

• INTRODUCTION •

Every society defines and legislates the boundaries of sexual contact between adults and children and imposes consequences for violations. For the past 25 years, working with victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse, I have tried to understand why any adult would trespass on society's most fundamental obligation to its children. I immersed myself in our professional literature; I have been a longtime member of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers and the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. I diligently attended trainings, conferences and seminars. I learned about paraphilias and cognitive restructuring, relapse prevention and empathy enhancement, children with sexual behavior problems and trauma bonding, attachment deficits and recidivism risk predictors. For me, something was missing, something not talked about in sex-offender research or treatment circles. I found myself wondering, and looking for guidance.

In 1991, I came across an article in the Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, "*Conceptualization of conscience in normal children and adolescents, ages 5 to 11*", by Barbara M. Stilwell, Matthew R. Galvin and S. Mark Kopta. Morality! Conscience! Words not found in sex offender literature, but certainly the basis for moral panic about sex offenders in our communities. I realized I was trying to understand breakdowns in the moral domain without naming it, and without fully understanding how conscience developed in normal children. I wrote to the authors. They have mentored and inspired me and transformed my work with sex offenders. I organized a small group of local professionals - psychotherapists and clergy. We met monthly for a year and engaged in a conversation about morality and how to create a moral child. Based on our dialogue and the work of Stilwell, Galvin and Kopta, the work in this manual took shape.

Sexual offending **is** a moral issue. As members of society, we have an obligation to be clear about what is right, and what is wrong, and act accordingly. Moral integrity is about wanting to be good and behaving well. It is about struggling with choices, and giving up personal gain and gratification in behalf of something more important than self. Once we name it, we can explore it.

I have used the Stilwell Conscience Interview in work with children, teens and adults. I have used it in individual and group settings. I have explored and challenged my own conscience! I hope you find the work illuminating and enriching, professionally and personally.