



## Sexual offenders difficult to group

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Numerous myths and misconceptions exist regarding the possibility and/or efficacy of treating an individual convicted of a sex crime. Perhaps most worthy of note is that not all sex offenders can be grouped into a single category. Offenses range from instances such as an inappropriate touch to sexual misconduct to repeat offenses with multiple victims.

It is important to note that there is a vast difference between someone convicted of a single incident, a sex offender, and an individual who has had multiple victims, a sexually violent predator.

Research indicates that some prevailing attitudes about sex offenders include a perception that the offender is imagined to be a stranger, an old person, addicted to drugs or alcohol, sexually frustrated or impotent. Realistically, the sex offender may be a close relative, friend or acquaintance rather than a stranger. The offender may in fact be an older person or a child as young as 8.

The individual may be wealthy or poor, able or disabled, religious or nonreligious, a professional, white or blue collar, or unemployed. The offender may have an extensive criminal record or one with no criminal history.

In summary, offenders are not typically strange people; they are people who have one part of their behavior that is very disruptive to them and to others, a behavior they cannot control.

Another important myth to debunk is that all sex offenders or sexually violent predators are men. A view of the sex offender registry for Vanderburgh County ([www.vanderburghsheriff.com/SexOffender](http://www.vanderburghsheriff.com/SexOffender)) can quickly dispel this

notion. Sex offender registries are available for review in each of Indiana's 92 counties. Every state offers similar information, which is considered public knowledge. The information can be accessed with ease using any search engine available via the Internet.

Obviously, treatment prognostication is much greater for the individual convicted of a single occurrence versus a person who has committed multiple crimes. Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. offers a Sex Offender Treatment Program for these individuals with a history of one offense.

More intensive treatment is available in the area for sexually violent predators through a program called Sex Offender Monitoring and Management. Typically, individuals enrolled in either program are also under the supervision of a probation officer, and treatment progress is evaluated by the court system.

Treatment of the sex offender follows a curriculum that includes an analysis of why the individual is in treatment and perceptions about same, what effect the offense has had on the individual and victim's life, understanding how the problem developed, an overview of human development, cognitive restructuring risks and triggers for a repeat offense, developing skills to deal with negative emotions and stress, and forming a relapse prevention plan.

One of the most helpful approaches to treating a sex offender and assisting the offender to remain crime free in society is relapse prevention. The relapse prevention techniques have been implemented for years with sex

offenders and for decades with individuals struggling with alcohol and/or drug addiction. If an individual is taught relapse prevention skills and they are used consistently, they can be effective tools to avoid further sex crimes, and make our communities safer.