Slide 1

Circles of Safety:
Understanding and Responding to Warning Signs

Slide 2

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

Slide 3

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

- 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 interest or 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.

Children's Behaviors
Slide 7

Continuum of Behaviors

Safe, Healthy, Appropriate
Concerning, Inappropriate
Harmful (Abuse)

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Healthy or Unhealthy???

- Motivation - Why?
- Dynamic - Power Differentials, Repetitious, Spontaneity, Mutuality
- Activity - How mature/adult-like? Mutual?
- Affect - When “caught”, Playful vs. “Sneaky”, Defensive, Private, Entitled

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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?
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**Warning Signs**

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

**Protect & Respond**

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**Warning Signs: Youth’s own risk of causing sexual harm**

- Confused about social rules and interactions
- Anxious, depressed or seeming to need help
- Impulsively sexual or aggressive

**Protect & Respond**

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**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
### Slide 13

**Protect and Respond**

- Follow Up
- Trust yourself
- Find an ally
- Warning Signs
- Take action
- Review and follow safety plan

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### Slide 14

**Continuum of Behaviors**

- Safe, Healthy, Appropriate
- Concerning, Inappropriate
- Harmful (Abuse)

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### Slide 15

**Children’s Harmful Sexual Behaviors**

- Uses force, bribes, and tricks
- Lacks self-control
- Behavior elicits complaints
- Takes vulnerable children to "secret" places to play "special" games
- Links sexuality and aggression
- Sexually harassing behavior
- Offers alcohol/drugs, sexual materials or inappropriate "privileges" to a young child

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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

Children's Own Abuse

- Disclosure
- Accidental
- Purposeful
- Evidence

Responding to a Child’s Disclosure

- What a child needs to hear
- What a child needs you to do
Slide 19
Red – System Response and Safety

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

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Continuum of Children’s Behaviors

Practice

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

- What are your questions: Motivation, Dynamic, Activity, Affect?
- What is the prevention level?
- What is your response?
- Role play

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Your role now?

What do you understand as your responsibility now?

What do you plan to do?
Slide 22

Returning to the Scope

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Slide 23

What are the barriers?

Fears
Beliefs

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Adult Behaviors

Safe, Healthy, Developmentally Appropriate
Concerning, Inappropriate
Harmful

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___________________________________
There is no such thing as a "typical" offender
• Any Age
• All Economic Backgrounds
• Any race or culture
• Any religious belief
• Any gender or sexual orientation

Myth Busting!

The importance of warning signs
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.
**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
- Concerning, Inappropriate
- Boundaries
- Relationships

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**Continuum of Behaviors**

- Showing pornography, watching youth undress, any sexual activity with others
- Playing favorites, adult initiated hugs, petting the buttocks, verbal or suggested comments, dirty jokes, asking for personal telephone or email, taking individual photos, etc.
- Praise, high fives, child initiated hugs, pats on the back or shoulders

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Exercise: Continuum of Adult Behaviors

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

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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

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Communication Skills

- Language and Tone
- Avoid Labels and Intent
- Stick to the Facts
- Calm and Confident
- Respectful
- Listening Skills
- Follow up
I know we both care about children; I know it’s important for both of us that children in our home/program 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/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 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)

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**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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**Slide 36**

**Your response?**

- 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 – a girl – in the program. He has also brought her a gift on one occasion.
- A young neighbor, Roberto – 22 year old, has been texting a teen boy.
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