

Ten Tips for Creating Judicial Education Programs About Adult Victim Sexual Assault

“Sex offense trials are “more difficult...to preside [over] from a legal and technical standpoint, a personal and emotional viewpoint, and a public scrutiny and public pressure perspective.”¹

- 1. Ensure leadership from local judges, especially those with relevant experience.**
Include local judges in planning as early as possible and in every step of the decision-making process. Identify judges who would want to be part of the training's “leadership.” Try to identify judges who have experience with sexual assault cases – either as judges or before taking the bench – and who understand the importance of an informed judiciary to ensure fairness in adult victim sexual assault cases. When judges help shape the program it gives them a sense of ownership in the program and a stake in its success. It also gives the program credibility with the judicial community.
- 2. Have local judges participate as faculty.**
Ask the leadership judges to serve as faculty— presenting various sessions alongside the judicial educators and experts – and to identify other judges who may be willing to do so. Local judges can share with their colleagues their own experiences trying sexual assault cases, which is powerful.
- 3. Adapt the program to local law and practice.**
To ensure that the program is useful for your judicial audience, present issues such as rape shield law in the context of local law and practice.
- 4. Invite local experts and service providers to present.**
Invite local experts and service providers such as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), victim advocates, and sex offender treatment providers to explain how medical forensic sexual assault examinations are conducted and what they can tell the courts, and the services/treatment available in your state. These “local experts” can present alongside both judicial educators and local judicial faculty members.

¹ Kurt M. Bumby & Marc C. Maddox, *Judges' Knowledge About Sexual Offenders, Difficulties Presiding Over Sexual Offense Cases, and Opinions on Sentencing, Treatment and Legislation*, 11 *SEXUAL ABUSE: A JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND TREATMENT* 305 (1999).

5. Recruit subject matter experts to explain rape myths and realities.

Subject matter experts on topics such as the neurobiology of trauma, offender behavior, and elder victims of sexual assault can be extremely helpful in debunking rape myths and explaining the realities of sexual assault to judicial audiences.

6. Plan and rehearse each session carefully!

In the rush of planning and hammering out logistics the content of each session can take a backseat. Practice each session to get the timing right. If you have co-presenters, try and arrange for them to practice together in person or remotely so that the presentation flows smoothly.

7. Make the sessions interactive.

Sexual assault is a heavy topic. Educating judges on the complexities of sexual assault cases can lead to dense, detailed presentations. To keep judges engaged, include interactive elements such as case studies to be explored in small groups, polling using electronic responders and videos that will promote discussion.

8. Resources should be made easily accessible for the long term.

Your programs may include resources such as presenters' PowerPoints, reference articles, and webinar links. These resources should be made accessible on the court website for the long term, for program attendees and those unable to attend. Having these "resource databases" will make it easier to develop resource lists for future trainings and provide examples of past program materials to potential future trainees.

9. When advertising your program, use a good "hook" to promote attendance.

If your state has a new law or state supreme court ruling that will impact sexual assault cases, feature it in your program and use it to advertise. Judges will need to get up to speed on the new law or opinion, so why not do it at your event? Is there a way to pair your event with a larger judicial training institute? Get creative!

10. Integrate sexual assault issues throughout your judicial education programming.

Sexual assault issues arise in many different kinds of cases and specialized courts including domestic violence, elder abuse, and drug treatment courts. Integrate these issues wherever relevant. For example, in domestic violence programming, include information about intimate partner sexual abuse and how it elevates risk to victims. Utilize the National Judicial Education Program's diverse online curricula to develop this diverse programming, www.njep.org.

This project is supported by Cooperative Agreement No 2014-TA-AX-K045 awarded by the Office of Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice.