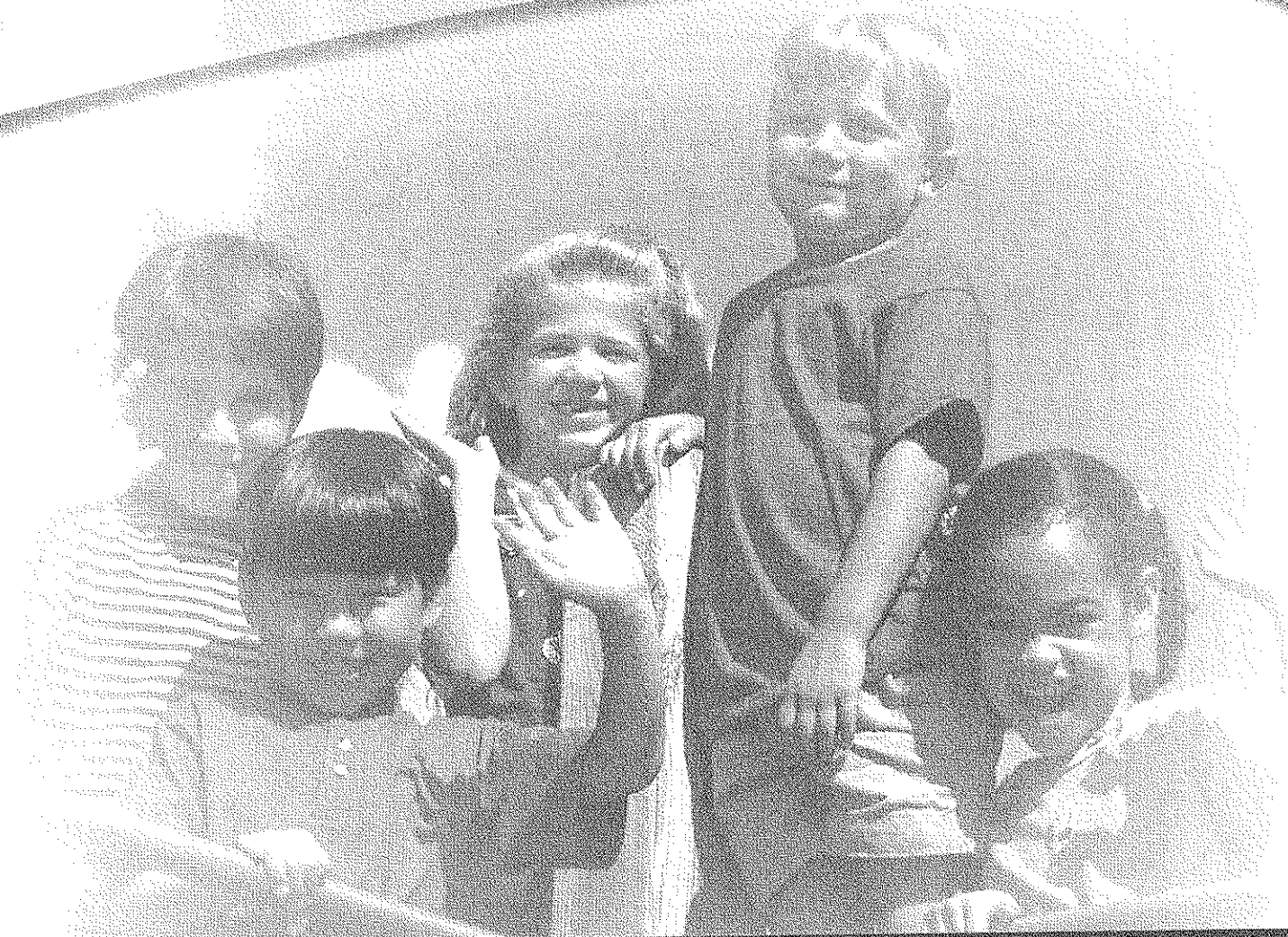


Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations:

*Getting Started on Policies
and Procedures*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention
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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Julie L. Gerberding, M.D., M.P.H., Director

Coordinating Center for Environmental Health and Injury Prevention
Henry Falk, M.D., M.P.H., Director

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Heana Arias, Ph.D., Director

Division of Violence Prevention
W. Rodney Hammond, Ph.D., Director

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Authors

Janet Saul, Ph.D.
Division of Violence Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

Natalie C. Audage, M.P.H.
Consultant and former ASPH/CDC Fellow

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Introduction

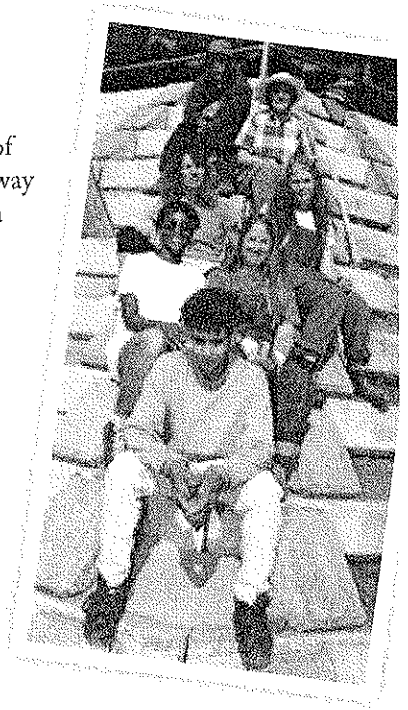
Youth-serving organizations strive to create a safe environment for youth, employees, and volunteers so that youth can grow, learn, and have fun. Part of creating a safe environment is making sure that youth are not harmed in any way while participating in organization-sponsored activities. One risk in any organization working directly with youth is child sexual abuse.

It is vital that organizations create a culture where child sexual abuse is discussed, addressed, and prevented.

This report is designed for representatives of youth-serving organizations who are interested in adopting strategies to prevent child sexual abuse. Whether these strategies are developed within the context of an overall risk management plan or are addressed separately, organizations need to examine how they can protect youth from sexual abuse.

Definitions

- Children and youth
 - Anyone between the ages of zero and 17 years. In this document, these terms are used interchangeably.
- Child sexual abuse
 - "Child sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given. This includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants, and all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child also can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size, rendering the younger child incapable of giving informed consent. The sexually abusive acts may include sexual penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure or voyeurism."¹
 - Legal definitions vary by state, so look up your state guidelines using the Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/search/index.cfm).



What You Will Find in This Report

In the first section, you will find six key components of child sexual abuse prevention for organizations. These components were identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in conjunction with experts:

1. Screening and selecting employees and volunteers
2. Guidelines on interactions between 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.

¹Myers JEB, Berliner L, Briere J, Hendrix CT, Jenny C, Reid TA, editors. *The APSAC handbook of child maltreatment*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications; 2002. p. 55.

Each component is described in detail, including the prevention goals, critical strategies, and additional strategies that could be considered depending on the context and resources of individual organizations.

The sections that follow offer suggestions for addressing challenges to developing and implementing a strategy to prevent child sexual abuse and provide tools to help organizations move forward. A list of publications and organizations that can provide helpful information is provided in Appendix B.

Contextual Issues

Every organization does not have to take on all strategies presented in this document. The process of implementing child sexual abuse prevention strategies takes time and will evolve differently in each organization. Not all strategies presented in this document will apply to all organizations. However, it is very important that organizations abide by their youth protection policies and procedures to avoid being criticized for not adhering to them if a youth is sexually abused. Adoption of strategies will depend on the following contextual issues:

- Organization's mission and individual activities. For example, though all youth-serving organizations are interested in helping youth develop into healthy adults, the mission of mentoring or religious organizations is often focused on fostering nurturing relationships between individual adults and youth. Because this mission results in more one-on-one activities between employees/volunteers and youth, these organizations need to adopt child sexual abuse prevention strategies that protect youth in one-on-one situations with adults.
- Culture and language of youth served by the organization.
- Insurance requirements.
- Available resources.
- State and national laws. Organizations should consult with legal representation and review state and national laws before adopting and implementing child sexual abuse prevention strategies. A good place to start is the Child Welfare Information Gateway, which provides state-specific information (www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/search/index.cfm).

Balancing Caution and Caring

The same dynamics that create a nurturing environment, and may ultimately protect against child sexual abuse, can also open the doors to sexually abusive behaviors. Research has shown that youth who are emotionally insecure, needy, and unsupported may be more vulnerable to the attentions of offenders.² By promoting close and caring relationships between youth and adults, organizations can help youth feel supported and loved and thus reduce their risk of child sexual abuse. But that same closeness between a youth and an adult can also provide the opportunity for abuse to occur. When developing policies for child sexual abuse prevention, organizations must balance the need to keep youth safe with the need to nurture and care for them.

²Finkelhor D. Four preconditions: a model. In: Finkelhor D, editor. *Child sexual abuse: new theory and research*. New York (NY): The Free Press; 1984. p. 53–68.

