

Best Practices in Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Pennsylvania Rape Crisis Centers have been working to prevent child sexual abuse for over 40 years. Many of the original prevention programs were carefully created with the best of intentions: to give children information and tools to prevent child sexual abuse. Now, decades later we have additional research and information that informs our approach to child sexual abuse prevention. This technical assistance bulletin is an overview of themes in current best practices for child sexual abuse prevention.

Adult Responsibility



Adults are responsible for the safety of children and for taking proactive measures to protect children from child sexual abuse. Traditional child sexual abuse prevention programs such as “No, Go, Tell” and “Good Touch, Bad Touch” place the responsibility on the children to protect themselves (PCAVT, 2016). Both researchers and practitioners agree that the responsibility for prevention should not be placed solely with children (Finkelhor, 2009). Rather, educational programs for children should be one piece of the comprehensive approach to child sexual abuse prevention.

Social Emotional Learning



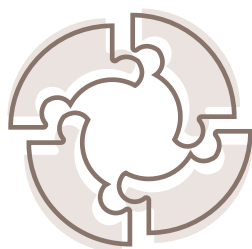
Social emotional learning has emerged as an essential foundation of primary prevention of child sexual abuse. Research reveals a consistent finding that individuals who sexually abused children lacked core emotional competency including empathy, perspective taking, emotional regulation, and problem solving skills (Prevent Connect, 2018). Of all child sexual abuse cases, nearly one third involve children being sexually abused by another child (Charak, 2016). With rates this high it is essential that prevention strategies incorporate social emotional learning in order to address both victim and victimizer prevention.

Healthy Sexual Development



Teaching children the correct terms for their genitals is an important piece of child sexual abuse prevention. This skill not only gives children language needed to successfully disclose but may also decrease a child's risk of victimization (Wurtele & Kenny, 2010). Teaching the correct terms for genitals also lays the foundation for healthy sexuality education and opens up the ongoing conversation about sexual development. When adults understand healthy versus unhealthy behaviors in children, they are better equipped to respond to potentially unhealthy behaviors.

Comprehensive Approach



There is no clear evidence that educational programming directed solely at children prevents victimization (Finkelhor, 2009), but rather, it gives children the tools to respond if victimization occurs. Therefore, it is essential to move beyond strategies that only address the individual. Preventing child sexual abuse requires a comprehensive approach that influences all levels of the social ecology such as community involvement, relationships among families and neighbors, and individual behaviors. Effective prevention strategies include focusing on modifying policies, practices, and societal norms to create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.

Conclusion

PCAR strongly believes in the prevention of child sexual abuse and that utilizing best practices will only further the good work being done to nurture and care for our children. Children have the right to grow up safe and healthy, and adults have the responsibility to provide safe, stable, and nurturing environments for all children.

References

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