

Building partnerships with youth organizations

Children and adolescents spend a significant amount of time involved in athletic teams, camps, clubs, and faith-based groups. For this reason, youth-serving organizations play a pivotal role in creating safe places for young people to play, learn, and grow.

Youth-serving organizations can also support children and youth in developing healthy and respectful attitudes and behaviors and a life-long commitment to nonviolence. This resource offers strategies for sexual assault centers to partner with youth-serving organizations to prevent sexual violence. These recommendations can also be used by youth-serving organizations in their efforts to support the development of healthy, safe, and happy young people.

Getting started

Identifying partners is the first step. To begin, make a list of the groups and organizations in your community that serve children and youth. This list might include faith-based youth groups, Big Brothers Big Sisters, youth theater organizations, the YMCA/YWCA, and your local library. Think big when it comes to potential partners and consider schools, athletic programs, and scouts. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) community groups, Planned Parenthood, and other local resources often have youth groups. Children and youth have an opportunity every day to come into contact with safe, supportive adults who can play a role in creating a healthy community.

Highlight shared goals

Partnerships grow out of the shared goal of creating safe environments for children and youth. Approach the leaders of these groups with a specific request, such as training adult staff and volunteers about preventing and responding to sexual abuse within the organization. Give the group practical information, like warning signs that an adult is violating a young person's boundaries and how to intervene. You may want to prepare a brief handout so that they can refer back to the information later.

Sexual violence prevention is a valued priority when organizations invest in creating policies that protect young people and create spaces where respect and trust are paramount. Work with leaders at youth-serving organizations to make sure they have clear policies and procedures regarding:

- Screening employees and volunteers
- Defining, identifying, and responding to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and interactions between adults and young people
- Reporting and responding to violations of the organization's policies

- Reporting allegations or suspicions of child abuse
- Training and education on child sexual abuse prevention and response (Saul & Audage, 2007; Tabachnick, 2013).

One safe, supportive adult can make all the difference in the life of a young person. Empower adults in youth-serving organizations to be that person.

Engage youth in prevention

In addition to working with youth-serving organizations to help prevent sexual abuse within their programs, offer to partner with them to engage the children and youth in sexual violence prevention programming. As respected mentors and role models, adult staff and volunteers at youth-serving organizations can have a powerful influence in promoting healthy and respectful attitudes and behaviors among young people.

Discuss ways in which the mission and activities of their organization may intersect with the goals and strategies of sexual violence prevention. Explore possible connections to topics such as healthy sexuality, media literacy, or bystander intervention. Youth-serving organizations often have more flexibility in their schedules and activities than schools, making it easier to offer multi-session, skill-building violence prevention programs to children and youth in these settings.

Supporting youth leadership and promoting positive youth development are core goals for many youth-serving organizations and community-based rape crisis centers. Work together to provide young people with training

and resources to become leaders for social change in their communities. Youth involvement in sexual violence prevention efforts is a powerful way for young people to use their talents and creativity to make a difference. Encourage them to brainstorm their own unique ideas for raising awareness and preventing sexual violence.

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Grow the partnership

Once you have established partnerships with youth-serving organizations, continue to explore additional opportunities for working together. Adults, youth, and children in these organizations may want to have a fundraiser, plan or volunteer at an awareness event, or participate in other activities to help address and prevent sexual violence in their community.

Resources

Resources on preventing child sexual abuse in youth-serving organizations

- **Darkness to Light:** www.d2l.org
- **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:** www.missingkids.com
- **Stop It Now!:** www.stopitnow.org
- **Enough Abuse Campaign:** www.enoughabuse.org

- **Safe to Compete:** www.safetocompete.org
- **Safe Sport:** www.safesport.org

Resources on engaging youth in sexual violence prevention

- **Best practices for engaging youth as partners in sexual violence prevention:**

<http://nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-sexual-assault-awareness-month-guides/best-practices-engaging-youth>

- **Becoming an agent of change: A guide for youth activists:**

<http://nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-sexual-assault-awareness-month-guides/becoming-agent-social-change>

- **Media savvy youth: Challenging pop culture messages that contribute to sexual violence:**

<http://www.wcsap.org/media-savvy-youth-challenging-pop-culture-messages>

- **NSVRC's Engaging Bystanders to Prevent Sexual Violence information packet:**

<http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-information-packets/engaging-bystanders-prevent-sexual-violence>

References

Saul, J., & Audage, N. C. (2007). *Preventing child sexual abuse within youth-serving organizations: Getting started on policies and procedures*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/PreventingChildSexualAbuse-a.pdf>

Tabachnick, J. (2013). *A practical guide to make your organization safer*. Retrieved from Enough Child Sexual Abuse: <http://www.enoughabuse.org/the-campaign/gatekeepers-for-kids.html>