

## **SECTION 6: Training About Child Sexual Abuse Prevention**

### **Executive Summary**

Creating a set of abuse prevention policies and procedures, enhanced screening and hiring practices, safe physical environment and safe technology standards, codes of conduct, and responding and reporting requirements are all necessary steps that help YSOs create comprehensive frameworks to protect the children and youth they serve. But creating these safety elements and handing them out to managers, supervisors, employees and volunteers while announcing that they are in effect is, by itself, inadequate as an implementation strategy. That is why the Task Force recommends that YSOs also provide some form of initial and periodic follow-up training on the organization's prevention strategies for staff and volunteers (and, for some, this also includes children/youth) at all levels. This section addresses some of the best practices guidance that exists to help YSO leadership think about the elements of effective workplace training programs, and offers guidance about how to adapt and integrate training programs into their environment, culture and circumstances.

There are many types of publicly and commercially available child sexual abuse prevention training resources, materials and programs – from books, to pamphlets and informational fact sheets to 15-30 minute on-line narrated videos; 60-90 minute online state-sponsored training programs for mandated reporters; and 1 or 2- day onsite training courses by public and private abuse prevention agencies and risk management service providers to name just a few.<sup>1</sup> Some YSOs have even created their own in-house training curricula.

Any YSO, no matter how large or small, can benefit the children and youth it serves by implementing a child abuse awareness/prevention training program for its personnel. But it can be difficult – particularly for those YSOs without experience, or without personnel with training backgrounds and/or who are familiar with this topic – to determine which training materials and programs are best suited for their mix of staff and volunteers, and most cost-effective for their organizations. Some of the larger YSOs like public and private schools, faith-based organizations and others may also take on (or be mandated to take on) the added responsibility of training children, youth and parents – adding another level of complexity to the decision-making process (more on this below).

Whether the YSO is large or small, one of the best ways to get started is to seek out and consult with local area social service providers like the Department of Children and Families, the regional Child Advocacy Centers, the Children's Trust, the Office of the Child Advocate and others mentioned in the Resources section below. These agencies and others can provide a wealth of local expertise about training options, informational materials, and curricula that have

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<sup>1</sup> See the website of the Child Welfare Information Gateway for examples of sexual abuse prevention training programs (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/prevention-programs/sexualabuse/>)

demonstrated effectiveness – and can help save a lot of time in terms of formulating an appropriate training strategy.

When selecting or designing a training program, it is important to build or to look for products that reflect good teaching and learning practices, and that offer participatory, problem-based learning experiences that are interactive and actively engage the learner. Effective programs present information from a positive viewpoint, encouraging healthy behavior rather than forbidding poor behavior, help participants to feel responsible for dealing with the problem, and teach and encourage intervention behaviors – sometimes even using role playing to help trainees find comfortable and appropriate ways to express their discomfort with another's behavior, or to come forward and report suspected child maltreatment.

The goals, objectives and requirements of the organization's child abuse prevention policies should also be addressed and made clear in the training program. An introduction by a recognized authority or by company leadership should set the stage by articulating leadership's commitment to building and maintaining an environment in which employees, volunteers and children/youth are free from adverse behaviors, and feel safe, supported and respected.

The bulk of the training content should follow the Policies and Procedures and Code of Conduct by including definitions of abuse and neglect and their symptoms as well as acceptable, unacceptable and harmful behavior; how to recognize and report suspicions of abuse in accordance with Massachusetts state law and organizational policy; encouragement for constructive, mutually respectful ways of behaving; the prohibition against retaliation when reports are made; and assurance that the YSO and its leadership will take immediate and appropriate corrective action when it determines that policies have been breached, or a child/youth is in danger. Essentially, in whatever form is implemented, the training should answer some basic questions: What is child abuse? How can I help prevent it? How do I recognize it if it's happening? And What do I do about it?

The section also offers, in chart form, suggestions about the elements that should be included in all sexual abuse prevention training programs, with particular attention paid to describing a continuum of the basic information the training should contain, the knowledge it should provide, and how that knowledge ultimately translates into practice and a set of desired outcomes and skills. Although some YSO's employ a "one size fits all" training program that is provided to all staff – the section offers an approach that differentiates among critical training content for various audiences: employees; contractors, consultants and interns; volunteers; children and youth; and parents/caregivers.

If appropriate (or mandated) because of the size of the YSO, and/or the services it provides, well-designed and developmentally appropriate personal safety and sexual abuse prevention training

programs for children and youth may also be required. Such training can teach children and youth basic skills that will help them stay safe in potentially dangerous or abusive situations – particularly with respect to sexual abuse. Of course, the primary responsibility to protect children and youth from sexual abuse always rests with adults. But even though adult caregivers can make every effort to provide a safe environment for children and youth, they can't always be there to protect them from exposure to every potentially harmful situation. The section also discusses the elements to consider when looking at and evaluating training curricula for children and youth, addresses some of the common misperceptions about the effects of sexual abuse prevention instruction on children and youth, and includes a checklist for assessment and selection.

The most effective programs for children and youth also incorporate some form of parental materials designed to keep parents and caregivers “in-the-loop” regarding the safety concepts and skills being taught to their children/youth. In their simplest form, these are represented by short, informational letters that go home with the children and youth and identify the safety concepts being taught during the lessons, and emphasize the partnership between the YSO and family in the endeavor to keep children safe. In expanded form, the safety concepts are listed along with suggestions as to ways parents can reinforce the topics and skills being taught, with family worksheets containing activities designed to carry on safety-related conversations in the home. Some curricula also include informational films for parents that model ways to communicate with children about personal safety issues in various scenarios. Whichever method is selected, some standard way of communicating with and educating parents is well worth the effort in terms of increasing the effectiveness of such programs.

The bottom line is that whether a YSO is large and provides services all over the state, or is small and has a single storefront location, the children and youth served can be better protected from child sexual abuse by increasing staff awareness about its existence, how to recognize it, and what to do if it is observed, suspected or disclosed. Staff training and education helps to ensure that YSO leadership and staff are prepared to respond if and when it becomes necessary.

Table 7, below, identifies what the Task Force considers to be the minimum required standards for adult training for YSO staff and volunteers.

**Table 7**

Minimum Required Training Standards and Content for Adults
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All YSO employees and volunteers need some form of annual awareness training about child abuse and neglect. Options include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Handouts, flyers, brochures, fact sheets</li><li>○ On-site presentation/discussion (facilitated by in-house personnel or external agency)</li><li>○ Online training (individual and/or group)</li><li>○ Partnering with local YSOs/agencies already conducting training</li></ul></li><li>• YSO staff and volunteers need to understand the specifics about child abuse and how to recognize it:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Definitions</li><li>○ Statistics about prevalence</li><li>○ Physical and behavioral symptoms of abuse</li><li>○ Offender patterns (grooming)</li><li>○ Long term impact on child development</li></ul></li><li>• YSO staff and volunteers need to understand and agree to comply with the YSO's child protection policies and procedures including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Safe environment and safe technology policies</li><li>○ Code of conduct</li><li>○ Screening and hiring procedures</li><li>○ Reporting procedures (including both the Massachusetts mandated reporter requirements and the YSO's reporting chain)</li></ul></li><li>• YSO Staff and volunteers need to know how to respond to children and youth they suspect are being abused, and how to handle direct and indirect disclosures.</li></ul>

**Key Findings and Recommendations**

- Training and education are significant elements of any YSO's child sexual abuse prevention and intervention efforts. Minimum required training standards for YSOs are identified.
- Training programs should be offered at least annually to all administrators, employees and volunteers to heighten awareness of the YSO's commitment to child and youth safety and zero tolerance for their abuse.
- Training objectives should include guidance on how to establish and maintain professional boundaries, how to intervene when boundaries are being violated, understanding the definitions of child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment, recognizing the physical and behavioral signs of abuse, responding to a

child's/youth's disclosure, and understanding both Massachusetts law and the YSO's policies regarding the reporting of observed, suspected or disclosed abuse.

- Depending on YSO size and resources, training implementation strategies can include distribution of pamphlets, brochures and factsheets about child sexual abuse followed by in-house discussion; Internet-based training and webinar options; partnering with organizations already conducting training; and onsite training by external consultants or agencies.
- There are multiple strategies to identify, select and implement training materials and programs. Checklists and resources are provided along with an Implementation Toolkit to assist YSOs in identifying appropriate evidence-based curricula.
- Some YSOs, because of size, the services provided, state mandates or other requirements may also be required to train children, youth, parents and other caregivers. Best practices for selection and implementation at all grade levels are provided.
- Training should take place before interactions with children begin (or employee/volunteer should be accompanied by trained personnel until training is completed).
- Training (or refresher training) should be repeated at least annually and include a method for confirming participation and completion.

### **Recommended Implementation and Decision Making Model**

STEP 1: Use the material in Table 7 above and in Appendix 12 to determine how many of the minimum required abuse prevention training standards are present in the YSO.

- The existence of child safety policies and procedures, and a code of conduct that identifies acceptable, unacceptable and harmful behaviors and outlines required reporting procedures is a starting point.
- Determine how many individuals need to be trained and at what levels – focus initially on those who will have direct, unmonitored access to children.
- Assess the resources and expertise on hand (and/or available) to help determine the scope of the training program and an implementation strategy.
- Appoint an individual or group to take responsibility for all aspects of the training program and empower them with the authority necessary to enforce and accomplish compliance with the YSO's training requirements.

STEP 2: Research and select informational materials and programs that can provide the required training in identifying, responding to and reporting child abuse, or provide information to augment and enhance YSO-specific training in policies, procedures and requirements.

- Consult and/or partner with state and local prevention expertise to determine the types of training programs available, as well as their cost, format, length and schedule.

- Determine how best to combine that training with prevention information and requirements specific to the YSO (e.g., Code of Conduct, reporting requirements for all staff, internal points of contact and reporting chains, etc.).
- YSOs can utilize the abbreviated materials in the section-specific appendices to augment or customize the training.
- Explore possible attendance at workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia and other similar child abuse prevention training events that may be accessible through schools, school districts, social services, faith-based or other professional organizations.
- If training children, consider only curricula that are evidence-based and have a record of being evaluated for effectiveness. Utilize criteria for evaluating and selecting effective programs published by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.<sup>2</sup>
- Include a component that encourages parental involvement within the child/youth sexual abuse prevention program. This component should inform parents about child sexual abuse topics including but not limited to characteristics of offenders, grooming behaviors, symptoms, and how to discuss this topic with their children.

**STEP 3: Implement training using one or more of the training strategies outlined below.**

- Set a schedule that allows staff and volunteers multiple opportunities to attend the required training.
- Select a venue and ensure it has the necessary equipment for a training event: projectors, screens, white boards, notepads, sticky notes for “parking lot” issues, round tables for small group discussion, refreshments, etc.
- Ensure that the introduction addresses the reality that the training might be difficult for some, particularly for those who have had experience with personal or family abuse, and that attendees can excuse themselves if they feel the need. Make sure to talk with them later.
- Ensure some method of taking attendance.
- Consider issuing “certificates of completion”.
- Consider an evaluation component with measurable outcomes.

**End of Executive Summary**

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<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for Programs to Reduce Child Victimization: A Resource for Communities when Choosing a Program to Teach Personal Safety to Children (<http://www.safechild.org/PDF/Guidelines%20for%20Chid%20Safety.pdf>)