

Parent/Guardian Info Package

Sexual Violence

Concerning Youth



PACE Presentation

Sexual Violence

-The term "**Sexual Violence**" in this packet is used to describe:

- **Sexual Assault**

Sexual touching without voluntary consent: kissing, oral sex, fondling, intercourse, touching someone's private parts

- **Sexual Harassment**

Unwanted sexual behavior: Sexually offensive jokes, talking dirty, sexual requests or suggestions, "checking someone out," displaying sexually offensive pictures, sexual touching or grabbing, rating people as they walk by, cat calls, blocking someone's path so they have to make physical contact with you, sexual hand gestures, slapping their bum, "pantsing," wedgies, snapping a bra strap, "bag tag," etc.

Important to note: the distinction between assault and harassment is not always clear. These two types of violence exist on a continuum.

- **Sexual Abuse:**

Using words, sight, or touching to abuse someone for a sexual purpose by someone who is in a position of power or trust

When assisting youth who have experienced sexual violence you will likely be dealing with **two groups:**

- Youth who have or are experiencing trauma from recent or current sexual violence
- Youth who have or are experiencing trauma from sexual violence in the past (when they were younger or as a child)

NOTE: The Information from pages 2-7 is taken from the Who Do You Tell? Staff Info Package with minor edits and additions (unless otherwise noted)

Why do we need a sexual violence education program?

The Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth (Badgley, 1984), indicates that one in four girls and one in ten boys is sexually abused before the age of eighteen in Canada. In Calgary alone, police investigate 600-700 child sexual abuse cases per year. Some of the specific symptoms of childhood sexual abuse, that **may** manifest themselves in childhood, or later in adolescence or adulthood are:

"withdrawal, depression, suicidal feelings/actions, engagement in high risk behaviours, feelings of guilt, irritability, difficulties with anger, fears and anxiety, concentration and learning difficulties, self harming behaviours, eating disorders, substance abuse, nightmares, flashbacks, low self-esteem, lack of belief in a just world, distrust of others and significant relationship difficulties" (Briere, 1996; Dolan, 1992; Herman, 1997).

This is clearly a life altering experience for children with consequences that continue into adulthood, especially when children do not feel safe to disclose the abuse or do not receive appropriate support from those they do tell.

Vulnerabilities

Children & Youth are Vulnerable to Sexual Violence Because:

- They are dependent on other teens or adults (physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, etc.)
- They are sometimes not believed when they disclose abuse
- They may believe the myth that only strangers are dangerous
- They can be isolated from community supports
- They might believe that sexual violence cannot happen to them and that they would fight off would-be offenders
- They might have low self esteem
- Their access to technology isn't always monitored

Indicators

Possible Indicators of Sexual Violence

The following may not always be signs of sexual violence; many of these indicators may be signs of various stresses in a teen's life. The **most important thing to remember is to notice changes in a teen's behaviour and inquire as to what is causing these changes.** Every youth's situation must be assessed individually. **Possible indicators for youth can include:**

- Physical:** Genital bruising, excessive masturbation, difficulty sitting or walking, STIs, pregnancy
- Mental:** Learning disabilities, delays in language development, deficits in overall IQ, less flexibility and creativity in problem-solving tasks, difficulty with concentration and attention, challenges with abstract reasoning
- Emotional:** Increased anger and aggression, anxiety, depression, dissociation, helplessness, inability to regulate emotions and impulses, poor self-esteem, increased fear, self-blame, guilt and shame
- Relational/Social:** loss of trust, isolation, expectations of rejection or abandonment, lack of intimacy
- Behavioral:** withdrawal, over-aggressiveness or acting out, sleep problems or nightmares, suicide thoughts or attempts, extreme cruelty to animals, fire setting, impulsivity, exceptional secrecy, running away from home, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-mutilation, a drop in school performance, unsafe sexual behavior, at risk for exploitation or prostitution

Indicators taken from First Responders to Sexual Assault and Abuse Training Manual © AASAS (Module 2: p.17-8)

Disclosures

Possible Reasons It May be Difficult for Teens to Disclose Sexual Violence:

- Disclosing abuse can be very traumatic
- May not have the appropriate vocabulary
- Can be uncomfortable, ashamed or too embarrassed to talk about the abuse
- May not know who they can tell
- May want to protect the offender
- May have been threatened
- May be afraid of not being believed
- Often believe it is their fault
- May be afraid of getting into trouble
- May be afraid of showing disloyalty
- May have blocked out the abuse entirely

Possible Reasons It May be Difficult for Teens to Disclose Dating Violence:

- Protect families from truth and shame
- Fear of parental disapproval or "I told you so"
- Psychological distance from family / feel isolated from support systems
- Desire to maintain independence, not wanting it restricted
- Adults not recognizing severity
- Reluctance to prosecute (partner loyalty, afraid of partner, afraid of justice system)
- Saw violence at home

Reasons taken from Canadian Red Cross RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention Workshop Booklet (p.52-3)

When a youth discloses or says they need help

-When you hear a youth say "Can you keep a secret?" or "I want to tell you something but you can't tell anyone else," this can often be a sign that they want to disclose something to you.

