

A
Practical
Guide to
Make Your
Organization
Safer



Gatekeepers for Kids
preventing sexual abuse in youth-serving organizations



Safety Plans for Organizations Working with Children and Teens

Introduction

Every year, in youth-serving organizations across the U.S. an estimated 35 million adults come into contact with more than 70 million children and teens. Within these organizations our children* learn new skills, build self-esteem, and are challenged to explore worlds that might not be available to them at home. Unfortunately, the same factors that create a nurturing environment for children may also increase a child's vulnerability by providing "cover" and access to children that sexual abusers seek. Without a comprehensive strategy to prevent sexual abuse, those who work in youth-serving organizations and programs are not sufficiently equipped to protect our children from this risk.

Research clearly shows that children need safe nurturing touch and the opportunity to explore the kind of new situations which so many youth-serving organizations provide. However, the often misguided response to the potential threat of child sexual abuse has been to create rigid "no touch" policies. This may mean eliminating some activities, taking away valuable mentoring or adventure opportunities for children and reducing opportunities for staff and children to interact in safe, healthy, and spontaneous ways. The Enough Abuse Campaign supports an alternative approach – a comprehensive strategy that reduces the risk of sexual abuse while ensuring that children are provided with the trusting and positive guidance they need to grow and thrive.

Approach

The strategies needed to keep children safer must be tailored to fit an organization's circumstances, mission, and resources. These include, but are not limited to, legal requirements, physical space, the special vulnerabilities or disabilities of children served, and an organization's unique strengths and leadership.

The question of where to begin can be overwhelming, especially to smaller organizations that don't have resources to hire consultants to guide them through the process, or specialized staff that can focus on youth safety. For organizations with limited resources, this booklet offers some simple suggestions that can significantly reduce the risks of sexual abuse for children and teens, employees and volunteers.

Framing Safety in Youth-Serving Organizations

Retrospective surveys tell us that one in four women and one in six men report having been sexually abused before age 18. In fact, it is estimated that there are 39 million Americans living today who have been the victims of child sexual abuse; one-third are still children. What does this mean for most youth-serving organizations? The question is not "if" sexual abuse will affect the organization, but "when" will the organization face this issue and "how" will it respond in a way that does not re-traumatize children or their families.

The Basics

The Enough Abuse Campaign suggests that every youth-serving organization, regardless of its size, resources, or mission, implement three basic strategies. Visit the Enough Abuse Campaign at www.enoughabuse.org for fact sheets and detailed information about each of these strategies.

1
Educate
Everyone

2
Screen
Applicants

3
Create
Reporting
Procedures





1. Educate: Provide education for all staff, volunteers and families whose children you serve.

Educate everyone about the facts of child sexual abuse, including:

- ⇒✦ Touching and non-touching sexual offenses
- ⇒✦ The red flags of abusive behaviors
- ⇒✦ Signs that a child or teen might have been sexually abused
- ⇒✦ Ways adults and communities can prevent child sexual abuse from happening in the first place

Some organizations may continue to hold on to the myth that “sexual abuse just doesn’t happen here.” Education about child sexual abuse provided by skilled and supervised trainers can demonstrate to an organization’s staff, volunteers, board, and funders that sexual abuse will not be tolerated and

the organization is willing and ready to respond. Linking this new awareness to simple actions and prevention strategies creates a safer organization for children and adolescents.

The Enough Abuse Campaign and our community partners offer educational workshops for organizations, staff, parents and volunteers. The training programs can be tailored to meet the knowledge level of trainees, focus on the unique needs of serving children and teens of different ages, and be responsive to any specific circumstances that generated the organization’s interest in introducing new safety trainings and policies. They outline the behavior signs that might indicate an adult, teen or child poses a sexual risk; describe behaviors and physical signs that might indicate a child or teen has been sexually abused; help establish appropriate responses to disclosures; and build skills to support adults taking actions to prevent child sexual abuse *from ever happening* in the first place.

