

Best Practices for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention



Prevent Child Abuse
Iowa

Child sexual abuse programs help promote a level of public awareness about abuse, allowing for a better understanding of how to prevent it from happening as well as promoting a willingness to report if abuse does occur. They also equip children with the skills needed to prevent and report abuse. Child sexual abuse prevention programs may focus on the children themselves or the adults responsible for their care. This monograph presents the best practices for both in a unified outline.

Skills and Knowledge Children Should Develop

- **Assertiveness**
Including how to stand up for themselves when being touched inappropriately
- **Communication**
Including saying “no,” telling an adult who can help, and keep telling until someone listens
- **Problem-solving**
- **Safety in relationships** with older people
- **Understanding** of appropriate and inappropriate touching; feelings; body boundaries; and secrets
- **Understanding** potential grooming behaviors and tricks used by offenders

Characteristics of Effective Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs

I. Curriculum Components

These components should be included in the design of effective prevention programs.

- a. A definition of sexual abuse.
- b. How to identify perpetrators, recognizing that abuse can come from people known to the family (e.g., relatives, close friends, community members).
- c. A description of the range of sexually abusive behaviors, including good, confusing, and bad/problem/unsafe touches.
- d. An emphasis on the child's innocence; sexual abuse is never the child's fault.
- e. Promotion of internet safety; helping children develop awareness of possible dangers when using the computer.
- f. An explanation of bystander responsibilities and informing children how to help friends who may be experiencing sexual abuse.

II. Format and Structure of Sessions

- a. The best evidence-based programs developed for schools provide at least 3-4 sessions a year on a variety of topics and most sessions last for at least 30 minutes per session.
- b. Consider the following format elements: Customized presentations match children's age, development level, education, culture, and cognitive level.
 1. When working with younger children, teach concrete, specific concepts and avoid abstract concepts.
 2. Use behavioral skills training formats: Instruction, modeling, rehearsal, and feedback.
 3. Present information in a variety of ways that engage children.
 4. Schedule multiple sessions in a year to repeat the information and offer more opportunities for practice.
 5. Provide education in any organization that serves youth such as after school programs, sports leagues, or church groups.



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III. Family Involvement

Ways to Involve Adult Family Members

- a. Include families on an advisory committee for program development, implementation and evaluation.
- b. Share information with adult family members about sexual abuse prevention curriculum/class activities.
- c. Encourage adult family members to review distributed materials and practice skills with children at home.
- d. Promote the importance of talking about sexual abuse prevention with children and adults.
- e. Provide an adult-focused sexual abuse prevention curriculum (Best evidence based programs provide at least 2-3 hours of training for adults).

Information to Offer Adult Family Members

- a. Myths and facts about child sexual abuse
- b. Behavioral and physical indicators of possible sexual abuse.
- c. Types of situations where sexual abuse may occur.
- d. Prevention activities that families can do at home.
- e. How to appropriately respond to a child's disclosure of abuse.
- f. How to report sexual abuse and what to expect as a result.
- g. Community resources, including prevention, intervention, treatment, and support services.

IV. Child Care and School Involvement

Suggestions for assuring comprehensive programs include:

- a. Integrate curriculum into regular programming.
- b. Involve teachers, care providers, and other staff who work with the children, know them best, and understand development.
- c. Include teachers, care providers, and other staff by using them as co-presenters; remaining in the room for presentations; and reviewing the information with the children later in the year.

V. Handling Disclosures

- a. Develop an action plan for teachers, care providers, other personnel, presenters, and adult family members to respond to disclosures.
- b. Ensure plans include information on child protection issues, mandatory reporting requirements, and local resources for treatment and support.

VI. Program Assessment

- a. Assess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavioral changes of students.
- b. Assess the knowledge and understanding of teachers, care providers, other staff, and adult family members.
- c. Document the number of sessions provided.
- d. Document the number of disclosures after each session.
- e. Collect feedback from students, teachers, parents, and care providers.
- f. Administer pre and post tests to students to determine skills and knowledge gained.

Examples of Evidence-based Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs

- Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children (www.d2l.org)
- Stop It Now! (www.stopitnow.org)
- Talking About Touching (www.cfchildren.org/programs/tat/overview)
- Child Lures (www.childluresprevention.com)

Community education programs, such as those listed here, provide important information, knowledge, and resources to large and diverse groups of people. Please request a review of current literature, *Evidence-Based Practices for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect* by contacting Hornby Zeller Associates at ME@hornbyzeller.com for detailed descriptions of each program.