-It is important to find a private place where you and the youth can talk.

****IT IS VERY IMPORTANT NOT TO ASK LEADING QUESTIONS**** For example:

"Did she touch you on your _____?"

"Did he put his hand on your _____?"

- Leading questions direct the conversation and guide the youth to say what they think you want to hear, instead of describing the facts in their own words.
- Leading questions do not allow the youth to tell their story or allow them to feel empowered.
- Leading questions can often seriously jeopardize an investigation of abuse.

Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Violence

- Work to remain calm. Youth can feel confused and/or responsible for sexual violence that occurs and your reaction can have an immense impact on how the youth copes following the disclosure. Strive to react in a way that lets the youth feel supported, rather than discouraged or insecure, etc.

- Listen and let the youth tell you what is going on in their own words. Validate their feelings. **Do not ask leading questions.**
- Reassure the youth they have done the right thing by telling an adult.
- **Communicate** to the youth that **you believe what they have told you and that the sexual violence is not their fault.**
- Use the youth's terminology.
- Use open ended questions so as not to lead the disclosure or prompt the youth with specific language. Valuable information to have includes: their relationship with the perpetrator and how often they see them, when the event occurred, is anyone else at risk, and have they told anyone else about this and what was the result of telling.
- Thank the youth for telling you.
- Tell the youth you will do as much as you can to help. Do not make promises to the youth that you cannot keep and do not promise that everything will be ok. Help them brainstorm self-care and support systems. Be transparent about what will happen next and if possible, allow them to have a bit of control in making decisions.
- Each case is different. Some require reporting to the RCMP, some CS, and some no one at all.
- **Remember:** If the offender is a family member, lives at home with them, or if the offender has any access to other children or teens, report the abuse to Child Services and get further instructions from them.
 - You do not need to make a detailed disclosure report. You need to get enough information to establish a reasonable belief that the abuse occurred, who the offender is, and how much access the offender has to the child.
 - CS Phone Numbers:
 - Grande Prairie Child Services Phone Number: 780.538.5102
 - Fairview Child Services Phone Number: 780-835-7199
 - Peace River Child Services Phone Number: 780-624-6460
 - High Prairie Child Services Phone Number: 780-523-6678
 - Slave Lake Child Services Phone Number: 780-849-7220
 - Grande Cache Child Services Phone Number: 780-827-2245
 - High Level Child Services Phone Number: 780-926-4441
 - Valleyview Child Services Phone Number: 780-524-4106
- Get support for yourself. You will probably experience strong emotional reactions when a youth discloses abuse. Acknowledge your own feelings. It is normal to feel overwhelmed. It may be difficult to hear what the child is telling you.
 - Practice self-care

- Adults have a legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse to Child Services and/or the Police.
- The individual receiving the disclosure has the primary responsibility to report child sexual abuse to Children Services, according to the *Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act of Alberta*.
- You do not need to prove that the abuse has occurred; your only responsibility is to report any observations or suspicions of abuse.
- You cannot be sued for reporting child abuse if you are reporting in good faith and without malice.

Alberta Children's Services is the government department with the responsibility to protect children in Alberta. For further information, check out www.child.gov.ab.ca

The Child, Youth, and Family enhancement Act of Alberta states:

Any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report the matter to a director.

A child is deemed to be in need of protective services if:

The child has been, or there is substantial risk that the child will be, physically injured or sexually abused by the guardian of the child,

or

The guardian of the child is unable or unwilling to protect the child from physical injury or sexual abuse

Suspicion

If you suspect a youth has experienced or is experiencing sexually violence:

- Monitor the youth's behaviour
- Document each concerning incident
- Build a rapport with the youth and provide a warm, trusting atmosphere
- Report disclosure or suspicions to Child Services – Phone (see above).