2. Screen: Enforce screening policies for all staff and volunteers who apply for a position.

Effective screening tools ensure hiring the right staff or volunteers to work with children.

The hiring of new staff or the selection of new volunteers or interns provides opportunities to create barriers to those who might seek to harm children. Comprehensive screening is the first line of defense for any youth-serving organization committed to keeping high risk individuals from working with children. Consider each position in your organization and determine the level of screening that position requires. For example, a night watchman in a non-residential program does not need the same level of screening as a volunteer mentor working one-on-one with a child.

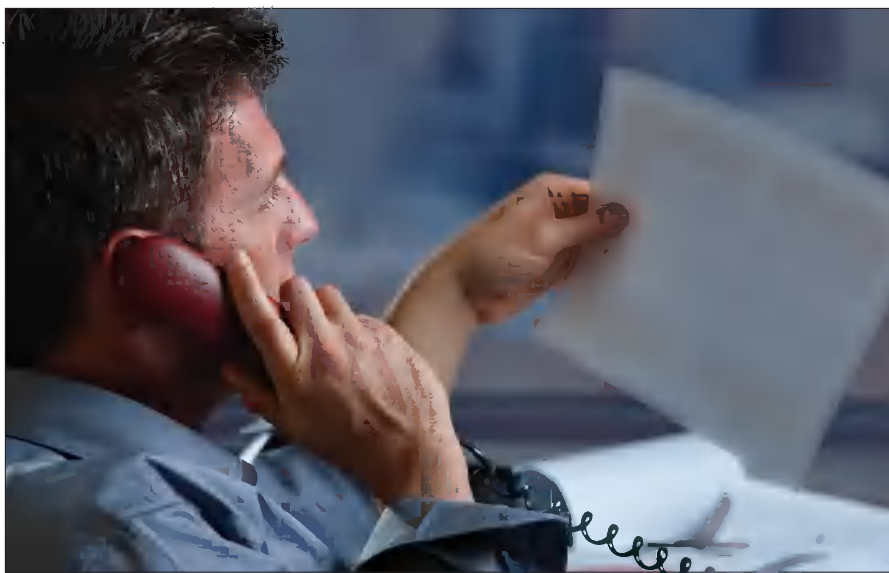
The Enough Abuse Campaign can provide guidance on how to:

- ⇒ Communicate your organization's commitment to child safety in your introduction to the interview;
- ⇒ Conduct an informative reference check and if needed, a criminal background check;
- ⇒ Ask questions that will help you better assess the person, not just the person for the job;
- ⇒ Identify red flags around inappropriate boundaries and sexual behaviors;
- ⇒ Assess applicant responses that should trigger disqualification;
- ⇒ Respond to an applicant's disclosure of inappropriate or illegal behavior;
- ⇒ Reduce the chances he or she will seek employment with another youth-serving organization.



"The release of our report today marks the beginning of a process for Penn State, and not the end. It is critical that . . . the Penn State community never forget these failures and commit themselves to strengthening an open, compliant and victim sensitive environment – where everyone has the duty to "blow the whistle" on anyone who breaks this trust, no matter how powerful or prominent they may appear to be."

Louis Freeh Report, July 12, 2012



3. Report: Establish clear procedures for reporting any allegation of sexual abuse.

Every youth-serving organization needs to know how to respond appropriately to an allegation of sexual abuse. In fact, all youth-serving organizations are legally required to report suspected cases. Establishing a clear process for handling allegations by adults or disclosures from children or youth will ensure that when a case comes to light, everyone in the organization will know how to respond in a professional and timely way. Establishing contact and a relationship with the local child protective services office will make it easier to report if/when that is necessary.

Each state has established a clear process for the reporting of child abuse by mandated reporters and citizens and, when appropriate, to state or private program licensors. But this is only part of what is needed to respond to the trauma and fear that is often generated by this kind of report. The Enough Abuse Campaign can help an organization identify the resources within each community and establish a system of support based on these resources for the alleged victim and his or her family.

