

Appendix C: Guidance for Implementation of Sexual Abuse Prevention Education

It is the responsibility of educational institutions to promote optimal learning environments by ensuring the well-being and safety of their students. Sexual abuse prevention education will differ in each school community due to community needs and available resources. With the understanding that each local education agency (LEA) or school approach will be different, this section provides recommended best practices.

When child sexual abuse or sexual exploitation threatens that sense of safety, the educational process is obstructed. Schools are in a unique position to help young people shape positive, healthy attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that work to prevent sexual violence and other forms of abuse. Research shows that the most effective way to do this is by training adults (all school staff and caregivers) and teaching students skills. This can be done by creating a comprehensive sexual abuse awareness and prevention program that incorporates evidence-informed best practices inclusive of policies and procedures, teacher and staff training, student education and family education.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

To provide effective sexual abuse prevention, LEAs should

- identify sexual abuse prevention education, equity and inclusion as a priority both in and out of the school system.
- assess and update existing sexual abuse prevention and child protection policies, procedures and practices that aid in the development of evidence-informed comprehensive strategies. Considerations of policies and procedures that are in place include (1) prevention activities for school staff, administrators and students and (2) trauma-informed response when violence does occur.
- mirror community needs, cultures, LEA capacity and state requirements (staff training and mandatory reporting) in policies and procedures.
- develop a positive, healthy school climate and culture that values respect, equity and inclusion with no tolerance for abuse or violence.
- adopt sexual abuse prevention education curricula that is evidence-informed and reflects the needs of student population to ensure appropriate scope and sequence (Universal Design for Learning, trauma-informed, and equity).
- establish a personnel code of conduct for children and adults.
- implement procedures for screening and hiring staff and volunteers.
- report staff violations of protection policies and reporting abuse when it occurs.

Schools

To provide effective sexual abuse prevention education, principals, administrators and other key staff should

- plan and provide sexual abuse prevention education as a schoolwide initiative:
 - Promote a climate and culture of respect, safety, nonviolence, inclusion and trust for all staff and students.
 - Provide awareness about sexual abuse and information to families about planned instruction.
 - Apply schoolwide prevention through staff buy-in and training.
 - Engage students in age-appropriate opportunities.

- foster staff support of sexual abuse prevention education:
 - Provide teacher and staff training that includes information on recognizing indicators of child abuse and neglect, mandated reporting of suspected abuse and neglect and providing support for students who may have experienced sexual abuse.
 - Be aware of traumatic stress related to hearing disclosures and providing access to support services.
 - Be aware of and provide support services access to staff that may be survivors of sexual abuse.
 - Provide adequate time and resources for staff training and for promptly reporting disclosures.
- support students who disclose sexual abuse:
 - Ensure that students are able to connect to services that are available in schools (e.g., counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses).
 - Build relationships with the local Children’s Division office to support effective reporting and investigation that is consistent with Missouri state law.
 - Form partnerships with local community agencies (e.g., child advocacy centers, law enforcement, after-school programs, and community and faith-based organizations).
 - Create referral lists of community agencies or organizations that provide services to children and families who have experienced sexual abuse.

Classrooms

To provide effective sexual abuse prevention education, educators should

- provide Instruction delivery that accounts for
 - classroom structure with norms that promote and model respect, safety, nonviolent, inclusion and trust between teachers and students and students and their peers.
 - appropriately planned and timed instruction that ensures support staff availability and notifies families and students in advance.
 - age-appropriate instruction that provides student leadership and ownership opportunities (peer learning and mentorship and awareness events).
 - confidentiality and comfort for a system where students can anonymously submit questions.
- partner with local agencies and organizations that can provide support and assist with delivery of education.
- develop relationships with families and community members along with distribution of resources to reduce discomfort about sexual abuse prevention education (e.g., engage parent-teacher associations, include content during parent nights and parent-teacher conferences).

Student Education

School-based sexual abuse prevention education is supported by strong evidence and has demonstrated beneficial effects on academic outcomes, such as attendance and school performance. Universal school-based education directs age-appropriate grade level activities toward all students and does not target those whose circumstances place them at increased risk for perpetuating or being victims.

Sexual abuse prevention strategies are more likely to be learned when received through comprehensive skill education that provides opportunities to practice skills in class, instruction that spans multiple days, and the engagement of parents or guardians through take-home activities to foster discussions. Research advises that education that exercises concepts of Universal Design for Learning through the use of more active modes of teaching (modeling, rehearsal, and reinforcement) results in greater gains of knowledge and skills than those that simply provide information, particularly when working with students with disabilities (intellectual or developmental).

Curriculum Selection

School sexual abuse prevention approaches will differ depending on the grade level of students. Comprehensive sexual health education is an effective sexual abuse prevention strategy. Information and skills provided in grades K-5 lays the groundwork for healthy relationship education in later grades, which demonstrates importance of the implementation of a K-12 Comprehensive Health Education.

Grades 6-12

When working with youth in middle and high schools, peer-to-peer and dating relationships that have a major influence on youth should be considered. A profitable aspect of working with secondary students is furnishing them with opportunity, knowledge, skills and resources to address sexual abuse within their own school community. Implementing a prevention model focused on empowerment can help youth become leaders of change and may include

- engaging youth in planning and delivery of education,
- developing interesting opportunities for youth (mentoring, leadership),
- empowering youth with skills to end/dissolve/cease harmful behaviors observed/seen in their communities, and
- conducting student surveys to inform education.

Teachers and school staff play a key role in fostering a positive school climate and culture. Education about sexual abuse, how to interrupt behaviors and ways to incorporate prevention strategies into their classroom (culture, lesson plans) can empower/equip teachers and school staff in taking an active role in addressing sexual abuse prevention within their school community.

Assessment is an integral part of prevention and provides educators with information about whether or not students are learning and informs improvements for classroom lessons and activities.

Families

Research suggests that schools can help families fulfill their role as protectors by engaging them in sexual abuse education and prevention efforts (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992). Families play a crucial role in sexual abuse prevention by/when communicating with their children about sexual abuse, supporting and reinforcing education received at school and providing safer environments by recognizing potential grooming patterns of offenders. As sexual abuse occurs mostly within families and other trusted relationships, providing sexual abuse prevention education that includes parents, guardians and other caregivers as partners often can protect children from maltreatment or make it easier for children to disclose if abuse has occurred. Strategies for families might include

- supporting and reinforcing education with suggested books and family homework assignments,
- arranging a training for parents and guardians on sexual abuse prevention,
- sending education materials and resources both electronically and as hard copies, and
- reviewing school norms and values during family-teacher conference.