

The Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children

General Assembly Annual Report

The Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children was created in statute during the 2011 Missouri legislative session and was charged with studying and identifying strategies for preventing child sexual abuse. This Task Force provide the Governor, Missouri General Assembly, and the State Board of Education with twenty-two recommendations within seven core subject areas of community-based child abuse, professional training and technical assistance, multi-disciplinary team excellence, mental health services and treatment, awareness, funding, and statutory changes.

The Task Force was reauthorized during the 2018 legislative session to continue to study the issue of sexual abuse of children (Section 210.1200, RSMo). Prior to being reauthorized, committed experts were meeting as an Interim Task Force to further this work. The Task Force focused on four specific recommendations identified in the 2012 report:

1. Standardized online training for mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect
2. Best practices and standards for multi-disciplinary teams (MDT), law enforcement, prosecutors, and medical providers
3. Youth with problem sexual behaviors
4. Mental health services for sexually abused children

Members have continued to meet since the inception of the Task Force to continue to address the prevention of sexual abuse of children, as well as several other areas that have been identified as important issues needing to be addressed.

Available data from the Children's Division supports the need for the important work of the Task Force. In fiscal year 2019, there were over 64,000 reports of child abuse and neglect involving over 89,000 children in the State of Missouri. Of these reports that were substantiated, 34% were for sexual abuse. This represents the second largest category of abuse and neglect.

The full Task Force met on the following dates in 2019:

- February 1st
- May 10th
- November 15th

These meetings provide an opportunity for updates on the various Task Force Workgroups, legislative changes, pertinent agency partner updates, as well as to learn about other important work going on in the state around child abuse and neglect.

There are currently three Workgroups of the Task Force composed of smaller groups of Task Force members and other stakeholders. These Workgroups have actively met throughout the year:

1. Best Practices and Standards for Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT)

2. Youth with Problem Sexual Behaviors
3. Child Sexual Abuse Education

Best Practices and Standards for Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT):

One goal of this Workgroup was to develop and deliver training to all multidisciplinary member agencies in Missouri. In 2019 the MDT Workgroup implemented an eight hour training which is POST, CLE, CEU and 210 certified. This training focuses on the following concepts:

1. Understanding the role that each agency plays in a multidisciplinary team
2. Working together to become a stronger multidisciplinary team
3. Identifying indicators of child abuse
4. Reducing risk factors for witness intimidation and trauma to the child
5. Increasing inter-agency communication to develop better investigations and outcomes

In 2019 this training was offered ten times in multiple regions throughout the State. Over 200 MDT members have attended this training, including participation from law enforcement officers, Children's Division investigators, juvenile officers, prosecuting attorneys, school staff, medical providers, mental health providers, probation and parole, victim advocates, and forensic interviewers.

When asked what about the presentation was particularly helpful or useful about this training, participants wrote:

1. "Provided a better understanding of the processes and roles of other agencies"
2. "Very interactive course. Made me use investigative skills I don't use every day."
3. "As much as I dislike break-out groups, the break-out group portion of the presentation was extremely insightful. It was good to see each group's strengths and limitations in order to shift my own focus and role in my own MDT."
4. "As someone new to my position and new to MDTs it was all helpful to learn about the process of these meetings as well as how/why these MDT meetings take place."
5. "Getting the input and perspective from different members such as JO, LEO, CAC, etc. especially for the specific case examples."

The MDT Workgroup goals for the next year are to increase the number of certified instructors in order to increase the amount of trainings offered in each region. The Workgroup also hopes to increase participation in trainings from all member agencies.

Youth with Problem Sexual Behaviors:

On September 16, 2019, the Workgroup reviewed past activities that included looking at best practice standards and guidelines for the Children's Division. The idea of specialized workers in the area of assessment with youth with problematic sexual behaviors (Children's Division's Juvenile Assessments) was discussed. The specialist positions that the Children's Division once had across the state have been absorbed into other investigative positions. There are as few as 3-5 workers left in the state that dedicate their workload to only Juvenile Assessments. Another concern for the Workgroup is how to get appropriate mental health treatment to families in need. Rural areas struggle because group

therapy is a great option for these youth and yet it is hard to find a group for them to go to or a professional for them to see within a reasonable distance from their home. Also, waiting lists can be 8-12 weeks long and this can cause an issue with schools as they do not want the child back in the school setting without seeing a professional. The group discussed the use of tele-mental health as an option in the rural communities. There are a few organizations that currently offer tele-mental health, but it is a rarity across the state.

During the November 15, 2019 meeting, Kelly Schultz, Director of the Office of Child Advocate and longtime Task Force member, presented on the report released from the Task Force on Child Safety. The report outlined the findings from this Task Force, which was a short-term group that convened over the summer of 2019. This group was asked to examine the Children's Division's investigation process and identify opportunities to strengthen practice and improve safety outcomes. Given that the primary charge of this group was to address concerns and recommendations related to the Children's Division, the focus of the report largely addresses those policies and recommendations for which the Department of Social Services has authority. The Workgroup will continue to monitor any recommendations that might include youth with problem sexual behaviors.

The group also reviewed the Children's Division's current tools, the CD-214 (Children with Problem Sexual Behaviors Assessment Tool) and the CD-215 (Children with Problem Sexual Behaviors Safety Plan). These forms have not been updated since the 2015 law regarding Juvenile Assessments went into effect. Some workers find them long and duplicative. Some of the questions seem irrelevant to the assessment and they are not consistent with Signs of Safety, the Children's Division's current practice model. A smaller group of this Workgroup is going to look at the forms and make recommendations for improvement. This group hopes to form in early 2020.

Child Sexual Abuse Education:

This Workgroup convened in October 2019 as a result of the passage of Section 170.045 RSMo in the 2019 legislative session. This legislation requires each school district to provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate sexual abuse training to students in all grades not lower than sixth grade.

Stakeholders within this Workgroup have given input to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as the agency develops guidance and training materials around sexual abuse prevention curriculum. The information developed by DESE will be vetted by the Workgroup prior to dissemination to school districts.