



# AN EVALUATION OF STOP IT NOW!'S CIRCLES OF SAFETY PROGRAM

*This report was funded by the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, a non-profit dedicated to enriching the lives of people in Western Massachusetts. We are grateful for their support of primary child sexual abuse prevention training. We would also like to thank all of the participants who participated in and supported the Circles of Safety program during this study. Without your participation, this study would not have been possible.*

## Introduction

Despite the difficulty and sensitivity of researching the prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA), long-term research shows that in the U.S., **CSA is experienced by at least one out of four girls and one out of six boys by their 18th birthday** (APA, 2014)

*Circles of Safety* is a layered training and educational primary program, utilizing a community responsibility model that teaches adults as bystanders how to intervene safely and effectively when they see early warning signs of an adult or youth behaving inappropriately with a child.

**Goals:** Seek to enhance the likelihood that an adult will take action to prevent the sexual abuse of children through the following:

- Increasing awareness and knowledge of child sexual abuse,
- Increasing ability to recognize warning signs in people and environments,
- Increasing skills to design safety plans, and
- Increasing comfort and confidence in ability to speak up.

**Support:** The program is supported by Stop It Now! a non-profit dedicated to the prevention of child sexual abuse and Klingberg Family Centers, a multi-disciplinary and licensed child placing agency.



Stop It Now!®



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## Implementation

Circles of Safety was administered to 3 departments in one community multi-service organization in Western Massachusetts in the spring of 2018.



## Methods

To measure program impact, pre and post staff **surveys** were designed to measure changes to the knowledge and awareness of CSA issues, prevention skills, perceived changes to CSA prevention, changes in attitudes, as well as gather participant perceptions of the training program.

A **needs assessment**, including staff surveys and focus groups, was completed at the start of the project.

## Needs Assessment



- ❖ 41 participants
- ❖ 54% previously received training on sexual abuse or sexual abuse prevention

In surveys and focus groups program participants said some barriers to discussing sexuality were (1) it was an uncomfortable and sensitive topic, (2) family and cultural differences, (3) it was outside the scope of their program, and (4) a lack of training.

Participants suggested **improved training, increased reporting, and better communication** to keep children safe and increase the ability to create a safe environment.

## Findings

On average, Circles of Safety program participants who participated in a full-day training for recognizing and responding to CSA reported increases to their knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse and positive changes to their behaviors and confidence to handle sexual abuse.

### Knowledge and Awareness

	Before	After
It is an adult's responsibility to prevent child sexual abuse	83%	<b>93%</b>
Understanding healthy sexuality development can help prevent child sexual abuse	69%	<b>93%</b>
Healthy touch is important to a child's sexual development	69%	<b>89%</b>
I know the specific behaviors that constitute contact sexual abuse of children	23%	<b>84%</b>

More participants correctly responded to knowledge questions at **Posttest** than **Pretest**



On average, program participants reported that the Circles of Safety program affected their knowledge and awareness **“a great deal.”** The majority of participants **“strongly agreed”** or had positive association with program components.

- 87%** Participants said this training **increased their knowledge about healthy sexuality** for different ages “somewhat” or “a great deal”
- 98%** Participants said this training **increased their knowledge about the importance of safety planning** “somewhat” or “a great deal”

## Findings

On average, awareness to action supervisors, who participated in a 3-hour training to create community planning steps to enhance their organization's safety planning reported increases to their knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse and improvement to their ability and confidence to handle sexual abuse.

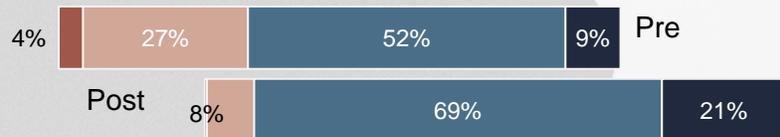
### Supervisor

- 100%** Supervisors said as a result of my participation, **"I increased my awareness of best practices** to support families to create safe homes."
- 93%** Supervisors said as a result of my participation, **"I increased my confidence to support staff and families** in my program on sexual abuse prevention best practices."
- 100%** Supervisors **expect to apply information from the training** in their work.
- 92%** Supervisors said this training **"provided opportunities to initiate action steps** to increase and improve the prevention actions of my program."
- 100%** Supervisors reported **positive satisfaction** with the training.

### Confidence

Participants reported statistically significant increases in their ability to identify and respond to warning signs of CSA for all confidence items from pre to post testing

Not at All Confident   Not Very Confident   Confident   Extremely Confident



**Participant confidence increased by 48% from pretest to posttest**

## Perceptions

- 71%** Participants said the format of the training provided them with ample opportunities for participants to meaningfully interact with each other.
- 92%** Participants said the training provided opportunities to initiate action steps to increase and improve the prevention actions of their program.

All (100%) Supervisor participants said the program was **"good" or "excellent."**

Participants shared positive feedback about their experience with the Circles of Safety Training:

*“I really liked the combination of lecture, discussion and activity. It allowed us to practice what we learned.”*

*“I am able to recognize concerning behaviors and have strategies on how to address them.”*

*“It gave me tools to recognize problems or potential problems sooner.”*

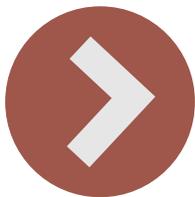
The aspects of the training that were most helpful were “recognizing behaviors and knowing how to approach them was very helpful because it’s better to know than not know.”

*“I have a greater understanding of how to work with children on sexual development, healthy/unhealthy behaviors, and a general better awareness/understanding of child sexual abuse.”*

## Recommendations

Participants offered suggestions to improve the Circles of Safety program including:

- hosting a longer training
- facilitating more group interactions
- hosting follow up training via online modules
- adjusting some terminology during the training



### NEXT STEPS

- Develop more webinars and workshops on ongoing safety planning activities
- Deliver the program to a larger sample
- Assess long-term impacts by tracking program and participant progress over time
- Collect data from a comparison group to measure changes between groups
- Consider developing a healthy sexuality program for children