



News

**Experts
get tips on spotting sexual abuse
Enforcement,
aides learn
how to further
protect children**

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More than 100 enforcement and aide professionals took part in a seminar aimed at stemming the sexual abuse of children last week at Ivy Tech Community College.

Called "It Takes a Community to Battle Child Sexual Abuse," it was the largest-ever meeting against the sexual abuse of children ever held locally, according to Connie Rose, executive director of Family Service Society.

Those in attendance included CASA volunteers, others from social services agencies, clinicians, probation officers, law enforcement and officials from the Department of Child Services, according to Rose.

"This is a cross-representation of community stakeholders in child safety," she said.

The conference included a candid panel discussion about child sexual abuse featuring many recovering offenders, as well as a victim and parents of other victims.

Robert Jesiolowski, a forensic therapist for Family Service Society, moderated the panel, which fielded questions about topics such as prevention of sexual abuse, communicating with abused children and more.

"The answer is you really can't (prevent it)," he said. "Ninety percent of offenses are committed by someone you already know or trust."

Six counties were represented on the panel, Jesiolowski said.

"They all volunteered their time and opened themselves up to a large group of people to talk about the most difficult moments of their lives and their children's lives," he said.

Other presentations discussed types of intervention, psychosexual evaluations and sexually reactive children, among others.

Jesiolowski gave a discussion about psychosexual evaluations as well as adult child sexual offenders.

Among his discussion points was why treatment for offenders is the key to avoiding recidivism.

"The two things that lower the risk for sexual offenders the most in committing new offenses are stable employment and completing a treatment program," Jesiolowski said.

Another speaker was Deborah Williams, a licensed clinical social worker at Family Service Society, who talked about what children need from their parents once they've been victims of sexual abuse.

"What we try to help parents realize is how to help children understand it's not their fault what happened to them," she said.

Williams said another important steps a parents can take include helping a child understand that it's OK to be confused, not encouraging them to try to "forget" about the incident and not making too many changes in a child's life all at once.

"You shouldn't move the child to a new home or put them into a different school," she said. "They're going through enough already."

The conference was funded by the not-for-profit Children's Bureau of Indianapolis, according to Nikki Furry, that agency's director of community partners.

"We subcontract with agencies such as Family Services to put on these educational seminars," Furry said. "Anything we can do to stop a child from being abused is worth the money."

Among those in attendance was Joseph Combs, a county director for the Indiana Department of Child Services, who said any event that disseminates information to help prevent sexual crimes against children is worth the time.

"We can't prevent these things if we don't know what they are," he said. "It's important to recognize warning signs and key elements."

Ed Pereira, a clinical director for Family Service Society and one of the seminar's speakers, said events such as this conference are key for the professional development of those fighting against child sexual abuse.

"Unfortunately, it's a problem we're not going to eliminate," Pereira said. "But we can make a significant impact, and we can make a difference in abused children's lives."

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