Celebrate Accomplishments

Once the three basics are in place, ensure that these new training, screening and reporting policies are integrated within the organization. Make sure that every staff and volunteer is fully aware of them. Consider including information about these new practices in the personnel policies handbook so that every prospective, new and current employee knows that the organization takes the risk of sexual abuse seriously. Then take time to step back and celebrate accomplishments. Let Board members, funders, your youth-serving colleagues, and local media know that this organization is firmly committed to keeping the children in its care safe and has taken concrete steps to ensure that. Once done, it may be time to assess if their organization has the capacity or need to consider other protections to reduce the potential risks to children, adolescents, families, staff and volunteers.

Assessment



Before expanding on the basics, your organization may first want to conduct a self-assessment which would help you identify and build upon existing strengths. Then consider developing a multi-year plan to address any remaining gaps that have surfaced and that may place children at risk of harm from sexual abuse. One important caution: if an organization adopts additional policies and procedures that it cannot consistently implement, it may open itself up to additional liability. It is critical, therefore, that an organization develop a plan that it has the capacity to fully implement.

Caution: if an organization adopts policies and procedures that it cannot consistently implement, it may open itself to additional liability.

The Enough Abuse Campaign can provide an organization with an easy-to-use self-assessment tool to review the policies and procedures already in place and explore ways to address any particular vulnerabilities presented by the organization's mission and the unique needs of the children and adolescents it serves. The tool helps an organization assess if its physical facility and grounds are fully safe and if interactions between children and adults, and children and children are always observable. It can help an organization consider the strength of the entrance and

exit practices for children, parents and other visitors; focus on the need to establish clear policies about offsite trips; and establish a policy that describes the positive and appropriate interactions between adults and children.

The Enough Abuse Campaign makes available specially trained consultants to help assess an organization's current policies and safety strengths, and discuss the benefits and possible liabilities for implementing these additional protections. For more information about conducting a self-assessment, go to www.enoughabuse.org.

Policies to Consider

Here are additional ways to strengthen even further your organization’s safety strategies for children and youth:

4
Create a
Code of Conduct

5
Modify
Physical Spaces

6
Match Policies
to Mission

Create a Code of Conduct



A code of conduct allows an organization to set standards for age-appropriate healthy interactions between adults, adults and youth, and between youth. In a positive way, it can provide guidelines for appropriate language, dress, and demonstrations of support and encouragement. It also allows an organization to establish protocols to address inappropriate behaviors and breaches in policy. Through supervision, staff orientation and parent conversations,

the organization can reinforce appropriate interactions and intervene when interactions are inappropriate, coercive or may become abusive. Monitoring both the performance and the interactions between staff, volunteers and youth sends a clear message to everyone that the organization supports a culture that is seriously committed to safety. Once that culture is established, everyone can then share in the responsibility for maintaining the safety of children and youth.

The Enough Abuse Campaign offers trainings that educate youth-serving staff and parents about how to respond to inappropriate behaviors between adults and children. Since a third or more of sexual abuse involves child to child offenses, it also provides education about what are considered “developmentally expected” sexual behaviors of children and teens and how to distinguish these typical behaviors from those that are problematic for the child or other children. Importantly, adults are educated about how to respond to these behaviors in ways that model good communication, empathy and accountability for one’s behavior and its effects on others.

Key to child safety is a well-coordinated response that effectively addresses any violation of the established code of conduct.



Modify Physical Spaces

Key Principles:

- ⇒ Visibility
- ⇒ Access
- ⇒ Security

Many small organizations use a facility that was designed for another purpose. Taking the time to examine an organization's buildings and grounds offers a chance to identify strategies to remove any vulnerable areas. The key principles to consider in this review are ways to increase visibility, monitor all points of access, and enhance security. While certain improvements could be costly, many are low or no-cost solutions. For example, to increase visibility within a facility where children learn and play, a simple strategy is to add windows to all doors that need to be closed. To provide more oversight to people coming and going from a facility, a simple "check-in procedure" can be established at all entrances.

