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Circles of Safety: Understanding the Role of Healthy Sexuality Development and Education in Sex Abuse Prevention

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Updated: Version 2.0

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Agenda – Objectives

• Define the scope and impact of sex abuse
• Reflect on professional caregiver’s role in prevention
• Describe key steps of prevention
• Understand safety planning as a prevention tool
• Enhance understanding of healthy sexuality information and support as a prevention tool
• Identify and respond to early signs of children’s sexual problem behaviors
• Develop courage, comfort and communication tools to talk about sexuality
• Practice with new skills

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Ground Rules

• Take care of yourself
• Full participation to the extent you feel able and comfortable
• Use “I” statements
• No such thing as a stupid question
• Stay afterwards if you want to talk privately
• Respect privacy
Key Concepts for Prevention

- HOPE
- ADULTS ARE RESPONSIBLE
- Learn about sex abuse
- Plan for safety
- Promote healthy sexuality development
- Recognize and respond
- Develop confidence
- Take action - speak up
- Implement prevention-focused, effective policies and procedures

Adults Setting Boundaries

Won't Children Tell Us?
The Facts

All sexual activity between an adult and a child is sexual abuse. Sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain, or even touching. If an adult engages in any sexual behavior (looking, showing, or touching) with a child to meet the adult’s interest or sexual needs, it is sexual abuse.

Sexual touching between children can also be harmful, and in some cases abusive.

Additional Forms of Sexual Abuse

- Online Illegal Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)
- Sexual Exploitation and Internet Sex Crimes

The Scope of Sex Abuse

60% of child sex trafficking victims rescued through FBI raids across the U.S. in 2013 were from foster care or group homes.

1 in 6 of 18,500+ youth reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2017) were the victims of child sex trafficking.

15% of Youth/Young Adults experiencing homelessness had been trafficked for sex, and 32% had been involved in the sex trade in some way (Wolfe, 2017).
Family Safety Planning Rules

- Respect
- Consent
- Privacy
- Boundaries
- Body autonomy
- Touching behaviors

Children’s Sexual Behaviors

Healthy Sexuality & Sexual Development

- Infancy and Toddler
- Preschool (3-5)
- Young School Age (6-8)
- Pre-teen (9-12)
- Adolescent (teen)
Children’s Sexual Behaviors

Children’s sexual behaviors are different from adult sexual behaviors.

Prevention Levels

- Safe, healthy, developmentally appropriate: Respond & Reinforce
- Concerning, inappropriate: Protect & Respond
- Harmful, sexual abuse: Systemic Response & Safety Planning

What is Your Role?

What do you want, hope and do?

What do you understand as your responsibility now?
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**Reinforce Healthy Sexuality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Information-gathering process</td>
<td>• Mutual, consensual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looking and touching</td>
<td>• Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exploring with peers</td>
<td>• Often within relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Playful quality</td>
<td>• Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing friendship</td>
<td>• Sexual exploration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Healthy Sexual Development**

**Infant to Toddler**
- Curious and explore their own and others' bodies (incl. genitals)
- Self-soothing through self-stimulation
- Experience erections/vaginal lubrication
- Able to say appropriate names for body parts
- Talk openly about their bodies; enjoy nudity
- Identify as male or female, recognize difference between boys and girls

**Ages 3 to 5**
- Touch genitals for pleasure
- Role experimentation and play
- Questions, questions, questions!
- Conscious of their own body

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**Healthy Sexual Development**

**Ages 6 to 8**
- Continue sexual play and genital stimulation
- Prefer same-gender friends; affectionate behavior with peers
- Recognize taboos about sexuality, may not ask as many questions
- Begin to conform with style, dress and speech of peers
- Engage in name-calling and teasing
- Stronger self-concept in terms of gender and body image

**Ages 9 to 12**
- Enter puberty, especially girls; become more modest and private
- Romantic crushes; decision-making about sexual activity
- Concerned about being normal
- Shy asking questions of caregivers, especially regarding sexuality
- Seeks out sexuality information from the internet/media
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Healthy Sexual Development

Adolescent
- Self-conscious and self-secure
- Parent/authority relationships intense
- Pressure to become sexual
- Questioning family values and beliefs
- Advanced sexual behavior/relationships
- Practical dating matters

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Prevention Tasks
- Recognize developmentally appropriate practice and exploration
- Model and provide safe environment
- Be a safe person
- Provide accurate information
- Teach and model consent
- No secrets
- Identify and model boundaries and respect

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Prevention Tasks
- Infants and Toddlers
  - Teach language for all body parts, including genitals
  - Allow child to explore each body, do not shame them for being curious
  - Respond to questions about sexuality honestly but simply
  - Healthy physical contact
  - Provide warm, safe and loving environment
  - Allow them to say no to hugs, kisses, etc.
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Healthy Touch
- Everyone needs to be touched!
- Healthy touch prevents sexual abuse
- How to provide healthy touch
- Teaches consent
- What do you need?

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Prevention Tasks
Three to Five
- Teach and model privacy, respect, healthy boundaries
- Talk about "OK" and "Not OK" touches
- Provide age-appropriate sexuality education
- Encourage self-care
- Answer questions honestly and directly
- Teach and model consent
- Introducing surprises - NOT secrets

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Talking about Consent
- Minors cannot give informed consent - EVER
- Respect their physical boundaries
- Teach respect for other's physical boundaries
- Verbal and body language skills
- Model
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**Prevention Tasks**

**Six to Eight:**
- Provide age-appropriate information about sexuality
- Utilize media, books, situational opportunities to discuss sexual matters
- Model healthy and respectful boundaries
- Reinforce family safety planning rules

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**Safety in the Cyber World**

- Active VS passive participation
- What kids need to know
- Using safety planning

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**Prevention Tasks**

**Nine to Twelve:**
- Provide broad-based sexual health education
- Discuss and help develop problem solving, decision-making, and communication skills
- Develop and use media literacy tools, and stay informed about child’s cyber activities – discuss internet safety
- Discuss and model family values
- Promote healthy relationships
- Enhance self-esteem
**Prevention Tasks**

- Adolescents
  - Will need information and have questions about
  - Decision making
  - Social relationships and sexual customs
  - Personal values and consequences of sexual behavior
  - Encourage them to think for themselves
  - Stay involved and engaged!
  - Ask what they think

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**Actively Teach Healthy Boundaries**

- Model
- Reinforce
- Restrict

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**Responding to Children's and Teens' Questions**
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Talking to Children and Teens

Validate
Provide accurate information
What already knows

Secrecy vs. surprises
Talk about child's own behaviors

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Family Safety Planning Rules

Safety Planning Resources:
- Everyday Actions to keep kids safe
- Create A Family Safety Plan

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Talking about Sexual Abuse with Children

- Talk most about highest risk situations
- Use "practice scenarios"
- Use "child friendly" language
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**Green - Respond and Reinforce**

Educate and Support

Establish and Reinforce

Monitor

Appropriate Sexual Behaviors

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What do you understand as your responsibility now?

What do you plan to do?

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You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.

- Mahatma Gandhi