

# Positive, hopeful prognosis for children with sexual behavior problems

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By Gail Rosenblum...

It's common to feel many emotions when faced with the prospect of children as victims, or perpetrators, of sexual violence: Horror. Grief. Anger. Shame.

One emotion we rarely dare to feel is hope.

But findings from a new, myth-busting study by the [Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#) (MNCASA) give us hope in abundance for these children, their families and society.

The project, funded by Raliance, a nonprofit that distributes funds from the National Football League, examined how Minnesota identifies and treats children with sexual behavior problems, as well as how our state might better train those who work with them.

Among eye-opening findings is a correction to the widely held belief that children who are victims of sexual assault will become adult perpetrators, thus perpetuating an insidious cycle.

In fact, when children receive appropriate and timely treatment for sexual behavior problems (preferably brief and family-focused), they are at no greater risk than the general population of becoming adult sex offenders.

Also, for children exhibiting sexual behavior problems, it is essential that we treat the whole child, and avoid further stigmatizing him or her with terms such as "sex offender."

"I have spoken to many, many parents over the years about the shame they feel when they talk about how their child has sexually harmed another child," said Joan Tabachnick, a national expert on child sex abuse prevention who served as an adviser to the study.

What they want more than anything, she said, "is to know that their child can grow up and live a safe and healthy life."

That sunny, and attainable, outcome is what drove the study, said project lead Yvonne Cournoyer, who recently retired from the coalition.

"Anecdotally, we were hearing stories, particularly of children falling through the cracks after being identified for acting out in concerning ways," she said. "Child-care providers know how to respond to hitting. They don't question themselves."

With sexual behaviors, however, they're not so confident, she said. In fact, two-thirds of professionals who work with children said they were interested in training on how to recognize and respond to these behaviors.

"A lot of providers wondered, 'How do I talk to a parent about

this? If I say I'm seeing this, is that parent going to be upset? Will he or she pull the child from my care because they're afraid of what it means?'

"We really wanted to do the report to make this a more common conversation," Cournoyer said. "There doesn't need to be all this stigma. It gets in the way of us responding."

[Read the full article here.](#)