Slide 1

Circles of Safety: Understanding and Responding to Warning Signs

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Updated: Version 2.0

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Agenda - Objectives

- Understand adults' responsibilities in prevention
- Identify warning signs of inappropriate behavior and abuse in both children and adults
- Identify fears and beliefs that can impede action steps
- Develop courage, comfort, and communication tools to respond to concerning or sexually abusive behaviors
- Practice having hard conversations

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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

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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

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 sexual needs, it is sexual abuse.

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

Sexual abuse between children is often defined as when there is a significant age difference (usually 3 or more years) between the children, or if the children are very different developmentally or size-wise.

Warning Signs in Children's Behaviors
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Continuum of Youth Behaviors

Safe, healthy, developmentally-appropriate
Concerning, inappropriate
Harmful (Abuse)

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Healthy or Unhealthy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unhealthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity, Discovery, Processing</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Coercion/Control, Emotional/Verbal, Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual consent, Equal power, Spontaneous</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Manipulation, Threats, Unequal dynamics, Repetitious, Strategized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking, Touching, Showing</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Adult sex-like activity, Repressed behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun, Silly, Spirit of play</td>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>Fear, Shame, Entitled, &quot;Sneaky&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Consider the Context

- Is the behavior developmentally expected?
- Have you seen these behaviors before?
- Have you set limits before?
- Differences in age, size, development?
- Between playmates - playful quality?
- Coercion, manipulation?
- Obsessiveness?
**Warning Signs**

**Possible Sexual Abuse in Children**
- Unexplained changes in routines and habits
- Regressed behaviors
- Unexplained fears, mood swings
- Risky behavior
- Secrets
- Leaves "clues"
- Unexplained money or gifts
- Sexualized behavior

**Warning Signs**

**Youth's Own Risk of Causing Sexual Harm**
- Confused about social rules and interactions
- Inappropriately sexual or aggressive
- Misinterprets physical contact
- Insists on physical contact
- Age-appropriate sexual behaviors in inappropriate settings
- Spends time with much younger children
- Drugs and/or alcohol involved
- History of violence, own abuse
- Impulsively sexual or aggressive
- Behavior elicits complaints/continues after limits set
- Uses threats and coercion

**Talking with Youth When There are Warning Signs**
- Stay calm
- Be non-judgmental
- Show support
- Talk about behaviors – not intent
- Do not label
- Reassure them their safety is a priority
- Refer to safety plans and rules
- Let them know that adults are responsible for helping them and their environment stay safe
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Yellow - Protect and Respond

Trust your gut

Find an ally

Review and follow safety plan

Take action

Follow Up

Warning Signs

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Continuum of Youth Behaviors

Safe, healthy, developmentally appropriate

Concerning, inappropriate

Harmful (Abuse)

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Harmful Sexual Behaviors

between children:

- Uses force, bribes, and tricks
- Lacks self-control
- Behavioral and emotional compulsive
- Takes another child to secret places to play “special” games
- Links sexuality and aggression
- Takes or uses inappropriate or inappropriate “privilege” to a young child
Talking Post-Harm

- Review safety rules
- Review consent
- Talk about consequences
- Remind them that they are still a valuable person, deserving safety, support and nurturance

Abusive Behaviors

- Disclosure
  - Accused
  - Unquestioned
- Evidence

Responding to a Child’s Disclosure

- What a child needs to hear
- What a child needs you to do
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Red - System Response and Safety

- Relationship
- Reporting
- Disclosure, Evidence
- Safety
- Professional Help

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Exercise: Continuum of Youth Behaviors Practice

Concerning, inappropriate
Healthy, Active

- Think about:
  - Motivation
  - Exposure
  - Activity
  - Effort

- What is the prevention level?
- What is your response?

