

Disclosure/Child Wellbeing: Child Knowledge and Awareness

There are too few studies to have a clear idea of the effect of school-based disclosure-focused programmes on child knowledge and awareness regarding abuse.

Evidence status	Some concerns	Too few studies of disclosure-focused programmes to know impact on child knowledge and awareness.
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The summary in brief

This cell has two primary studies (both recent) and two systematic reviews, all in high-income countries.

Both 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.

Results show somewhat mixed results on increase in knowledge and awareness among children about how to recognize abuse and what they should do when they face a dangerous situation. These interventions can also increase children's willingness and confidence to disclose. There are numerous prevention-focused programmes conducted in schools that can increase knowledge and awareness, but only few studies focus on disclosure (in this cell).

Contents of the cell

The cell has two primary studies (*Hoefnagels 2021, White 2019*) and two systematic reviews (*Quadara 2015, Radford 2017*).

Full summaries of *Hoefnagels 2021* and *White 2019* are available in the guidebook.

<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>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>Quadara 2015</i> Scoping review, low quality.	Australia: A broad systematic review to identify the prevalence of child sex abuse, risk factors, and intervention approaches.
<i>Radford 2017</i> Rapid evidence assessment, low	UK: A rapid evidence synthesis commissioned by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

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A. PRIMARY STUDIES

The interventions

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

Hoefnagels 2021 evaluated a disclosure-focussed educational programme implemented in various primary schools in the Netherlands. The programme aimed to create an environment where child abuse and neglect can be safely talked about. The intervention includes an initial lesson followed by four interactive sessions in the classroom using video clips, TV content, and other educational materials. The introductory lesson is on moments of joy the children experienced with their parents or caregivers.

An informational flyer is sent to parents, a poster is placed in the classroom and teachers receive curriculum information. Teachers are encouraged to think about their own view on child abuse and neglect. Further, they are provided with guidance on where to seek assistance both within and outside the school and how to respond when children come to them with a maltreatment disclosure. Subsequent lessons are on neglect and child abuse.

White 2019 assessed a combination of two school-based interventions. One, a 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 on school premises. The facilitators are external and used ‘Emmy’, the programme mascot, to deliver key messages on how to recognize and respond to potentially dangerous situations.

The second intervention is disclosure-focussed. The Observed Protection Behaviours Test (OPBT) in-person training is a single session to promote disclosure of abuse by a child. This is referred to as in-situ training (IST) in the published article. The IST interviewer is alone with a child and pretends to forget some documents and leaves the child alone in the interview room. A male stranger enters the room and urges the child to leave with him (this is meant to create a real-life risky situation). The child has ten seconds to respond. If they say ‘no’ or do not respond the man leaves but asks the child not to tell anyone about their interaction. If the child says ‘yes’, the man again asks the child to keep it secret and to remain in the room. The interviewer returns in a few minutes, and the child is prompted to disclose the encounter with the stranger every few minutes till they either talk about it or the interview ends.

Do the interventions work in improving children’s knowledge and awareness?

The results are mixed. In the Dutch intervention (Hoefnagels 2021), children in the intervention improved at recognizing child abuse and neglect. However, in the Australian programme (White 2019), though disclosure confidence and intentions improved for children who did the programme, there was no improvement in their ability to identify unsafe situations, i.e., safety identification skills.

Children in the Dutch intervention (Hoefnagels 2021) were more than three times likely to recognize child abuse and neglect (from vignettes shown) than students who did not do the intervention - the likelihood was higher for physical and emotion abuse than neglect. Children of Dutch origin were twice as likely to spot child abuse and neglect than children of non-Dutch origin.

Children in the in-situ disclosure-focussed Australian programme, whether alone or in combined with the prevention-focussed education programme, showed statistically significantly higher increases in disclosure confidence and disclosure intentions than children in the control group (White 2019). The combination boosted effectiveness for disclosure intentions compared to the prevention programme alone but not for disclosure confidence or safety identification skills.

Have the interventions been implemented at scale?

No. Both programmes were school-based and small-scale, with a small number of schools and classrooms involved.

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.

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.

How reliable is the evidence?

There are some concerns. The RCT has a low risk of bias, but the QED study has a high risk of bias.

Risk of Bias for Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs)

Study (Author)	Overall risk	Randomised	Deviations from	Missing outcome	Measurement of the	Selection of the
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and year)	of bias	process	intended interventions	data	outcome	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)	Over all 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>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 REVIEWS

What are the systematic reviews about (Quadara 2015 and Radford 2017)?

Quadara 2015 was a broad scoping review to understand the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the Australian context, identify risk factors for abuse, and look at available interventions to address abuse.

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 child knowledge and awareness?

There are not many disclosure-focussed interventions available. From the available studies, children’s knowledge and awareness of recognizing abuse increase with school- or classroom-based programmes that are short-term conducted in one or more sessions delivered by teachers or trained facilitators.

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 both systematic reviews is rated as ‘**high risk of bias**’. This means that there is at least one major flaw in how they were conducted.