

## PREVENTION X DISCLOSURE: DISCLOSURE RATES

School-based interventions to tackle abuse can increase disclosure.

|                        |                      |   |
|------------------------|----------------------|---|
| <b>Evidence status</b> | <b>Some concerns</b> | Evidence of positive impact, with need for testing to establish best practice |
|------------------------|----------------------|---|

### The summary in brief

School-based interventions to reduce child abuse usually involve a few sessions to increase children's awareness of physical and sexual abuse, and train them in what to do. The interventions often also include teachers and parents. Training on appropriate courses of action increases likelihood of disclosure in response to hypothetical situations. The interventions - and data collection for the evaluation - provide a good opportunity for disclosure of actual abuse, sometimes on a substantial scale. The studies suggest that recurrent activities result in more disclosure than one-off interventions. No studies found evidence of adverse side effects. Findings need to be treated with caution, as the studies mostly have a medium to high risk of bias.

All studies in this cell from high-income countries except one from Uganda (low-income country).

### The interventions

All the interventions are school-based, ranging from kindergarten to high school students aged 15-17. All interventions directly involve pupils other than the on-line programme for teachers, *Enough! Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in My School*.

Most of the programmes are targeted at protecting young children from abuse. The exception is the workshop by the agency *Viol Secours*, which is for teenagers as potential perpetrators as well as victims, and for people to whom abuse may be reported.

Most interventions are of limited duration, ranging from a 30-minute play with 15-minute discussion (Project Trust) to a one-hour online course (*Enough! Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in My School*) to a seven-session classroom course (*IGEL*). The exception is the *Good School Toolkit*, which is a comprehensive school-wide approach. The Good School Toolkit is also an exception, as its primary focus is the prevention of physical and sexual abuse by teachers in the school.

Table 1 provides an overview of the interventions included in the studies in this summary.

**Table 1 Overview of the interventions in this summary**

| Programme (study)  | Country   | Description   |
|--|-----------|---|
| <i>Tweenees</i><br>(Barron, 2013)  | UK        | Four classroom-based sessions of 50 mins on bullying, sexual assault etc.   |
| <i>IGEL</i><br>(Czerwinski, 2018)  | Germany   | Seven teacher-delivered school sessions. In each session, the children participate in various (interactive and experiential) exercises and exchange views.  |
| <i>Viol-secours workshop</i><br>(Daigneault, 2015)   | Canada    | One 75-minute workshop concerning sexual violence, date rape, common myths and misconceptions etc. for high school students aged 15-17.   |
| <i>Prevención de abusos sexuales a menores (del Campo Sanchez, 2006)</i>                       | Spain     | School-based prevention programme for children aged 8-12.   |
| <i>Good School Toolkit</i><br>(Devries, 2015)  | Uganda    | School-wide intervention for primary schools implemented over 18 months. Schools are provided with booklets, posters, and facilitation guides for over 60 Toolkit activities. The activities, e.g. student discussions, debates, and booklet clubs, are mostly for a group setting. |
| <i>Think First and Stay Safe</i><br>(Elfreich, 2020)   | USA       | Elementary school training for students grades 1-6 on how to avoid abusive situations and to disclose to a trusted adult if experiencing abuse.   |
| <i>Enough! Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in My School</i><br>(Gushwa, 2018)                    | USA       | One-hour online training course for teachers, administrators, counselors, coaches, office personnel, and support staff for K-12 students.   |
| <i>Feeling Yes, Feeling No</i><br>(Hazzard, 1991)  | USA       | Three sessions for third and fourth graders, including film, covering recognition of and response to sexual abuse. One session 'booster shot'.  |
| <i>Red Flag, Green Flag People</i><br>(Kolko, 1987 & 1989)                                     | USA       | Two sessions for elementary school students based on colouring book and film.   |
| <i>Project Trust</i><br>(Oldfield, 1996)   | USA       | 30-minute play (Trust) followed by 15-minute Q&A for grades 1-6.  |
| <i>In Situ Skills Training (IST) + Learn to be safe with Emmy and friends</i><br>(White, 2019) | Australia | Five one-hour weekly sessions delivered by trained facilitators to children in grade 1 + simulated risk scenario where child is asked by a stranger to go with them (in a controlled setting).  |

### Who delivers the intervention?

The interventions were all developed either by university research teams (e.g., *Prevención de abusos sexuales a menores* from the University of Salamanca) or non-governmental agencies, such as Red Flag, Green Flag People from the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center of Fargo-Moorhead.

Delivery may be by agency workers – e.g., two facilitators from Viol-secours deliver their workshop – or teachers who receive training for this purpose. In one case – *Tweenees* – some sessions were run by an abuse survivor aged under 18.

Several of the interventions also involve parents, although this is usually limited to one session to explain the programme, and possibly to encourage engagement with the programme materials at home.

In *The Good School Toolkit*, students are directly responsible for some activities.