Support

Helping a youth who may have experienced sexual violence:

A youth who has experienced sexual violence or trauma **may** find the following helpful and reassuring:

- ✓ *Appropriate Demonstrations of Affection:* Smile, warm voice, eye contact etc.
- ✓ *Sense of Belonging*
- ✓ *Consistency and Predictability:* The youth needs to be able to predict your behaviour and be familiar with your expectations

- ✓ **Security:** The youth needs to feel safe and know that you will not do anything to him/her, such as unexpected scolding in front of others, revealing their problems, etc.
- ✓ **Encouragement to Express Feelings:** Acknowledge the youth's feelings, and verbalize your understanding and empathy. Art such as drawing, painting or clay work can offer open expression and gives youth a needed outlet for their feelings
- ✓ **Identify:** Give the youth information or feedback about his/her self. "You are someone who makes friends easily... you are someone who really tries hard to solve difficult problems.... You are someone who is always on time..."
- ✓ **Structure:** The youth will gain strength and direction from you through daily routines. It is also important to reaffirm appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Refer/Report Options

- Counseling -Medical Care -Confronting the Assailant -Friends -Police
 - School Authorities if Appropriate -Parents, Caregivers, or Other Trusted Adults
 - Laying Charges for Criminal Prosecution -Suing Assailant in Civil Court for Pain, Suffering, & Costs
- Options taken from Canadian Red Cross RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention Workshop Booklet (p.54)*

*If you or your child(ren) have any questions regarding reporting
(the process, benefits, and consequences)
give **PACE** a call at **780-539-6692**.*

Program / Presentation

Staff Information Session: (30+ minutes)

The staff information session provides a brief outline of the program, as well as info. on child sexual abuse myths and how to respond to disclosures. Staff members are also informed of their responsibilities during the Program.

Parent/Guardian Evening Information Session: (45-60 minutes)

The evening information session familiarizes parents/guardians with the content of the programs as well as information about common myths of child sexual abuse and how to handle a disclosure. Parents/guardians are welcome to ask questions about the programs and sexual violence.

Classroom Presentations: (Three hour-long sessions/ per class)

Classroom presentations are tailored to the grade and developmental level of students.

Day 1

- Define sexual abuse, assault, and harassment
- Discuss that sexual violence is never the victim's fault (show two videos: "James is Dead" and "How To Protect Yourself from Rape" both from Blue Seat Studios.
- Brainstorm what to do if someone experienced sexual violence and how to help a friend whose experienced it. Also reinforce the importance of telling an adult

Day 2

- Cover sexting
- Brainstorm how to cope with having experienced sexual violence

- Talk about consent (Asking for a “yes”) and debunk the myths surrounding sexual violence. Show “Cycling Through Consent” from Western University.
- Discuss indicators of healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Cover issues with Pornography in society
- Discuss why people sexually offend, including unhealthy ideas of masculinity, women, and sex. Show part of “How Media Failed Woman in 2013” and the trailer for “The Mask You Live in”.
- What individuals and society can do to help reduce or eliminate sexual violence in our communities

There will also be a question and answer period and students will be given opportunity to speak one on one with the facilitator if they so choose.

Links to videos if you choose to view them:

- James is dead: <https://youtu.be/Op14XhETfBw>
- How To Protect Yourself From Rape: <https://youtu.be/1Rqduqh3GNs>
- Cycling Through Consent: <https://youtu.be/-JwlKjRaUaw>
- How Media Failed Women in 2013: Contact Public Awareness Coordinator.
- The Mask You Live In Trailer: <https://youtu.be/hc45-ptHMxo>

Key messages of the program include:

- **It is never a victim’s fault when abuse occurs**
- **If you experience sexual violence it’s important to tell an adult you trust**

Teachers/staff are expected to be present during presentations. Due to issues of spontaneous disclosures and confidentiality, parents are not invited to attend their child’s presentations.

A Parent/Guardian’s Role:

- Read and understand *Parent/Guardian Info Package*
 - Use this presentation as an opportunity to discuss sexual violence with your child. Brainstorm with them what they could do if it happened to them or a friend.
 - Continue to have open ongoing conversations with your child surrounding sexual violence.
 - The more you begin to talk with your children about sexual violence and human anatomy at a young age, the more natural and easy these conversations become. Communicate that these are okay things to talk about (not shameful or disgusting); then your children will be more likely to tell you if sexual violence happens to them or a friend.
 - Handle disclosures appropriately that occur after the presentation at school
- Remember:** Educating your children about sexual violence is not about instilling fear in them but rather empowering them with the knowledge of what to do if it happens to them or a friend and that it is never their fault.

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