PSYCHOSEXUAL ASSESSMENTS
for Children and Adolescents with Problematic Sexual Behavior

When a child or adolescent is suspected or observed to have engaged in what may be sexually inappropriate or sexually aggressive behavior, the child/adolescent may benefit from a sexualized behavior risk assessment including recommendations to address the behavior.

Such an assessment, called a psychosexual evaluation or assessment usually includes a description of the scope of the difficulty, by defining the nature, history, and structure of the sexual problem. This specialized assessment often includes interviews; review of records, and in some cases psychological testing. The goals of such an assessment is to identify and describe behavior and patterns of sexualized actions that are problematic, to help differentiate between problematic and expected sexual development, to establish the level of risk that the child/adolescent presents to other children/adolescents and the community, and to speak to the type of intervention most appropriate for the child/adolescent.

What is a psychosexual evaluation?

- It is an evaluation conducted by a mental health professional that focuses on the client's psychological and sexual functioning. This evaluation also examines the client's sexual interests, attitudes and behaviors to see if the client has a sexual deviancy problem. These evaluations also assess the client's risk for re-offending or acting out sexually in the future. This part of the evaluation is called a risk assessment.

Who is qualified to conduct a psychosexual evaluation?

- A mental health professional, usually licensed with a master's or doctoral degree in counseling, social work, psychology or some other mental health discipline is qualified to conduct an evaluation. The professional should have received specialized training in how to assess and treat sexual deviancy. This is a specialty area in which most mental health professionals have not received training.

- The mental health professional should have training and/or experience in evaluating individuals in the specified age range. For example, if the evaluator is conducting a psychosexual evaluation of an adult, then he or she should have training in evaluating sexual deviancy in adults. Or, if the client is a sexually aggressive child, then the evaluator should be trained in assessing sexual issues in children.
• The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) is an organization of professionals who are trained to evaluate and treat sexual abusers. According to ATSA’s "Principles for the Management of Sexual Abusers," a mental health professional who works with sex offenders should have "demonstrated competence in providing a minimum of 2000 hours of face-to-face contact with clients who have perpetrated sexual abuse."

**What does a psychosexual evaluation involve?**

• A psychosexual evaluation can include general psychological testing, IQ testing and questionnaires that assess one's sexual interests, attitudes and behaviors. For adolescents, this evaluation might also include completing a polygraph assessment or a test that measures one's sexual interest in different types of sexual stimuli. This test is called an Abel Assessment.

• The types of testing and procedures used in psychosexual evaluations vary with the age of the client being evaluated. Thus, the testing for children is different from the testing administered to adolescents and adults.

**When is a psychosexual evaluation needed?**

• It is needed when someone is known to have committed a sex offense. A psychosexual evaluation can assess the individual's treatment needs and risk for re-offending. This is described on ATSA's web site (http://www.atsa.com/pprsattiwa.html).

*Treatment is not intended to replace other possible responses through the criminal justice system, but is intended for use in conjunction with other options for the reduction of overall rates of sexual offending in a community.*

• For sexually aggressive children and adolescents, this evaluation can also be helpful in assessing the child's placement needs. For example, a psychosexual evaluation can help determine if the child needs residential treatment to treat his sexually aggressive behaviors.

• When someone has been suspected of having committed a sex offense or acted in an inappropriate sexual manner. A psychosexual evaluation cannot assess guilt or innocence regarding a specific sex offense. However, this type of evaluation can be helpful in assessing if a client has a sexual deviancy problem that requires specialized treatment.
Psychosexual evaluations can be for:

- Children
- Adolescents
- Adults

**Psychosexual Evaluations for Children**

**When does a child need a psychosexual evaluation?**

- When a child is showing inappropriate sexual behavior such as:
  - Excessive masturbation
  - Making inappropriate sexual comments and gestures
  - Exposing one's genitals to others
  - Sexually touching other children who are 3 or more years younger
  - Sexually touching others against their will
  - Sexually touching animals
- When a child continues to act out sexually despite having been told to stop.

**What does a psychosexual evaluation of a child involve?**

- This evaluation usually involves:
  - An interview with the child's parent or primary caretaker
  - An interview with the child
  - Questionnaires that are completed by the child's parent or caretaker
    - Questionnaires to assess the child's general emotional and behavioral functioning
    - Questionnaires to assess the child's specific sexual behaviors
  - General psychological testing that is administered to the child
    - To assess emotional functioning, psychopathology and intellectual functioning
  - Specific sexual questionnaires or tests that are administered to the child
    - These tests are carefully worded to use simple, non-threatening terms such as "private parts".
    - The tests vary depending upon the child's age and developmental level.

