

[My Profile](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Advertise](#)

corrections.com
 The Official Home of Corrections

LIVE Talk

[Buyers Guide](#) | [Shopping](#) | [BB - Chat - Listserv](#) | [Training](#)
[Travel/Relocation](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Off Duty](#) | [Events](#) | [Site MAP](#)

Home > [News/Legislation](#) > Program Profile

[Sign In](#)
[Check Email](#)
[Free Email](#)

GO

(Advanced | Help)

Weather

People

Education

- [Editorial Calendars](#)
- [Standards & Guidelines](#)
- [Editorial Staff](#)

News: Profile

Watching for the Signs of Sexual Misconduct in Corrections

By [Keith L. Martin](#), Associate Editor

Sexual relations between correctional staff and inmates do not happen overnight. The steps and incidents leading up to it are slow and deliberate, whether being initiated by an employee or an inmate, so there is ample time to catch warning signs. In many cases involving staff, the person who is being manipulated usually doesn't realize it until it is too late.

"In my teaching [on sexual misconduct], I always say that it is like the hour hand on a clock - you know the direction it is going in, but you don't see it moving," says **Aaron Aldrich**, Chief Inspector for the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. "Sexual misconduct happens so slow in most cases, that an employee doesn't realize that they are going down the wrong route. Much like they look at a clock and say 'it's *that* time already,' they don't realize how the situation has developed into sexual misconduct."

Aldrich adds that in the case of inmates, they can be motivated and sometimes know very quickly which staff members can be manipulated.

"Just like correctional officers, they are trained observers," he says. "They read body language and mannerisms. Some inmates I've interviewed have indicated that after just one look, they knew a relationship would happen."

Despite the fact that their crimes alone should indicate to staff that they can be manipulative, many inmates possess an engaging personality, adds Aldrich. From serial killers like John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy to "Long Island Lolita" Amy Fisher, they have the ability to size people up and read them - a trait that allowed them

[Food Service](#)
[Health Care](#)
[International](#)
[Juvenile](#)
[Privatization](#)
[Student](#)
[Technology](#)
[MORE LINKS](#)

Networking

[Message Boards](#)
[Chatrooms](#)
[ListSers](#)
[Open Forums](#)

Contribute:

Send us News,
 Write a Letter to
 the Editor,
 Submission
 Guidelines, News
 Staff, Give us
 Feedback, Editorial
 Calendar

to function on the street and makes them someone staff should be extra careful.

"It's like encountering a rattlesnake - you know what it is and what it can do, but some still decide to play with it," he says.

The Slow, Steady Process of Manipulation by Inmates

According to Aldrich, when inmates manipulate staff, they commonly begin by approaching staff who they have already felt out. They won't approach the strict disciplinarian who does everything by the book from behavior to condition of uniform or what Aldrich calls the "poster boy for corrections." Instead, they will find a target who is a little lax and has a relationship with other inmates as the "cool, nice guy" who they have already identified as having a softer heart.

The use of compliments from inmate to staff member usually sets the stage for both friendly dialogue as well as trying to begin a simple relationship. For example, an inmate may say that an officer looks nice and follow that up by asking if they work out. If they say "yes," they may add further compliments, such as the way their uniform looks on them and ask how many push-ups they do, engaging them in flattering conversation.

"Prison is a negative environment and has the potential to be a hostile environment," says Aldrich. "[Staff] spend eight and sometimes 16 hours a day with that and compliments don't usually come their way, so a person feels good when compliments are offered."

Once some kind of rapport is established, he says, the introduction of personal matters comes into play, with the inmate seeking a friendly ear from the staff member. This usually involves their personal matters, so Aldrich advises all staff to use a simple measuring tool to gauge what is discussed.

"Do not engage in any dialogue at any time, that you would not talk about in front of your wife or husband, boyfriend or girlfriend, boss or member of internal affairs," he says. "Say what you would say if they were there. Say to the inmate that you are not comfortable talking with them about that. This tells the inmate: 'game over.'"

Innocent Things Are Anything But

Aldrich even warns against sexual jokes or "prison humor." What happens is that the inmate feels they can tell a staff member a joke like this and then can extend that to other dialogue of a sexual nature - once that humor is accepted, doors begin to open. For example, an

inmate will tell a staff member that they have been locked up for so long without sex and that every time they see that person, they think about sex. An inmate may also tell them that they've had dreams with the staff member in it, peaking the interest of that person.

"[There is a problem if the employee] is not abrupt or shuts down the conversation and instead, looks over their shoulder to see who is around," says Aldrich. "Curiosity takes over and the thrill of hearing someone incarcerated is having thoughts about them, so they'll ask 'what kind of dream was it' and the inmate knows 'wow, I've got this person.'"

What can follow, he adds, are notes or cards being passed from the inmate to the staff person as an expression that they think differently of them than others working at the prison. In fact, says Aldrich, this feeling of being separated from others in the correctional environment is often used. For example, if a person is frustrated with their job, thinking of leaving and tells the inmate, an offender may back that up by telling them that they should go because they are "better than anyone else there" and "you treat others better."

