

School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

Purpose

Schools strive to create a safe environment for students, teachers, staff, and volunteers that enables students to develop, learn, make friends, and have fun. Creating a safe environment includes making sure no child is harmed in any way while attending school and school-sponsored activities. Educators recognize that child sexual abuse (CSA) is a risk factor that requires collective vigilance on the part of all in the school community. In this tip sheet, key information about child sexual abuse and strategies for establishing and sustaining school-based prevention efforts is provided.

Definition

Oklahoma statute define child abuse as harm or threatened harm to a child's health, safety, or welfare by a person responsible for the child. **This includes non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or neglect (Title 10, Section 7102).**

Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence and School Data

Research indicates that by the age of 17 years, the prevalence of sexual abuse and sexual assault was 26.6% for girls and 5.1% for boys¹. In Oklahoma in 2017, 1,046 cases of child sexual abuse were substantiated, which represents a fraction of the cases in Oklahoma. Often, due to fear and stigma, youth do not report an estimated 66% of sexual abuse and assault incidents²^[SJF(1)]. Over 70% of child sexual abuse and sexual assault experiences are carried out by another youth², many of which go unreported.

Rates of child sexual abuse and assault at schools are on the rise. *The number of reported forcible sex offenses on primary and secondary schools increased from 2,500 in 2009 to 12,300 in 2018 (a 383 percent increase)*³. The rise in cases is multifaceted and related to increased awareness and reporting and to the impact of technology and social media.

Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse directly impacts a student's emotional, behavioral, social, and developmental well-being. Long-term impacts include adverse mental and physical health, education, job productivity, and well-being. In 2015 alone, the lifetime cost of CSA was estimated to be \$9.3 billion in the U.S., which included victims' health care costs, productivity losses for caregivers, and costs to child welfare systems⁴^[SJF(2)]

School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

Schools Are Key to Preventing Child Sexual Abuse and Promoting Child Safety

- With a supportive environment and messaging - schools provide a safe place for students to report sexual abuse, be believed, and be protected.
- Effective implementation of safe school policies can prevent sexual abuse.
- Schools are key to identifying child maltreatment. School personnel are the most common reporter sources of child maltreatment.
- Schools can mitigate the high rate of harmful sexual behaviors among students by teaching child sexual abuse prevention, boundaries, and healthy relationship skills.

What Is the Law?

Child Sexual Abuse Reporting and Education Requirements

Erin's Law, passed into law in 2015, requires Oklahoma public schools to train staff on identifying and reporting abuse, and allows schools to provide students age-appropriate curriculum, determined by local districts, on what constitutes abuse and how to report it.

At least a minimum of once an academic year, schools must offer a program which includes:

1. Training on recognition of child abuse and neglect
2. Recognition of child sexual abuse
3. Proper reporting of suspected abuse
4. Available resources

The training facilitates compliance with Oklahoma child abuse reporting statute. In accordance with this statute and the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, "**every person** having reason to believe that a child under the age of eighteen (18) years is a victim of abuse or neglect shall report the matter **immediately** to the Department of Human Services and the local law enforcement agency." 10A O.S. § 1-6-102.

Reports shall be made **immediately** to the state hotline at **1-800-522-3511**.

School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

Safe and Supportive Schools

Child sexual abuse prevention supports safe and supportive schools. In accordance with sections 4001 and 4111, child sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs or activities are designed to:

- o (i) provide age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate instruction for students **in child sexual abuse awareness and prevention**, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to safely report child sexual abuse; and
- o (ii) provide information to parents and guardians of students about **child sexual abuse awareness and prevention**, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to discuss child sexual abuse with a child; and
- o (iv) improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improve safety through the **recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse**, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment;

Student access to technology has complicated safety strategies for students in schools. Measures outlined by Safe and Supportive Schools guidance can facilitate this process.

[Safe and supportive schools](#) require having a policy of **Internet safety for minors** in place that includes the operation of a technology protection measure for any of its computers with Internet access. The policy protects against access through such computers to visual depictions that are obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors, and is enforcing the operation of such technology protection measure during any use of such computers by minors.