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Adults' Behaviors with Children and Youth

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**Barriers to Speaking Up**

- Fear of misinterpreting the situation
- Financial loss
- Fears of family disruption
- Shame and guilt
- They are the "perfect" family
- They're the "good" person
- They wanted it
- They are "too old"

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**Continuum of Adult Behaviors**

- Safe, Healthy, Developmentally Appropriate
- Concerning, Inappropriate
- Abusive

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**The Importance of Breaking Down Myths**

- I am probably well known and liked by you and your child: a nice guy offender.
- I can be a man or a woman, married or single.
- I can be an adult, adolescent, or a child.
- I can be of any race, hold any religious belief, have any sexual orientation.
- I can be a coach, teacher, family friend, parent, babysitter, or anyone who comes in contact with children.
- I can be the person who talks, inappropriately, inappropriate information to the community.
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Observing Behaviors - Not Intent

If we only knew when someone was walking down the wrong road, we might be able to stop them in their tracks, turn them around, and get them help before they harmed a child.

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Consider the Context

Think about:
- Whose needs are being met?
- Do behaviors continue after clear limits have been set?
- Is parental authority being undermined?
- Is one child singled out?
- Can a child say "no"?

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Yellow Behaviors in Adults

- Child-focused: "Too good to be true."
- Boundaries: Don't recognize what is appropriate
- Relationships: Secret or excessive interactions
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**Continuum of Adult’s Behaviors**

- **Praise, high fives, and initiated hugs, pets on the back or shoulders, etc.**
- **Playing favorites, adult initiated hugs, petting the buttocks, sexual or suggestive comments, dirty jokes, asking for personal information or photos, taking individual photos, etc.**
- **Showing pornography, watching youth undress, asking a child to touch another child sexually, any sexual activity with minor.**

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**Exercise: Continuum of Adult Behaviors**

- Safe, healthy, developmentally appropriate
- Concerning, inappropriate
- Abusive

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**Having Conversations**
Exercise: Speaking Up

What have you spoken up for?
What are you willing to speak up for?
What supports you to speak up?

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Speaking Up
- Set the tone - shared responsibility and accountability
- Be honest and genuine
- Describe the behavior
- State what you want
- Speak up and set boundaries

Communication Skills
- Language and Tone
- Avoid Labels and Intent
- Stick to the Facts
- Calm and Confident
- Respectful
- Listening Skills
- Follow up
**Practice, Practice, Practice**

- Your dentist is regularly ½ hour late
- Your neighbor’s dog has been digging holes in your yard
- Grandmother lets children stay up past their bedtime
- Your roommate always leaves a mess
- Your food has arrived cold at a fancy restaurant

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**Successful Conversations**

**DOs**

- Set the stage
- Stick to the facts
- We’re on the “same side”
- Be honest about your feelings
- Include positives
- Be prepared with information
- Create safety plan together

**DON'Ts**

- Avoid labels
- Avoid judgment
- Avoid comparisons

**After**

- Thank the adult
- Follow up

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**Speaking Up**

- I know we both care about children, I know it’s important for both of us that children in our home are safe. (Set tone/responsibility)
- I feel uncomfortable bringing this up but it’s important to me. (Be honest and genuine)
- I notice you often whisper to Marcia, and I’ve heard you mention to her to remember to keep the secret. (Describe behavior)
- I want you to follow our family’s/program rules/guidelines about whispering and keeping secrets. Our safety rules (or policies) state that adults will refrain from keeping secrets with children. I would like you to stop whispering to children and having any discussion with them about keeping a secret. (State what you want)
- Please follow our safety plan and rules (or policies and procedures). (Set boundaries)
**Practice Time!**

- Set the tone - shared responsibility and accountability
- Describe the behavior
- State what you want
- Speak up and set boundaries

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**Role Play Scenarios**

- Aunt Mary (visiting for 2 weeks) tells 6 year old in home that he is going to break lots of hearts and jokes about being younger so that she can take a "roll in the hay with him".
- A father often asks personal questions about another child in the program. He has also brought her a gift on one occasion.
- A young neighbor, Roberto, 22 years-old, has been texting a teen boy.

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**Role Play Debrief**

- What was challenging to talk about?
- What did you notice about switching roles? How did it change your perspective? How was it to observe?
- What skills came naturally?
- What skills did you notice need strengthening?
- What else??
You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.
– Mahatma Gandhi

Thank you!

stopitnow.org  facebook.com/StopItNow
Helpline: 1.888.PREVENT