



## INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Section 170.045, RSMo, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) developed a guidance document regarding sexual abuse training in consultation with the Missouri Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children. This document may be used to help districts choose programs and resources to meet the requirements of Section 170.045, RSMo, which provides as follows:

“In school year 2020-21 and in each school year thereafter, each school district shall provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate sexual abuse training to students in all grades not lower than sixth grade. School districts must include the following components in their training:

1. instruction providing students with the knowledge and tools to recognize sexual abuse,
2. instruction providing students with the knowledge and tools to report an incident of sexual abuse,
3. actions that a student who is a victim of sexual abuse could take to obtain assistance and intervention, and
4. available resources for students affected by sexual abuse.”

The reported recommendations are designed for local education agencies, schools, classroom teachers, the surrounding community, and state and local agencies and organizations that are involved in implementing child sexual abuse prevention education in Missouri schools. The information provided will help guide schools through an intentional process of preparing for and providing effective sexual abuse prevention education that uses evidence-informed approaches likely to be effective and will avoid retraumatizing students who may have already experienced some form of sexual abuse.

Education and training materials include information about requirements and best practices for sexual abuse prevention education based on a curriculum review, literature from the sexual abuse field and regional stakeholder meeting input. Districts are encouraged to adapt and customize the guidance to best address and meet the needs of their school community.



## Overview of Child Sexual Abuse and the Importance of Prevention Training in Schools

Child sexual abuse is a significant but preventable public health problem. Child sexual abuse refers to the involvement of a child (person less than 18 years old) and an adult (or another child) in sexual activity that violates the laws or social taboos of society, that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent to (CDC, 2020a). Child sexual abuse is evidenced between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a position of responsibility, trust or power. This may include but is not limited to the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity, the exploitative use of child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices, or the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials (World Health Organization, 1999). Sexual abuse can include both contact (sexual touching or intercourse) and non-contact (voyeurism, exhibitionism, taking unwanted sexual images or exposing the child to pornography) behaviors. Force may be involved but perpetrators also use deception, threats and other forms of coercion.

Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know; less than 10 percent of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a stranger. Approximately 30 percent of children are abused by a family member (Finkelhor, 2012). Child sexual abuse is also chronic in nature. It is not typically a one-time event; a child experiences the abuse over and over again and lives in a state of fear. Children who are being abused often face significant barriers to disclosing the abuse, including shame and guilt, fear of not being believed or fear of bodily harm or being removed from the home as a result of threats from and manipulation by perpetrators.

### ***Child sexual abuse is prevalent nationally and in Missouri***

Child sexual abuse is a silent epidemic in Missouri and throughout the nation. Children of all ages, races, ethnicities and economic backgrounds may experience sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse affects both girls and boys in all kinds of neighborhoods and communities. According to the CDC, nationally about one in four girls and one in 13 boys experience sexual abuse at some point in childhood (CDC, 2020a). In Missouri, there were 5,225 substantiated cases of child abuse and/or neglect in Fiscal Year 2019, 34 percent of which were cases of sexual abuse Missouri Children's Division, 2020). Additionally, in 2019 Missouri Child Advocacy Centers served over 9,000 children, 6,050 of whom reported sexual abuse (National Children's Alliance, 2020). These numbers mean that whether you work with youth, are a parent or are simply a member of a community, it is highly likely that someone you know or care for has experienced, or is currently experiencing, child sexual abuse.

### ***The impact of childhood sexual abuse is substantial***

In the short term, children who are sexually abused may suffer physical injuries as well as emotional and psychological problems. Academic problems are a common symptom of child abuse. Sexually abused children tend to perform lower on tests, have higher absentee rates and are more likely to drop out of



school. Children with a history of child sexual abuse also demonstrate an increase in rates of substance abuse, delinquency and crime. Child sexual abuse can also affect long-term health outcomes, mental health, social development and risk-taking behavior into adolescence and adulthood. Given the high prevalence of child abuse and neglect and its vast consequences, the associated economic impact is substantial. The total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States in 2015 was estimated to be at least **\$9.3 billion** (CDC, 2020).

### ***Why Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training Should Be in Schools***

Ending and preventing child sexual abuse in our society requires a systemic response, and schools are key to this response. No one group or person can prevent sexual abuse; the message that sexual abuse will not be tolerated must come in many voices.

Traumatized students are at risk of suffering from

- lower grade point averages,
- higher school absence rates,
- increased drop-out rates,
- increased suspensions and expulsion, and
- decreased reading ability.

Trauma impacts brain development, which can have severe consequences when it comes to school readiness, academic achievement and behavior. Examples of consequential behaviors include

- displaying aggression and social anxiety,
- lacking behavioral self-regulation, and
- suffering from learning disabilities (Darkness to Light, 2017).

These academic and behavioral risks can be diminished by comprehensive prevention. **It is important to note that prevention programs are not designed to put children in charge of their own safety. That is the role of adults, and schools should explore providing comprehensive training to all adults who interact with children.** Child-focused programs do, however, empower children to trust their feelings. Prevention programs also give them the knowledge and resources they need to avoid potentially harmful situations and confide in trusting adults.

Schools are in a unique position to help young people shape positive, healthy attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that work to prevent sexual abuse. **Research shows that the most effective way to do this is by training adults and teaching students skills through a comprehensive sexual abuse prevention education.** Appendix B contains information on child sexual abuse prevention education for adults as well as children.

Prevention education varies considerably depending on the age of the child, the type of sexual abuse being addressed and community and cultural contexts. This document will use sexual abuse as an umbrella term that includes the range of sexual abuse that may occur throughout childhood and adolescence.