To address problematic areas that are not easily visible, an organization can consider locking off a section or installing mirrors or cameras to make those spaces more observable.

The Enough Abuse Campaign can help assess the physical space used by an organization by providing a new set of eyes that can objectively scan a facility and offer suggestions for safety improvements.





Match Policies to Mission

There are many additional policies an organization can implement, including but not limited to, the ratio of child and/or teen to adult caregiver, or the appropriate use of social media. However, beyond the basic suggestions, where do you start? Each of the policies chosen by an organization will depend in part upon the mission and values of the organization and the programs it offers.

For example, the guidelines for parent and guardian visits in a summer sleep-over camp for adolescents will be very different than an afterschool program for kindergarten. Typically, an early education program for infants and young children will welcome family participation or observation and utilize that time to enhance the attachment of child and family while an adolescent program will be focused on helping these young people explore their independence and build their self-esteem. Faith-based organizations with a commitment to minister to everyone may need to have a policy about how to safely integrate someone who has sexually abused into some of the congregational settings. Obviously a mentoring program would not even consider this option.

The Enough Abuse Campaign has a variety of sample policies to share that can help streamline this process of consideration. When choosing policies or before introducing specific protocols, an organization should consider matching them to its mission and values.

"... it's a good time for the entire country to do some soul-searching... Our No. 1 priority has to be protecting our kids... Every institution has to examine how it operates, and every individual has to take responsibility for making sure that our kids are protected."

President Barack Obama in response to the Penn State scandal



Safety Plan

Youth-serving organizations are key to achieving our collective goal of ensuring that every child be safe wherever they live, learn and play. Putting together a feasible plan that matches the organization's mission and committing adequate resources to implement these new safety strategies can significantly reduce the risks of sexual abuse for children and youth. To recap – here are the essential elements of a comprehensive child safety plan that an organization should consider adopting.

The Basics for Every Organization

1. Educate staff and volunteers about child sexual abuse and its prevention as a fundamental building block for safety.
2. Establish a comprehensive screening procedure to ensure that all employees and volunteers are properly vetted and given the tools and information to work safely with children.
3. Implement a clear protocol for responding to allegations or disclosures of sexual abuse and reporting to police and/or child protective services.

After implementing the three basics and completing the self-assessment, an organization may decide it has the need and capacity to do more to reduce risks.

Policies to Consider

4. Create a code of conduct for the staff, volunteers and the children and youth served by the organization that establishes a culture of zero tolerance for sexual abuse and identifies early and promptly the kinds of boundary-violating behaviors that can lead to it.
5. Address physical space issues to further reduce risks at minimal or no expense.
6. Select or craft policies tailored to the specific mission and activities of the organization to ensure that policies are relevant and practical, not burdensome.

Once a decision is made for a safety plan, it is critical that the organization set a realistic timeframe to implement any new changes. A part of that plan should be an organizational commitment to regularly review safety policies and progress in implementing them. This review guarantees that new employees and volunteers understand the policies, and that information and protocols are kept visible and not set aside. An annual assessment is important to monitor ongoing improvements and trigger revisions that reflect the changing environment.

A safety plan that is clearly implemented and promoted can strengthen an organization's recognition across the community as a responsible gatekeeper for children. Importantly, it can help ensure the fundamental right of every child to a safe and nurturing childhood.





enough secrets. enough shame. enough hurt. enough confusion. enough denial.

ENOUGH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

enoughabuse.org

For more information about how to strengthen your organization's capacity to prevent child sexual abuse and keep the children in your care safe, visit the Enough Abuse Campaign New York at www.enoughabuse.org or contact the Campaign directly at 1-800-CHILDREN.

Produced by Prevent Child Abuse New York, lead agency for the New York Partnership for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, www.preventchildabuseny.org, enoughabuse@preventchildabuseny.org

Information provided here is based upon current research and best practices. This overview should not be considered a detailed blueprint for your organization's approach to risk management and safety. For specific cases and legal questions, the Enough Abuse Campaign encourages organizations to consult an attorney for advice.

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