



It's time ... to talk about it! Talk early, talk often. Prevent sexual violence.

## Resource for advocates, educators & preventionists

Sexual violence preventionists play an important role in teaching individuals valuable skills to create healthy and violence-free communities. One of the ways this can happen, specifically around child sexual abuse prevention, is by engaging adults in accurate and productive conversations about child development.

### How can preventionists support healthy, respectful, and safe communities?

Accessible information that supports adults in understanding healthy childhood sexual development and the role this plays in protecting children from abuse is the foundation for lasting social change. When adults and community members take responsibility for ending abuse, social norms and expectations change.

Effective child sexual abuse prevention programming engages adults who play a role in the lives of children, including (NSVRC, 2011):

- Parents, caretakers, or other family members
- Professionals who work with children (e.g., teachers, day care providers, health care providers, coaches, or advocates)
- Other members of the public, especially potential bystanders (e.g., community member and neighbors)
- Members of groups that can influence community or societal policies, actions, and behaviors to prevent child sexual abuse (such as policy makers, media, and corporate leaders).

Prevention programming for adults to promote healthy childhood sexual development should not only focus on how adults interact with and support children. Effective child sexual abuse prevention must prepare adults to be able to talk with other adults. Adults are responsible for sharing information, modeling positive behaviors and addressing inappropriate actions with one another. This also equips adults to address developmentally expected behaviors of children and respect healthy boundaries.

### Step One: Assessing comfort level

Understanding childhood sexual development helps individuals promote healthy development, set appropriate boundaries, and recognize signs of unhealthy or abusive behaviors with the children and adults in their lives. As discussed in the *An overview of healthy childhood sexual development* (NSVRC, 2013), many adults have not had sexuality education, and this can impact their level of knowledge and comfort about healthy childhood sexual development. It is important for educators to be prepared to engage with adults who may consider the topic of children and sexuality taboo, inappropriate,



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or uncomfortable. Practitioners also need to acknowledge their own questions, discomfort, and values related to healthy childhood sexual development. By assessing one's comfort and knowledge of this topic, it will be easier to gain information and support.

## Step Two: Resource for support

There is a wealth of online and print resources for preventionists working to end child sexual abuse - having the tools and information to create powerful change can help programs engage communities. The resources listed below offer information on talking to parents about communicating with children, as well as curricula to use when talking with parents, service providers, and community members.

- **Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC):**  
*"She did WHAT?" "He said WHAT?" How to Respond to Children's Sexual Behaviors*  
<http://barcc.org/information/educators/ece>

- **Our Whole Lives:**  
*Sexuality curricula for parents and adults*  
<http://www.uua.org/re/owl/faq/parents/index.shtml>

- **National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation:**  
*National Plan to Prevent the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children*  
<http://www.preventtogether.org/Resources/Documents/NationalPlan2012FINAL.pdf>

- **Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR):**  
*Where we live: A manual for engaging parents in child sexual abuse prevention*  
[http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/Where%20We%20Live\\_web.pdf](http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/Where%20We%20Live_web.pdf)

- **Planned Parenthood Federation of America:**  
*Talking With Kids of Sex and Sexuality*  
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/talking-kids-about-sex-sexuality-37962.htm>

- **Stop it Now!:**  
*Let's talk: Speaking up to prevent child sexual abuse*  
[http://www.stopitnow.org/files/Lets\\_Talk.pdf](http://www.stopitnow.org/files/Lets_Talk.pdf)

## Step Three: Give it a try

Understanding childhood sexual development is a core concept that can strengthen a variety of prevention programs and goals. Consider sharing content about healthy childhood sexual development in your existing prevention efforts and partnerships. Additionally, explore resources that can be adapted to discuss this prevention approach with parents, individuals who work with children, and members of your community.

## Opportunities to engage adults in prevention

The above curricula, *Where we live*, has a workshop focused entirely on giving parents the skills to discuss sexuality and sexual development with children within the context of child sexual abuse prevention. Similarly, the *Our Whole Lives* resource for parents reaffirms parents as the primary sources for children on topics related to sexuality and sexual development. These resources can be used by preventionists in the anti-sexual violence movement, as well as in collaboration with community partners and educators in allied professions.



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In addition to new curricula or programming, existing programming can be modified to engage parents and adults in discussions of sexual abuse prevention:

- Plan educational sessions or workshops for adults that run parallel to or at the same time as child personal safety educational programs. Educators, school professionals, and parents can receive the same messages that will be delivered to students, while also receiving information and skills to engage in prevention.
  - Support adults in talking about healthy sexual development and modeling appropriate boundaries with other adults. Preventing child sexual abuse means that adults talk with other adults about healthy sexual development and model positive behaviors to create larger environments that are safe for children. Modeling appropriate boundaries includes encouraging communication between adults such as parents talking with one another about family rules. For example, "We knock before opening the door when someone is in the bathroom." Those rules can be used to inform other adults about the expectation to respect boundaries and the child's privacy.
  - Review policies with local child-care providers, school communities, and community organizations on mandated reporting procedures, training and education. The expertise of preventionists can support institutions and organizations in their ability to respond to abuse and in creating spaces where everyone is safe and the responsibility of prevention is on adults.
- Prevention messaging that provides a basic explanation of healthy childhood sexual development in resource materials and public education campaigns can empower members of the general public to see their role in child sexual abuse prevention. This message does not need to stand alone, and incorporating discussion of healthy sexual development and sexuality into an overall prevention framework may be a more effective way to approach capacity and outreach.
  - Targeting policymakers, media and corporate leaders in your community is a strategy to impact policies and larger-scale actions to support child sexual abuse prevention. Engaging these adults in your prevention efforts can influence standards, institutions, and legislation toward overall societal impact.

## References

National Sexual Violence Resource Center . (2011). *Child sexual abuse prevention: Programs for adults*. Available at <http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/child-sexual-abuse-prevention-programs-adults>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2013). *An overview of healthy childhood sexual development*. Retrieved from [insert URL for pdf] or Available from <http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/current-campaign>