That, he says, is when the ping-pong game begins. Staff begin to relate to the inmate with appreciation and then start to wonder why they are in prison, talk about the personal aspects of the inmate's life and start to feel compassion for their situation.

"You have two people in a negative environment who are complimentary to one another," says Aldrich. "The inmate will say that the officer is a step above others in the prison and that's when the door begins opening."

Recognizing the Boundaries of Authority

Just as inmates can be the conduit to initiate a sexual relationship with staff members, those who work in the prison can do the same. In Minnesota, just as officers and other personnel are made aware of sexual misconduct, its consequences and signs to watch out for, so are inmates.

The state's Department of Corrections begins addressing the issue with inmates both in an orientation session when they initially come into the system as well as when they are moved to a new facility. Along with a discussion, each inmate is given a pamphlet that discusses what sexual misconduct is, the procedures for notifying staff of an incident and the consequences of false accusations.

"We want to teach offenders that just because they are in prison and a lot of the aspects of their lives are controlled by correctional officers and staff, that they

can't use that authority to tell them to have sex with them," says **Jeff Shorba**, Assistant Commissioner of the Management and Legal Services Division of the Minnesota DOC. "We make it clear that this is not tolerated, get it out clearly and get the information out on how to report these issues."

In their training, staff are told about the training inmates receive and also informed that this activity is not only a violation of policy, but a felony offense in the state of Minnesota. Beyond losing their job, staff need to be wary that they could also be subject to criminal sanctions for their behavior.

According to Shorba, training for staff is crucial because this type of behavior, while a personal discrepancy, has a ripple effect on their facility as well.

"We point out to staff that this is not a 'gotcha' thing where we try to get as many [staff doing this] as we can, but also need to make it clear that this is everyone's business because it causes security problems for the whole facility," he says.

Part of this, adds Shorba, is letting staff know that if they are aware of incidents of sexual misconduct going on, to report it immediately to the department.

"They have an obligation to report any sexual misconduct they see, even if it is their buddy who is doing it and doesn't think their behavior is inappropriate," he says. "[Staff] are the eyes and ears of management - if they see something suspicious, they need to let us know."

Be Wary of the Motive In Motivation

According to Aldrich, unlike inmates, it is more difficult to profile those staff members who are likely to engage in sexual misconduct. He has seen cases involving new officers and those with 26 years of seniority, male and female officers alike and those ranging in level of education from a GED to a Master's degree.

In his investigations, one thing usually is the case - the officers involved are those who are trusted by the administration at the facility. This trust can aid them in setting up situations where they can engage in a relationship with an inmate without others being aware.

One example might be an officer at a facility who is allowed to hand-pick inmates for a work crew and has the latitude to go to the warden and request that inmate "X" be on his or her crew.

"This should be a warning, but can be overlooked because it is a seasoned veteran, so it shouldn't be

The Corrections Connection News Center - Program Profile

Page 5 of 6

questioned," says Aldrich. "On the surface level, a certain inmate has been requested to be with them. We should ask why."

Another warning sign, says Aldrich, is handpicking inmates to work in an isolated area of the facility. One example he gives is an officer who went to a superior and wanted to renovate an unused space in the basement of the facility. Maybe this officer even comes in on his time off and brings in materials from home for his project. Now, says Aldrich, you have an employee who wants to bring a handpicked inmate into an isolated area of the prison and the warden thinks "what a great motivator this guy is."

"There may be motivation there, but look at the motives they have," he says.

In many of the letters he has read between inmates and officers involved in a relationship in corrections, staff often indicate that they need to see the inmate everyday and would go to great lengths to see them, which is presented in a number of warning signs.

Aldrich recommends that managers be aware of staff who volunteer for overtime, pick a post to cover and then when they don't receive that assignment, might as well go home. There should also be concern when staff come to blocks they are not assigned to and request to go in to see someone. The question of "why" should immediately be asked. Aldrich advises putting that person in check and even making them uncomfortable.

Another situation is the staff member who comes in early and asks to relieve officer "X" from their post, eager to begin their shift.

"They can't wait to get there - like a moth to a flame," he says.

No matter the situation itself or how staff use their authority to set up a relationship behind bars, Aldrich says that there should be anger on the part of anyone connected to that facility or department over sexual misconduct.

"I think we need to be aware when corrections professionals get involved in these kinds of relationships and we should be as outraged [about them] as we would a dentist taking advantage of a patient, a teacher of a student or a patrolman who pulls someone over and accepts a favor versus giving someone a ticket," he says. "That person doesn't belong with a badge."

Resources

Aaron Aldrich, Chief Inspector, Rhode Island Department

The Corrections Connection News Center - Program Profile

of Corrections, (401) 462-2551

Jeff Shorba, Assistant Commissioner, Management and
Legal Services Division, Minnesota Department Of
Corrections, (651) 642-0566

[Make Corrections.com Your Homepage](#) | [Link to Corrections.com!](#) | [Add your URL](#)
[About Us](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Join Our Team](#) | [Suggest a Site](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© Copyright 2001. The Corrections Connection. *All Rights Reserved*
Use of this web site constitutes acceptance of The Corrections Connection [User Agreement](#)