

# Safe Environments

Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse



# Overview

Today we will discuss:

- Develop an understanding of the prevalence and impact of childhood sexual abuse
- Learn how to report any suspicions of child abuse and neglect
- Review standard protocols you can adopt to protect yourselves and the children you work with

# The Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse

- No one truly knows the prevalence rates
- Estimated that 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused by their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays
- 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 25 boys
- The Good News: Dramatically decreased in the last 20 years (Finkelhor, 2009)

• \* Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). Adverse childhood experiences reported by adults—five states, 2009. *MMWR*, 59(49), 1609-1613.

\*\*Source: Townsend, Catherine (2013). Estimating a Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence Rate for Practitioners: A Review of Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence Studies. Darkness to Light.

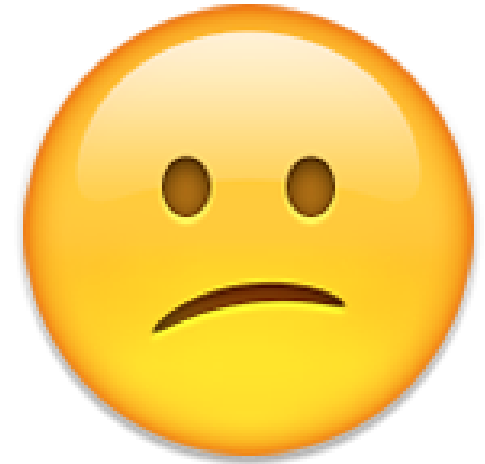


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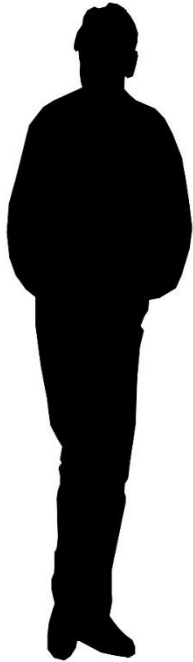
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# Offenders: Not the creepy guy in the park

- 90 % of sexual abuse is committed by someone known by the child and trusted by the child/family
- 35-40 % of sexual abuse is committed by other children



# Offender Characteristics



- Deviant arousal or interests
- Over-identification with children
- Use sexual behavior as coping mechanism
- Adverse family backgrounds
- Attachment/Intimacy problems

\*Many of these can be easily hidden

# The Process of Abuse: Grooming

- The deliberate actions taken by an adult to form a trusting relationship with a child, with the intent of later having sexual contact, is known as **child grooming**.
- The key is to develop TRUST with the child and the child's parents or, if the adult is a coach or teacher, with administrators and parents.

## Identifying the Tactics . . .

- Targeting: What kind of children will they target?
- Testing Boundaries: How does the child react to compliments, touching, tickling?
- Gaining Trust: Gain the trust of who? How?
- Desensitization: Pushing boundaries, normalizing sexual behavior
- Isolation: Seeking and establishing alone time
- Secrecy: If you tell then \_\_\_\_\_

## Consider Sexual Abuse

- When parent, caregiver, or other adult:
  - Lacks/ignores social, emotional or physical boundaries or limits with children
  - Insists on physical contact (wrestling, hugging, kissing) even when child does not want it
  - Turns to child for support and comfort by sharing personal information normally only shared with adults
  - Makes sexual or suggestive jokes around child
  - Spends an unusual amount of one on one, uninterrupted time with a child
  - Buys gifts, treats one child as the favorite





# Sexual Abuse

- Approx. 7% of cases
- Invisible abuse
- 80% victims deny or minimize
- Children lie about sexual abuse <1% of time
- May include
  - Touching
  - Fondling
  - Kissing
  - Sexual assault
  - Video taping sexual acts
- Indicators
  - Sexual knowledge and behaviors that are not age appropriate
  - Unexplained physical complaints in genital area
  - Significant change in routine/behavior
  - Secretive behavior, including use of internet and technology



## Signs of Sexual Abuse in Child

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts an STI
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or other caregiver



## Impact

**Traumatic Sexualization:** Aversive feelings, overvaluing sex, sexual identity problems

**Stigmatization:** guilt, shame, embarrassment, self-destructive behavior

**Betrayal:** Difficulty trusting others, relationship problems

**Powerlessness:** Vulnerability and victimization

Source: Finkelhor et al., *Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*.

