

ASSESSMENT OF FAMILY DYNAMICS

The following characteristics are areas of concern that need to be evaluated during initial and ongoing family assessment:

Over Involvement or Enmeshment:

The physical, emotional, psychological, and/or sexual boundaries in the family may be blurred or non-existent. Generational boundaries (who is the parent or who is the child) and family members' personal space are not respected.

Isolation:

The outside world may be seen as hostile and so the family has closed itself off, which has led to family secrecy, loss of perception or reality checks, and a lack of support systems in the community.

Extreme External and Internal Stress:

The family has a large number of intra- and extra familial problems including debts, illness, legal difficulties, and extended-family conflict. Constant exposure to stress weakens family resources. Coping mechanisms may be poor to maladaptive.

Intergenerational Sexual and/or Physical Abuse:

Offenders and other family members may have been victims of abuse or may have been abusive, sometimes dating back generations. It is not uncommon for

the offender to have been abused by older family members and for his parents to have been victimized as well.

Impaired Communication Styles:

Communication patterns tend to be indirect, with feelings and thoughts expressed through behavior or in such obscure ways that family members often misunderstand one another.

Conflicting Parental Relationship Styles:

Relations may be either too close or too distant (for example, the father is sometimes emotionally distant while mother is enmeshed). There is often inadequate control and erratic limit setting.

Emotional Deprivation:

Emotional needs for nurturance and closeness typically are not met, and skills in this area are limited.

Abuse of Power:

Family members, particularly parents, do not know how to use power, often reacting to external stimuli instead of responding to an internal value system.

Source: "The Adolescent Sex Offender's Family in Treatment" by Jerry Thomas, in Juvenile Sex Offending, pp. 340-341.