

Disclosure/Child Maltreatment Disclosure

Effects of disclosure-focussed programmes to reduce child maltreatment are unclear.

Evidence status	Some concerns	A small number of studies suggest that disclosure-focussed programmes can increase the likelihood of children self-disclosing potential abuse. More studies are needed.
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The summary in brief

This cell has three primary studies and two systematic reviews – all in high-income countries. Two of the primary studies are school-based and focus on preparing students to identify dangerous situations and how to avoid them. One of these studies is specifically focussed on creating a safe environment for children to disclose potential abuse. The third study is inspired by Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in the US and creates a multiagency team to work collaboratively in responding to alleged child abuse cases.

Two studies did report disclosure. The results are mixed. These interventions, especially the school-based one, can increase children’s willingness and confidence to disclose. However, the studies in this cell are still too few to provide really solid and reliable answers about the effectiveness of interventions to encourage disclosure.

Contents of the cell

The cell has three studies (*Herbert 2021, Hoefnagels 2021, White 2019*) and one systematic review (*Radford 2017*).

Full summaries of *Herbert 2021* and *Hoefnagels 2021* are available in the guidebook.

<i>White 2019</i> RCT, low risk of bias.	Australia (Gold Coast: eight government schools). Children in Year 1 (5-7 years). Evaluation of the effectiveness of <i>Learn to be safe with Emmy and friends</i> combined with an in-situ skills training programme to protect against potential child abuse situations
<i>Herbert 2021</i> QED, moderate risk of bias	Australia (city of Perth). Children of all ages. Evaluation of the <i>Multi-Agency Investigation & Support Team (MIST)</i> program.
<i>Hoefnagels 2021</i> QED, high risk of bias.	Netherlands (twelve primary schools) Children aged 10-12 years. Evaluation of a programme for primary school students to help them identify and talk about child abuse and neglect.
<i>Radford 2017</i> Rapid evidence assessment, low	UK - A rapid evidence synthesis commissioned by the

quality	Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.
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A. PRIMARY STUDIES

The interventions

The interventions from the three primary studies in the cell are summarized below.

White 2019 assessed a school-based child abuse prevention programme called ‘*Learn to be safe with Emmy and friends.*’ The programme, conducted in eight primary schools in the Gold Coast region of Australia, has five hour-long weekly sessions for year 1 students (age 5-7 years) delivered by trained facilitators in school premises. The facilitators are external and use ‘Emmy’, the programme mascot, to deliver key messages on how to recognize and respond to dangerous situations. This was combined with a simulated abduction scenario where a stranger asks a child to come with them.

MIST, or the *Multi-Agency Investigation & Support Team (Herbert 2021)*, is a collaborative approach to responding to alleged cases of child abuse. Instead of having multiple responses individually from different agencies, *MIST* creates a team with representatives from different agencies located in the same physical location. Detectives, social workers, child family advocates, and therapists all work together on the same case.

The third programme was implemented in various primary schools in the Netherlands. Its goal is to create an environment where child abuse and neglect can be safely disclosed. The intervention includes four interactive sessions using video clips, TV content, and other educational material.

Do the interventions work in improving child maltreatment disclosure?

Unclear. The only RCT (*White 2019*) found increased disclosure intentions and confidence, but the study did not report actual disclosure rates. *MIST* reported lower disclosure rates during child interviews compared to usual practice, but the rate of substantiated offences was not different for the two groups. Teachers in the Dutch programme had more children disclose to them (five) than the control group (one). However, the researchers in this last case were not sure if this difference could be attributed to their programme.

Have the interventions been implemented at scale?

Both the school-based programmes were small-scale, with a small number of schools and classrooms. *MIST* received over a third of reported cases in Perth during the study period.

Which type of organisation delivered the interventions?

Trained facilitators delivered *Learn to be safe with Emmy and friends* in school buildings. In the Dutch study, regular classroom teachers, if interested, received training to deliver the curriculum in their classrooms. MIST included multiple public agencies involved in investigating child abuse cases.

What do the interventions cost?

None of the studies report costs.

How are the programmes meant to work? The theory of change

Two theories mentioned in the papers are social cognitive theory and the theory of planned behaviour. *MIST* is modelled on Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in the US.

How reliable is the evidence?

There are some concerns. There are only a few studies. Two of the primary studies, including the one RCT, are rated as ‘low risk of bias,’ but there are serious concerns about the Dutch study.

Risk of Bias for Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs)

Study (Author and year)	Overall risk of bias	Randomised process	Deviations from intended interventions	Missing outcome data	Measurement of the outcome	Selection of the reported result
<i>White 2019</i>	Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk

Risk of Bias for Quasi-Experimental Designs (QEDs)

Study (Author and year)	Overall risk of bias	Confounding	Selection bias	Bias in intervention classification	Deviation from intended intervention	Missing outcome data	Measurement of the outcome	Selection of the reported result
<i>Herbert 2021</i>	Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk
<i>Hoefnagels 2021</i>	High risk of bias	Low risk	Moderate risk	Serious risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk

B. SYSTEMATIC REVIEW (Radford 2017)

What is the systematic review about (Radford 2017)?

Radford 2017 is a rapid review commissioned by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales (IICSA). It investigates whether public and non-state institutions have adequately protected children and young people from CSA and exploitation. The rapid review sought to learn how institutions (state and non-state) outside of England and Wales have prevented and responded to CSA and exploitation.

What are the findings on disclosure?

The review included 21 papers, both primary studies and systematic reviews, almost all on disclosure, identification, and reporting on child sexual abuse. All individual studies came from high-income countries, mostly the US. Different approaches at the institution and community-levels are described in the studies. Some of these are *“proactive outreach and engagement with minority communities, training those who work with children to be alert to the signs of sexual abuse and exploitation, co-located multi-disciplinary investigation and response models, protocols and best practice approaches for investigative interviewing, improved assessment methods and training for professionals (Radford 2017).”*

What information is available on cost and cost-effectiveness?

No information is provided on cost or cost-effectiveness.

How reliable is the evidence?

Not very. The quality of the systematic reviews is rated as **low**. This means that there is at least one major flaw in how it was conducted.