

Can't We All Just Get Along? Varying Perspectives from Professionals in Juvenile Sexual Abuse Cases

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Having attended an ATSA Conference in the past, there appears to be very little communication (or perhaps miscommunication) between prosecuting attorneys and therapists. The relationship can often be strained due to respective roles and varying perspectives. In my community, I have attempted to bridge this gap by presenting the prosecutor perspective to therapists where we discuss why some decisions are made, where our interests diverge, and how to communicate effectively for the common good. This has been especially beneficial in juvenile sexual abuse cases since the dynamics seem to change frequently.

My presentation consists of a discussion about the role of the prosecuting attorney in juvenile sexual abuse cases, how and why decisions are made and what dynamics we face in our job. Specifically, how we screen cases (what we think about in determining whether to file a case or not), the dynamics of being accountable to victims, and what considerations we must make in order to keep the community safe (i.e.: why we have to be the 'bad guys' sometimes). Case discussions and examples are provided. There is an interactive case discussion where examples are provided and questions posed to the attendees about what they would each do (as the prosecuting attorney) in those cases.

Ideally, attendees will have a better understanding about the role of the prosecuting attorney and, perhaps, feel more open to approaching their local prosecuting attorney with questions, concerns, and comments. This greater understanding will enhance professional development/growth as well as address systemic conflict while working towards better relationships and successful treatment/rehabilitation of juveniles with sexual abuse issues.