Social-Emotional Learning as a Component of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is critical to empowering youth with the skills to recognize, report, and refuse sexual abuse, as well as to help prevent youth from offending.

Child Sexual Abuse Is Widespread

Child sexual abuse is reported to affect one in four girls and one in 20 boys in the United States, a statistic that's probably even lower due to vast underreporting, with those affected often experiencing long-lasting negative effects.[1]

Some Youth Might Be at Greater Risk

Child sexual abuse affects youth from all backgrounds. There's also increased risk of vulnerability for youth who identify as LGBTQ,[2] are living in foster care, disabled, homeless, or have run away.[3]

> SEL is integral to a comprehensive research-based child sexual abuse prevention program, with a multifaceted approach that helps children feel safe and supported and prevents child sexual abuse.[8]

Child Sexual Abuse Is Preventable

The most effective way to prevent child sexual abuse—including responding to diverse needs[4]—is twofold. Train all the adults who interact with youth, and teach students the skills for recognizing, reporting, and refusing sexual abuse.[5] An early, school-based child sexual abuse prevention program[6] can accomplish this with a comprehensive approach that includes research-based strategies for policies and procedures, staff training, student lessons, and family education.[7]

Child sexual abuse currently is reported to affect **1 in 4** girls and **1 in 20** boys in the United States

SEL Lays the Foundation for Prevention

- One focus of prevention for young people is to promote skills that prevent victimization and that lead to disclosure if targeting or victimization occurs.[5]

- Evidence-based SEL programs teach children to be assertive and ask for help in difficult and dangerous situations; assertiveness skills lay the foundation to recognize unsafe and sexually abusive behaviors, immediately report those behaviors to an adult, and assertively refuse the situation when possible.[8]

- SEL strengthens protective factors that decrease a child's vulnerability to potential harm.[9]

- SEL can also help prevent people from engaging in harmful sexual behavior before it occurs, by fostering their empathy, conflict management, and interpersonal and healthy relationship skills.[10]

- SEL provides benefits to kids across all backgrounds.[11]

For more information, go to **cfchildren.org/policy-advocacy**

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Policy Recommendations

- Create a framework for schools to equitably provide developmentally appropriate, evidence-based awareness, prevention, and protection instruction concerning sexual abuse and assault.

- Create a framework for schools to provide periodic evidence-based educator training on prevention, identification, and intervention for sexual abuse of young people.

- Provide sustainable funding streams for schools to implement SEL as a Tier I intervention on a continuum of student supports.

- Provide funding to support research-based prevention strategies and to continue research to improve and evaluate promising prevention practices.

- Develop programs and other supports that specifically address youth who might be at greater risk.

- Develop programs and other supports that are responsive to diverse influences on disclosure and reporting.

- Promote students' access to social-emotional competency development in educational settings.

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