “convener,” or team leader, the supervision officer should ensure that all stakeholders (e.g., treatment provider(s) for the offender, victim services provider, victim advocate, caregiver) are at the table and deciding collectively if reconnection or reunification is advisable. Reconnection or reunification cannot occur when victims are opposed to it or when any of the professionals involved believe that it is contraindicated or not in the best interests of the survivor. If the decision is made to proceed toward reunification, it must be done in a collaborative, gradual manner.

Family Reunification (continued)

- **Support the team in establishing and implementing comprehensive safety plans for all persons involved.** These plans should recognize risk factors, warning signs or red flags, patterns, and protective factors and strengths. Officers should make sure the offender, victim, and nonoffending partner understand expectations, the importance of boundaries, and what to do if they need help.

Family Reunification (continued)

- **Continually monitor and reevaluate the safety and well-being of all family members after reconnection or reunification.** Acknowledge the potential risk, keeping victim safety and the best interests of victims and other vulnerable individuals paramount. Supervision officers should conduct home visits to assess in real time the adherence to safety plans and other expectations of the reunification plan; assess communication patterns and observe the dynamics in the home between the perpetrator, survivor, nonoffending partner, or other family members; and gather information from collateral contacts who are serving as additional eyes and ears in the field.

Family Reunification (continued)

It is not always possible for everyone to live together in one household again, but some healing, learning, boundary-setting, and accountability may occur that allows for some ongoing contact and relationships, if the survivor desires. In situations when family reunification is agreed upon but has to be halted or cannot continue, it is important that survivors be supported in dealing with the additional feelings of loss or trauma that they may experience (Tabachnick & Pollard, 2016).

Responding to Violations of Supervision

- Supervision officers have a duty to hold offenders accountable and to ensure that they follow the conditions and expectations that are designed to reduce and manage the risk to victim and public safety.
- When the perpetrator fails to comply with the conditions of supervision, the survivor and others in their life may feel threatened.
- By addressing noncompliance quickly and with certainty, officers can demonstrate to the victim, their loved ones, the public, and the offender that they are invested in accountability, preventing reoffending, and protecting victims and communities.

Responding to Violations of Supervision (continued)

Here are some specific things that supervision officers can do to promote victim-centeredness when it comes to violations of supervision:

- **Educate victims about the risk factors that may signal noncompliant or violation behavior** and invite them to share any risk factors of which they may be aware. As was mentioned previously, depending on the nature of the relationship, survivors may know the offenders' behaviors and modus operandi better than anyone and be well-positioned to identify "red flags" for noncompliance or violations.
- **Keep open the lines of communication with victims and collateral contacts.** Officers should assure survivors and their loved ones at the outset of supervision that they are committed to their safety and to accountability, and that they can be contacted at any time if there are concerns about suspicious behavior or if conditions have been violated.

Responding to Violations of Supervision (continued)

- **Follow up on victims' concerns in a timely manner.**
Responding to survivors in a timely and sensitive manner, assuring them that their confidentiality will be maintained if possible, is critical. Officers should maintain close contact with the victim after they've expressed concerns to ensure that they are not being further threatened by the perpetrator, and they should take steps to provide additional safeguards to the survivor or other vulnerable individuals, if warranted.

Responding to Violations of Supervision (continued)

- **Make sure that victims are aware of their rights with respect to violations and noncompliance**, including the right to be present at any violation/revocation hearing processes and, in some circumstances, to offer input into responses to the violations or noncompliance.
- **Be candid and realistic.** Survivors should know that all instances of noncompliance will result in a response; however, they must understand that responses may look different depending on the circumstance. A violation may not result in a formal violation hearing, sanction, and/or revocation of probation, with the perpetrator being remanded back to custody (e.g., a violation may result in additional office visits, increased home visits, GPS monitoring, additional conditions, or treatment interventions).

Responding to Violations of Supervision (continued)

- **Communicate to the victim the response to the noncompliance or violation.** Without knowing the response and being provided with a rationale for how the behavior was handled, the victim may believe that the behavior wasn't addressed at all or that the response was inadequate or inappropriate and that their concerns weren't heard.

Responding to Violations of Supervision (continued)

Engaging or collaborating with victim advocates can be beneficial to officers and survivors with respect to issues of noncompliance or violations. For example, victim advocates can:

- be a “sounding board” for survivors, who may be more comfortable sharing their concerns with victim advocates rather than with supervision officers;
- communicate with officers about victim safety concerns, report suspicious behaviors that potentially violate conditions, and report unwanted communication from an offender or an actual reoffense;
- participate in or conduct notifications to survivors about violation behaviors, for those who wish to receive such information;
- explain to victims any violation/revocation hearing processes and their rights to participate or be heard, help them prepare should they choose to participate, and support them through the process; and
- help survivors with safety planning, as needed.

Responding to Violations of Supervision (continued)

- A multidisciplinary team — including a victim advocate — can be particularly helpful at this time to assist with information gathering, strategizing about ways to address the violation, reviewing goals and plans, and supporting supervision officers in carrying out their responsibilities.
- Depending on the nature of the violation, this may be a time to consider or update protection orders, safety plans, and other safeguards and precautions in order to ensure victim and community safety, as well as to revise the case management/supervision plan to address skill deficits that may have contributed to the violation or noncompliance.

Registration and Community Notification

- Registration and community notification laws are mechanisms to track sex offenders and increase public awareness about registered sex offenders who may be residing in a given community, such that victims and other citizens can take protective measures when warranted.
- Registration and notification can be one means of addressing victims' rights, needs, and interests — specifically the right to be informed; the right to be treated with dignity, respect, and sensitivity; and the right to protection.