# Factors that Influence Recovery

- Psychotherapy
- Child age/developmental level
- Frequency and duration of abuse
- Relationship to the abuser
- Intrusiveness
- Degree of force used
- Passage of time
- Extra-familial supports
- Telling a caregiver/length of time between act(s) and disclosure (being believed!)
- **Maternal/family support - #1 predictor**

Source: American Psychological Association



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# Activity

What do you know?



# Prevention Techniques

There are policies and practices you can do to protect both the children you work with and yourself including:

- Avoiding one on one interactions
- Documenting
- Communicating



# Avoiding One on One Interaction

Try to avoid any one on one interactions with students behind closed doors. So...

- Always have another adult in the room.
- Open all practices to parents and encourage them to come.
- If you need to have a one on one talk with a child, do it in a public place where people can see you, but not hear you.
- If you find yourself in a one on one situation with a child, get creative! Call a co-worker or have the child call their parent.



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# Communicating

Communicate to parents and other professionals on:

- Standard procedures at practice.
- Expectations of students and other coaches.
- How you are actively working to keep kids safe.

Communicate with children on:

- Your coaching techniques around touching.
- Rules around touching at practice (i.e. slaps on the rear-end).
- Expectations in how they interact with others in the locker room.





# Out of Program Contact Restrictions

There are two types of out-of-program contact restrictions;

#1: Limit youth contact with employees/volunteers to:

- Organization-sanctioned activities and programs.
- Certain locations, such as activities within your organization's building.

#2: Monitor contact between youth and people unaffiliated with your agency by:

- Developing a system for monitoring the comings and goings of all youth and adults who enter and leave your facility.
- Developing specific policies about interactions between youth and people not affiliated with your organization if it is located in a building that houses more than just your program or if your organization's activities take place in public areas (e.g., sports field).



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# Documenting

If a student is:

- Saying inappropriate things to you or about you.
- Invading your personal space.
- Privately messaging you.

Call out the behavior immediately, document, and share it with administration and caregivers.

If a student makes a disclosure of abuse to you:

- Follow the steps of the CA/N discovery process. (Card provided in your handouts)
- Report it to the CPS hotline or 9-1-1.
- Know any organizational policies or procedures surrounding the disclosure and follow through accordingly.



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## Don't be shy...

Tell parents that you have been trained on sexual abuse prevention with children, especially if you are coaching a sport such as swimming or gymnastics where sexual abuse of children has been prevalent in the past.

- Acknowledge the problem
- Explicitly say how you are protecting their child
- Ask if they have any questions

This conversation may also be preventative. Educated parents may prompt other organizations to adopt similar practices to protect children.

# Scenario #1

You are the music director of an afterschool arts program. One day on your way back into your office after rehearsal, you notice one of your musicians following you to your office. You don't think anything of it until you walk into your office and put your bag down on your desk on the other side of the room. Right when you do, that youth walks into your classroom and closes the door behind her.

What do you do?

Could you prevent this?

## Scenario #3

You're coaching the boys high school baseball team. One of the assistant coaches is a 24 year old female and you notice that she arrives at and leaves every practice with one of the senior players. He often will ask her for hitting or fielding advice and when she works with him, there is a lot of touching. More so than she does with the other players on the team. You have also heard other players giving him a hard time and insinuating that they are together.

What do you do?

Could you prevent this?

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## For more information...

Please check out our **Child Abuse and Neglect 101** training, which goes into greater detail about how to handle disclosures or child abuse or neglect.

And for more information about sexual abuse prevention, check out **Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children**. A nationally certified training centered on how we all have a role to end child sexual abuse.

**THANK YOU!**