### **Have the interventions been implemented at scale?**

School-based prevention programmes are a widely adopted approach, although they vary in duration and intensity. The *Red Flag / Green Flag People* colouring book – and similar books such as *Good Touch, Bad Touch* – are common, though the two studies of effectiveness were carried out on a small sample. The film *Feeling yes, Feeling no* was produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. A video of the same name is used in Scotland (UK), but it is unclear if it is the same video.

The online course *Enough! Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in My School* is marketed by the Enough Abuse Campaign. It is not possible to determine from the website the scale of implementation, but it has been more widely adopted than in the evaluation setting.

The *Good School Toolkit* is promoted by the NGO Raising Voices, which has implemented it in primary and secondary schools in Uganda and is being tested in Tanzania. The scale has been limited to date.

IGEL in Germany was a Ministry of Education project funded from 2015-17. It was offered to other schools, but take-up is unclear.

The Spanish intervention was a one-off undertaken for the purposes of the study to assess prevention programmes in a Spanish setting. Likewise, the *Viol-securus* workshop was undertaken for the purposes of the study.

The Think First and Stay Safe programme started off as a pilot in 3 schools in the US and expanded to 66 schools over ten years.

No additional information could be found for Project Trust or the study from Australia, suggesting they are not operating at scale.

### **What do the interventions cost?**

The study for only one programme – *Tweeness* – reports data on costs. The programme consists of four classroom-based sessions. Total costs were estimated at just over \$1,100 per school, or \$11 per student, which was equivalent to \$60 per disclosure. The major cost was the presenter.

For the other programmes, based on the programme descriptions, these seem to be similarly low cost, on account of their limited duration and the fact that they are mainly delivered by teachers.

For example, it is clear that *Red Flag / Green Flag* is relatively low-cost. Part of its stated rationale is that preventive interventions are a cost-effective alternative to taking children at risk of abuse into care.

Although it is an online programme and so may sound low-cost, *Enough! Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in My School*, is a branded programme which requires a licence fee.

The likely exception is *The Good School Toolkit*, which is a more intensive intervention and so has a higher cost. But it has more ambitious objectives in settings in which physical and sexual abuse in schools is relatively common.

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

The core idea of prevention programmes is to establish a clear understanding in children to identify what constitutes unacceptable behaviours and feel empowered to report it.

The logic of personal safety prevention programmes targeted at young children is that children are active agents in child sexual abuse. If children are aware of what constitutes abuse (e.g., good touch versus bad touch), they are likely to recognize it, object to it, walk away from it, and report it, all of which reduce the likelihood of abuse occurring. Programmes teach children skills for managing and reporting abusive situations.

This process is supported by parent and teacher training so they can reinforce the approach and listen to children when they discuss these issues, including reporting abuse.

Although not stated as part of the theory of change, the intervention and evaluation activities provide an opportunity for disclosure.

*The Good School Toolkit* has a six-step process based on the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change. This model first makes people aware of the problem of physical and sexual abuse and then supports the planning and implementation of behaviours to deal with the problem. The final stage is when new behaviours have become the norm.

### **Do the interventions work in improving child disclosure of maltreatment?**

Overall school-based prevention programmes are effective in increasing disclosure.

Direct disclosure – telling a teacher, counselor, or other project worker, or disclosing abuse during data collection – was measured in seven studies. These results show clearly that school-based prevention activities create an opportunity for disclosure. All the studies show that children disclose abuse during, or in association with, the intervention sessions (Table 2). There are usually zero disclosures in the control group over the same period. Even simply asking children about their experiences of abuse can result in substantial disclosure, notably in the case of Uganda, in which 434 cases were referred to child protection services after the follow-up survey.

**Table 2 Direct disclosure during intervention or data collection (number of cases)**

| Programme                                      | Disclosure in   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Treatment group   | Control group   |
| <i>Tweenees</i>                                | <i>Grade 6</i><br>18U presenter: 62<br>Teacher presenter: 3<br><i>Grade 7/8</i><br>18U presenter: 5<br>Teacher presenter: 0 (4 observed on video but not reported)<br>Telephone helpline*: 44 | 0<br><br>0<br><br>28 (all other areas of city not just control) |
| <i>Prevención de abusos sexuales a menores</i> | 8   | 2   |
| <i>Good School Toolkit</i>                     | 434 children referred to child protective services because of what they disclosed in the follow-up survey   |   |
| <i>Feeling yes, Feeling no</i>                 | Sexual abuse: 28 (8 on-going/20 past)<br>Physical abuse: 6 (5 on-going/1 past)<br>Teachers reported observing two incidents of children using prevention skills for strangers in cars         |   |
| <i>Red Flag, Green Flag</i>                    |   |   |
| <i>1987 study</i>                              | 20 (revealed in data collection of which 18 had been revealed to adult)   | 0   |
| <i>1989 study</i>                              | 20  | 0   |
| <i>Project Trust</i>                           | 4   | 1   |

Note: \*Refers to the two weeks after intervention. No calls received in three weeks before intervention

In the study of *Tweenees*, some sessions were presented by a survivor of child sex abuse aged under 18 (18U). These presentations were associated with higher rates of disclosure than the classes presented by teachers. For grade 6 students, the four classes held by the 18U presenter resulted in 65 disclosures, compared to just 3 disclosures in the X classes with teacher presentations. For grades 7 and 8, just one session was given by an 18U presenter, resulting in five disclosures, compared to none in any of the teacher presented classes.