School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

Student Education Guidelines

A. All public schools *may* establish an abuse-prevention instructional program for students, consistent with this section. The content of instruction shall be at the discretion of the school board, provided that the instructional program shall:

Provide developmental and age-appropriate curriculum to teach children risk-reduction strategies including, but not limited, to:

- A. How to identify dangerous situations
 - a. personal boundary violations
 - b. how to refuse approaches and invitations
 - c. how to summon help
 - d. what to do if abuse occurs
- B. Be offered annually to reinforce and build on skills learned the previous year
- C. Involve students as active learning participants
- D. Have the capacity to be delivered by a wide range of personnel including teachers, school counselors, prevention agency educators, and other professionals
- E. Include evidence-informed curriculum
- F. Include an evaluation component that utilizes a pre- and post-program survey or testing of students to measure the acquisition of the lessons taught
- G. Provide instruction that is culturally sensitive and adaptable
- H. Encourage parental involvement within the abuse prevention program to include, but not be limited to, information on child abuse prevention, risk-reduction techniques, abuse reporting, and support service availability.

Pursuant to the Parents' Bill of Rights, Section 2001 et seq. of Title 25 of the Oklahoma Statutes, no student shall be required to participate in an abuse-prevention instructional program. Failure to participate shall not, by itself, be grounds for a referral to the Department of Human Services pursuant to Section 1-2-101 of Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes.

School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

Key Components to Effective Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Child sexual abuse prevention in schools includes policies, practices, and procedures that address:

1. Screening and selecting employees and volunteers
2. Guidelines on interactions among all individuals
3. Monitoring behavior
4. Ensuring safe environments
5. Responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of child sexual abuse
6. Training about child sexual abuse prevention for faculty, staff, students, and families.^{5,6}

School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

Steps to Getting Started

Step One

LEADERSHIP

- Identify members in the school community to serve on the Leadership Team.
- The Leadership Team may be combined with an already-existing team (Safe School Team, Healthy School Team, Climate Team, etc.).
- The team will use local data to determine how to align prevention mission and vision with district and site goals.
- Identify [local child abuse prevention partners](#).

Step Two

DATA REVIEW

- Review current practices and policies.
- Collect, review, and evaluate local data to determine needs.
- Review state laws and requirements on child abuse prevention, mandated reporting, and Title IX.

Step Three

PLANNING

- Utilize the Universal Program Planning Guide for step-by-step guidance to planning comprehensive prevention programs.
- Select training for students and staff.
- Learn more about [child abuse prevention programs](#) in Oklahoma.

Step Four

IMPLEMENTATION

- Implement a comprehensive program focusing on staff, student, and parent knowledge, school-wide programs, reporting systems, and updated policies.

Step Five

EVALUATION

- Collect reports on the fidelity of implementation and student outcomes.
- Use collected data to make optimal adjustments.
- Review all data, planning, and implementation in a continuous cycle of improvement.



School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oklahoma State Department of Health and County Health Departments

Oklahoma State Department of Education

Center on Child Abuse and Neglect and National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth,
OUHSC

Bethesda Inc.

CARE Center

CREOKS Health Services

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Family Builders

Mary Abbott Children's House

Oklahoma County Child Guidance

Prevent Child Abuse Oklahoma

The Parent Child Center of Tulsa

Thrive

University of Central Oklahoma

YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City



School-based Prevention Services:

Child Abuse Prevention

References

¹Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H. A., & Hamby, S. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 3, 329-33. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.12.026.

²Gewirtz-Meydan, A, & Finkelhor, D. (2019). Sexual Abuse and Assault in a Large National Sample of Children and Adolescents. *Child Maltreatment*, 25, 1-12. doi.org/10.1177/1077559519873975.

³Irwin, V., Wang, K., Cui, J., Zhang, J., & Thompson, A. (2021). Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2020 (NCES 2021-092/NCJ 300772). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC. Retrieved [date] from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2021092>.

⁴ Letourneau, E.J. Brown, D.S. Fang, X. Hassan, A. & Mercy, J.A. (2018). The economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 79, 413–422.

⁵ Saul J, & Audage NC. (2007). *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures*. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

⁶Letourneau, E. J., Assini-Meytin, L.C., Kaufman, K. L., Mathews, B., & Palmer, D. (2020). Preventing and addressing child sexual abuse in youth serving organizations: A desk guide for organizational leaders. Baltimore, MD: Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.