Registration and Community Notification

- At the same time, there is a heightened potential for registration and notification to run counter to victim safety, needs, and interests.
 - For example, even though sex offender registration laws prohibit victims' identities from being included in the publicly accessible information in the registries, members of the community may try to guess the identity of the victim, who is often a member of the perpetrator's family or household. The victim's identity may be inadvertently revealed, or someone may be incorrectly identified as a victim.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

Victims and family members, family members of the perpetrator, and the public may have questions about registration and notification, such as:

- What is the purpose of registration and notification?
- What do I do if I learn that a registered sex offender lives near me?
- What are steps that I can take to protect myself and my family?
- Why do some registration requirements vary from person to person?
- How will this affect me, my children, and/or other family members?

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- How might registration and notification affect me or my loved ones if the perpetrator is in the family?
- Do registration and notification make me safer?
- What if I have information about someone who is on the registry?
- Who is responsible for making sure that registration is enforced?
- How is registration different from supervision overall?
- Can a person be removed from the registry? If so, how?

Supervision officers, victim advocates, and law enforcement officials can partner to help answer these and other questions.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

The opportunity for supervision officers to contribute to a victim-centered approach through duties related to registration and notification include the following:

- **Ensure that individuals on their caseloads are compliant with registration requirements.** Holding offenders accountable and ensuring compliance is central to a victim-centered supervision approach and demonstrates a commitment to offender accountability.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- **Verify/support the accuracy of sex offender registries.** Officers can ensure that sex offender registry information is accurate for those under their supervision. This accuracy is necessary in order for survivors, the general public, law enforcement, and others to be able to effectively use the information as intended (e.g., safety measures, prevention).
- **Collaborate with law enforcement.** Officers can help educate law enforcement about sex offenders' risk factors of which they should be aware.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- **Use address and employment verification contacts to help identify indicators** that may signal victim safety concerns or vulnerabilities and, equally important, to educate employers and housing officials about the negative impacts of registration/notification on victims, families, and the public.
- **Participate in collaborative approaches to community notification.** In some jurisdictions, community notification meetings are convened by multi-disciplinary teams that include advocates. This demonstrates that different entities with different points of view (supervision officers, victim advocates, community members, law enforcement, and other stakeholders) are working together toward the shared goal of community safety.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- **Remain attuned to the potential adverse impact of registration and notification on survivors, secondary victims, and families.** Children, intimate partners, and other family members of registered sex offenders can be impacted adversely by registration and notification.

(Frenzel, Bowen, Spraitz, Bowers, & Phaneuf, 2014; Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009)

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- **Some of those negative impacts may include:**
 - Financial hardships can result from the offender's loss of employment or difficulty finding employment because they are on the sex offender registry.
 - Survivors, secondary victims, and families may be stigmatized, subjected to negative public sentiment, threatened or harassed by neighbors and others in the community, or socially isolated, shamed, and ostracized from social networks because a person in their circle of trust is on the registry.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- Children may be stigmatized, bullied, shunned, and treated differently by teachers and peers.
- Survivors, secondary victims, and families may have their lives disrupted. For example, they may be forced to move or their homes may be vandalized.
- Community notification can resurface emotions and memories associated with the abuse or raise safety concerns for survivors (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011). Officers should partner with victim advocates to offset the potential for negative impacts.

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- Utilize community meetings as opportunities to educate the public about the goals of supervision, sex offenders in general, and community notification practices. Supervision officers can:
 - reinforce the goal of community safety;
 - provide general information about the supervision process and systems of accountability;

Registration and Community Notification (continued)

- share factual information about individuals who commit sex offenses and about common dynamics and relationships;
- help the community understand the kinds of information contained in the sex offender registry and how they can use the registry in ways that can support victim safety and prevent future victimization; and
- discuss other prevention-related initiatives that can strengthen the community and decrease the incidence of sexual assaults and other crimes.



CONCLUSION

Conclusion

As outlined in the previous sections, supervision agencies have an inordinate amount to gain by including victim advocates in their work and in considering the perspective of victims in their policies, procedures, and everyday practice. While historically this idea may have seemed somewhat radical, collaboration between justice agencies and victim advocacy organizations are becoming much more common.

“Victims are no longer on the sidelines in the sex offender management process. They now have a key place at the table.”

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, 2008

Conclusion

To access the complete version of the toolkit from which this training curriculum was adapted, visit:

[http://csom.org/pubs/Probation toolkit web.pdf](http://csom.org/pubs/Probation_toolkit_web.pdf)

For questions about the content of these materials, or how to use them, contact Leilah Gilligan, CSOM Project Manager:

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Links

- This curriculum can be used as a standalone resource and/or as a companion resource to augment two additional resources developed through this initiative: a [toolkit](#) about victim-centered supervision for sex offenders and an [online tool](#) that highlights key decision points and activities throughout the course of supervision that have implications for victim-centered practices.

Additional Resources

There are multiple resources available in the Appendix of the toolkit, available at: <http://csom.org/Opportunities-to-Promote-Victim-Centered-Sex-Offender-Supervision/>

- Exploring Current Practices, Part 1: Evidence-Based and Specialized Approach to Supervising Sex Offenders
- Exploring Current Practices, Part 2: Victim-Centered Approach to Supervising Sex Offenders
- Quick Reference: 10 Considerations for Specialized Pre-Sentence Investigations for Sex Offense Cases
- Sample Outline: Specialized Pre-sentence Investigation Report for Sex Offenders

Additional Resources (continued)

There are multiple resources available in the Appendix of the toolkit, available at: <http://csom.org/Opportunities-to-Promote-Victim-Centered-Sex-Offender-Supervision/>

- Sample Resources for Victim Impact Statements
- Victim-Responsive Communication Approaches: Do's and Don'ts for Supervision
- Innovations In Victim-Centered Approaches to Sex Offender Supervision
- Supplemental Resources

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