**What information is obtained from a psychosexual evaluation?**

- An assessment of the extent and severity of a child's sexual problem.
- Recommendations for the type of treatment a child should receive to address his/her sexual problem.
• Recommendations for the type of placement a child needs.
  o For example, a child's sexual problem may be too severe for the child to remain in
    a home with younger children. The child may need to be placed in a home where
    there are no younger children. Or the child may need more intensive treatment
    than is available on an outpatient basis. Thus, a specialized residential treatment
    program for sexually aggressive children may be recommended.
• Recommendations for how a caretaker can implement a safety plan to ensure that a
  sexually aggressive child does not have the opportunity to molest other children.

Who typically requests a psychosexual evaluation of a child?
• Parents or caretakers who are concerned about their child's sexual behavior.
• DC&F caseworkers who are concerned about children who are acting out sexually.
• Other professionals who suspect that a child may have a sexual problem.
• Funding agencies that are trying to assess if a child needs a specialized residential
  treatment program to address the child's sexually aggressive behavior.
• Mental health agencies that need to assess a child's specific treatment needs.

Psychosexual Evaluations for Adolescents

When does an adolescent need a psychosexual evaluation?
• When an adolescent is showing inappropriate sexual behavior such as:
  o Exposing oneself.
  o Peeping into others' windows.
  o Inappropriately touching others against their will.
  o Engaging in sexual activity with children who are 3 or more years younger.
  o Engaging in sexual activity with family members such as siblings.
  o Engaging in sexual activity with a non-consenting partner.
  o Engaging in sexual activity with someone who is significantly weaker in some
    way, such as mentally, physically, emotionally, or socially.
  o Engaging in sexual activity with animals.
  o Engaging in unusual sexual practices such as cross-dressing or stealing women's
    underwear.
• When an adolescent has been found guilty or has pled guilty to a sex offense of any kind.

What does a psychosexual evaluation of an adolescent involve?
• This evaluation usually involves:
  o An interview with the adolescent's parent or primary caretaker.
  o An interview with the adolescent.
What information is obtained from a psychosexual evaluation?

- Recommendations for the type of treatment an adolescent should receive to address his sexual problem.
- Recommendations for the type of placement an adolescent needs.
  - For example, an adolescent's sexual problem may be too severe for the adolescent to remain in a home with younger children. The adolescent may need to be placed in a home where there are no younger children, or he may need more intensive...
Who typically requests the psychosexual evaluation of an adolescent?

- Judges or probation officers from juvenile court who are working with adolescents who have committed a sex offense.
  - Judges often order an adolescent who has been convicted of a sex offense to receive a psychosexual evaluation before the adolescent returns to court for his sentencing or dispositional hearing. The information from the psychosexual evaluation can help guide the judge in his or her sentencing of the adolescent. This can help the adolescent obtain any specialized treatment he may need while minimizing the potential risk to the community.
- DCF caseworkers who are concerned about adolescents who are acting out sexually.
- Other professionals who suspect that an adolescent may have a sexual problem.
- Funding agencies who are trying to assess if an adolescent needs a specialized residential treatment program that addresses sexual issues.
- Mental health agencies that need to assess an adolescent's specific treatment needs.
- A sex offender treatment program often requires that a client receive a psychosexual evaluation before beginning the treatment program.
  - ATSA recommends that a psychosexual evaluation be completed before an offender is accepted into a community-based treatment program.
- Parents or caretakers who are concerned about their adolescent's sexual behavior.
- An adolescent's defense attorney may request a psychosexual evaluation of his client.
  - Usually, the defense attorney is hoping that the evaluator can recommend probation for his client if the client's risk for re-offending is low enough.
  - A defense attorney may also hope to use a psychosexual evaluation to help secure a residential treatment placement for the adolescent rather than incarceration.
  - Sometimes, defense attorneys request a psychosexual evaluation in the hope that the evaluator can state that the adolescent did not commit the sex offense in question. However, evaluators can never assess guilt or innocence regarding a sex offense. There is no psychological test that can prove or disprove that a person committed a sex offense.