Several studies report 'hypothetical disclosure', sometimes called the course of action the child should take in the event of attempted abuse. In some cases, the child is presented with a vignette and asked how they or the child in the vignette should respond. For example, for the evaluation of IGEL, the children were told the story of Jona, whose guitar teacher behaves inappropriately. Other studies ask the child directly how they would respond to inappropriate behaviour. The study of Red

Flag / Green Flag asked children, “Would you talk to an adult in order to get help if you were touched in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?”.

All studies reporting hypothetical disclosure found a significant effect, though it was usually only a small to moderate effect and weaker at follow-up than immediately after the intervention.

Prevention may also include activities with teachers, so they respond appropriately to disclosure. However, the effects of this component are not commonly evaluated. Three studies report findings about teacher preparedness: two found a positive effect and one found no effect, so no conclusion can be drawn about their effectiveness.

The evidence of increased disclosure is supported by the findings along the causal chain. The studies mostly report improving children’s awareness of potentially abusive situations and how to respond. For example, the Viol-secours workshop has only a small effect on knowledge and awareness and therefore a small effect on disclosure.

All findings need to be treated with caution, as the studies mostly have a medium to high risk of bias.

### Evidence of adverse effects

There are concerns that prevention interventions may have adverse side effects on children exposed to discussions of sexual abuse or data collection which includes simulated situations such as abductions. Several studies collect data from parents on child mental health, such as anxiety or concerns about sex. No evidence is found of adverse effects from the interventions.

### How good is the evidence?

Medium-weak. All studies are rated as overall medium (some concerns) or high risk of bias, except one RCT (*White 2019*) and the two studies of Red Flag and Green Flag which are low risk of bias (Table 3). However, these latter two studies are not RCTs, which generally give a higher quality of causal evidence.

### 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>Barron 2013</i>       | Some concerns        | Some concerns      | Low risk                               | Low risk             | Low risk                   | Some concerns                    |
| <i>Daigneault 2015</i>   | High risk of bias    | Some concerns      | Some concerns                          | High risk            | High risk                  | Some concerns                    |
| <i>Del Campo Sanchez</i> | Some concerns        | Some concerns      | Some concerns                          | Low risk             | Low risk                   | Some concerns                    |

|                          |                      |                  |                  |           |                  |                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>2006</b>              |                      |                  |                  |           |                  |                  |
| <b>Devries<br/>2015</b>  | High risk<br>of bias | Low risk         | Some<br>concerns | Low risk  | High risk        | Some<br>concerns |
| <b>Gushwa<br/>2018</b>   | High risk<br>of bias | Some<br>concerns | Low risk         | High risk | Some<br>concerns | Some<br>concerns |
| <b>Hazzard<br/>1991</b>  | Some<br>concerns     | Some<br>concerns | Some<br>concerns | Low risk  | Some<br>concerns | Some<br>concerns |
| <b>Oldfield<br/>1996</b> | Some<br>concerns     | Some<br>concerns | Some<br>concerns | Low risk  | Low risk         | Some<br>concerns |
| <b>White<br/>2019</b>    | Low risk<br>of bias  | Low risk         | Low risk         | Low risk  | Low risk         | Low risk         |

***Risk of Bias for Quasi-Experimental Designs (QEDs)***

| <b>Study<br/>(Author<br/>and year)</b> | <b>Overall<br/>risk of<br/>bias</b> | <b>Confounding</b> | <b>Selection<br/>bias</b> | <b>Bias in<br/>intervention<br/>classification</b> | <b>Deviation<br/>from<br/>intended<br/>intervention</b> | <b>Missing<br/>outcome<br/>data</b> | <b>Measurement<br/>of the<br/>outcome</b> | <b>Selection<br/>of the<br/>reported<br/>result</b> |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Czerwinski<br/>2018</b>             | Moderate<br>risk of<br>bias         | Moderate<br>risk   | Low risk                  | Low risk   | Moderate<br>risk  | Moderate<br>risk                    | Moderate risk                             | Low risk  |
| <b>Elfreich<br/>2020</b>               | Moderate<br>risk of<br>bias         | Low risk           | Low risk                  | Low risk   | Low risk  | Moderate<br>risk                    | Moderate risk                             | Low risk  |
| <b>Kolko<br/>1987</b>                  | Low risk<br>of bias                 | Low risk           | Low risk                  | Low risk   | Low risk  | Moderate<br>risk                    | Moderate risk                             | Low risk  |
| <b>Kolko<br/>1989</b>                  | Low risk<br>of bias                 | Low risk           | Low risk                  | Low risk   | Low risk  | Moderate<br>risk                    | Moderate risk                             | Low risk  |