

Child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual

Child abuse - physical and sexual - are serious problems that cross lines of race, religion, ethnicity and income. Among children, the combined rate of abuse is higher than for serious car accidents, being in a fire, or drowning. Rates of sexual abuse appear to have decreased over the last decade, but (because they are taken from CPS files) may not take into account abuse by people outside the family. They definitely don't take into account the emerging phenomenon of "compliant victimization," that is the voluntary participation of children in sexual activity, often as a way of emulating behavior they see in popular music videos.

Why address child abuse at school?

There are rare instances when teachers are abusers, but unlike with bullying or bias activity, child abuse almost never happens at school. Schools are not in the business of child welfare. So why should child abuse be addressed at school?

Children who are abused at home, are disproportionately represented as aggressors in anti-social behavior at school. They are more likely to bully others, and to transfer onto teachers anger they have toward other adults. They are also more likely to withdraw, drop out, become involved in substance abuse, and be victimized again in peer relationships. Perhaps most importantly, school-based prevention appears to be partly working. Decreased rates of abuse since the 1980's, when these programs became popular, are testimony to that.

Effective prevention programs provide children with basic safety information about people and touch in the same context that they learn about water, fire and traffic safety. They provide older children with appropriate training to avoid being either victim or victimizers, promoting self-efficacy, decision-making and connection to community.

Some people may decide some of these topics are inappropriate for a particular group. The customization feature allows adult implementers to easily delete any topic they choose. (See *User's Manual* for detail)

Handling disclosure

After exposure to abuse prevention programming, affected children may disclose abuse to you. Consult the *Ripple Effects Coach for Staff* program for training in how to handle disclosure. The gist is: stay calm; assure the student you will do what is needed to keep her or him safe; remember you are a mandated reporter; don't promise to keep it secret, do reassure students that it is not their fault and that nothing they tell you will go beyond the chain of command needed to keep them safe.

Goals of intervention

Students will:

- Understand that personal safety can be approached like water, traffic and fire safety
- Distinguish between legal discipline styles and illegal abuse
- Recognize, resist when it is safe, and always report physical and sexual abuse
- Understand that it is never their fault and never too late to tell
- Manage feelings of anger or shame in constructive ways
- Avoid the use of alcohol or drugs, as a response to abuse
- Develop core social emotional competencies that are tied to resilience: assertiveness, problem solving and connection to community.

A suggested scope and sequence

SKILL TRAINING TOPICS

Safety

Decision-Making

Recognize

Touch

Discipline

Resist

Assertiveness

Saying no

Report

Asking for help

Manage Feelings

Shame

Guilt

Anger

Fear

CHALLENGE TOPICS

Beaten

Emotional abuse

Molested

Molester

Secrets

Note: Blue titles indicate one of Ripple Effects “Seven Keys” (core social-emotional abilities)

Reminder: Due to the sensitive nature of this issue, some implementers, in some situations, will want to delete some topics. Please refer to your users manual for simple instructions.