

**Nice to be in the Limelight, in a Positive  
Sort of Way!  
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People who have committed and been convicted of a sexual offense are generally not spoken of in complimentary or positive terms by the press. Virtually all of these men and women are assumed to be the worst of the worst, called violent sexual predators, or sexually violent predators, monsters and other highly unpleasant and inappropriate names. The public fails when it comes to recognizing that not all of the people who commit a sexual offense are the same.

I knew that Chris Osher of the Denver Post wanted to write an article on a sexual offending subject, and was searching for the best way to present the story. The opportunity to explore the subject presented itself in the Burns Case, a recent district court decision that said unless there is a compelling reason why a father (or mother) cannot see and/or be with their child or children, they can see and be with them! This case caused the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB) immediate violent hiccups, as their policy has been that a person in sexual offense specific treatment is not allowed to be around children or anyone under the age of 18 and still remain in treatment. Not remaining in treatment poses the very real likelihood of going to the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), as being in treatment is required by the legislatively mandated SOMB Standards and Guidelines.

The SOMB immediately started looking for ways to get around this court ruling, but the Board was eventually told by their legal counsel in the Attorney General's Office that the new ruling had to be honored. Several attempts were made at writing a way to lessen the effects of this ruling into the Standards and Guidelines before the A.G.'s attorney representative met privately with the Board and told them they must follow it.

As with any change suggested to this Board over the years I have been involved (around 16 years) – any change that challenges their long held beliefs – this one has been extremely hard for this body to deal with in a mature, rational sort of way. Whether a person offended against a child or an adult, the Board and its Standards and Guidelines forbid them to be around children. There is a process well into sexual offense specific treatment that allows a person to be around their own child – it is long and fairly complex, requires a supervisor to be present at all times when the child is around, and takes significant time to complete. In reality, these men (and women) are around children everywhere they go – on city busses, in grocery stores, walking down the street etc. Children are a fact of life in our world, and cannot be totally avoided unless a person is incarcerated.

The no known cure/one size fits all/containment/crossover theory world the SOMB lives in has been replaced by a model called Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR). This model has been around for many years, but virtually ignored here in our state in deference to long and tightly held beliefs not based on research or best practice. It says that people are **individuals** and that they have different risk levels, different criminal (criminogenic) needs, and varying abilities to respond to treatment and supervision. One size does not fit all, and the vast majority of persons who have committed a sexual offense do not re-offend!

Children are being offended against – we hear the stories daily about fathers, cops, coaches, teachers, priests, pastors, uncles – people who are known to children and teenagers, and are in a position to gain

control over them on a daily basis. These offenses are ongoing, as youngsters and adolescents are slow to tell on someone they look up to, trust and perhaps even love. Victims' advocates say that up to 80% of people committing these offenses have not be caught or convicted. The SOMB is content to worry only about the 20% that have been caught and convicted, and are under intense supervision and treatment, and are not likely to re-offend! Educational endeavors with all age groups can help to make a positive difference, lowering the number of ongoing offenses that happen via people known to the person who is hurt.

Thanks to Chris Osher and the Denver Post for tackling this difficult subject, and presenting it to the paper's audience in a clear and honest way. Empathic treatment and supervision work –when those who have offended participate fully in this process, their lives change and they do not re-offend!