

Sex Offender Programs (SOP)



WHAT IS SOP?

SOP stands for Sex Offender Programs. SOP offers a range of programs within prison and the community for men who have been convicted of committing a sexual offence. Most of these programs are run at the Metropolitan Special Programs Centre (MSPC) located at Long Bay Correctional Complex in Sydney. The overall goal of these programs is to reduce the likelihood that treated individuals will continue with offending behaviour (i.e., reduce sexual reoffending). The program also aims to provide participants with the opportunity to learn new coping skills, relationship skills, to problem solve in healthy ways and offers tools and techniques to help them practice living in a different way.

All SOP group sessions are held in private group rooms. At the start of group, group members make/develop and agree to keep to a set of rules. This helps our groups become a safe space to share difficult things in confidence.

The programs are:

- High Intensity SOP (HISOP) – approximately 7-10 months, with 3 group sessions per week.
- Moderate Intensity SOP (MISOP) – 6-8 months in length, with 2 group sessions per week (also run in the community).
- Self-Regulation Program (SRP) – for participants with an intellectual disability or other cognitive impairment; approximately 12-18 months, with 3 group sessions per week.
- Deniers – for men convicted of sexual offences who have always maintained that they were wrongfully accused or falsely identified. The program is approximately 6-7 months in length with 2 group sessions per week.

The SOP Senior Psychologists determine which one of the programs a participant is suitable for based on assessed risk, treatment needs and having enough time to complete treatment.

Prison-based residential therapy programs are run as modified Therapeutic Communities (TC). In a TC, residents and staff participate in the management and operation of the community, contributing to a psychologically and physically safe learning environment where change can occur. The TC is a unique way to provide therapy that allows for real-life application of working together, relaxing together, decision-making, problem-solving, empathising, reaching out, helping and teaching to build a prosocial and positive environment.

HOW DOES IT HELP?

Treatment helps participants understand that their offending behaviour did not occur in isolation from the rest of their life. The aim of treatment is to help participants develop a broader understanding of the issues that facilitated their offending behaviour and impacted negatively on their life generally. It is through this process that participants begin to understand that many of the issues related to their offending have also caused them significant problems in other aspects of their lives (e.g. employment, relationships, mental health).

Participants discover different, healthy ways to communicate, they are encouraged to develop supportive and meaningful relationships and explore how they can better understand and control their emotions. As they progress through the program, they learn how to set realistic, achievable goals and learn how to make detailed plans to achieve them.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP WHILE MY LOVED ONE IS PARTICIPATING IN THESE PROGRAMS?

The participants want to know that changes they are undertaking are being noticed and appreciated, especially given how hard change can be. Words of encouragement and support through phone calls, letters and visits can make a huge impact while participating in the SOP.

One of the key things that participants learn is different ways to talk about

themselves and their emotions, and different ways to act/behave. One of the best ways you can support your loved one is allowing them the space to practice these skills with you. Many of the participants may feel guilty for what they have done and struggle with the extent/enormity of the things they need to change to lead different lives. They may be afraid that if they make these changes they might not have connections anymore with family and friends and they have to manage the fear of failure (what if I stuff up and hurt someone again or come back to gaol?)

During this process of change your loved one may experience lapses, where by old behaviour (e.g. anger, aggression) may be present. A lapse is a short-term return to old patterns of behaviour (e.g. using aggression solve/avoid problems, increased drinking), that stops again quickly, but the person is still motivated to change or improve. During such times you can play a key role in encouraging them to keep trying, letting them know its normal to have lapses and that you remain available for support.

We also encourage you to share the changes you notice in your loved one with other friends and family members. Please help us keep contraband out of our gaols. It may seem helpful at the time, however contraband, especially drugs, can pose serious health and safety risks and can cause your loved one to stop progressing in the program. They can also face serious penalties that will stop or reverse their progression in classification. Help others to understand how unhelpful and dangerous behaviours like this can be for your loved one in gaol.

ARE YOU A SOP GRADUATE?

The Community Maintenance Program is a part of sex offender treatment and management. The Community Maintenance Program has been designed to be a continuation of sexual offence specific treatment. Attending Community Maintenance is normally a parole condition. These groups are currently run at Forensic Psychology Services in Surry Hills.

The Community Maintenance Program assists participants who have completed HISOP/MISOP to reinforce and generalise the knowledge and skills that they gained from treatment or to continue to work on areas that need further development/strengthening. It also assists participants to further develop and implement their self-management plans and support networks upon return to the community.

The Community Maintenance Program is delivered in a rolling group therapy format with participants expected to attend a session every week until they have completed their sentence. Participants who are demonstrating successful use of self-management plans and compliance with supervision in the community are required to attend less frequently. The frequency of attendance is reviewed every three months.

