

Summary of individual study: White (2019)

Skinny cell(s) in which this study appears:

Intervention = Disclosure; Outcome = Child Mental Health

Summary: Combining classroom-based abuse prevention programme with one-on-one simulated training on dangerous situations can improve the confidence and intentions for Grade 1 students (5-7 years) to disclose.

The summary is based on **White et al. (2019)** ‘Outcomes of In Situ Training for Disclosure as a Standalone and a Booster to a Child Protective Behaviors Education Program.’

Evidence status

Evidence status	<i>Low risk of bias</i>	Strong evidence of improving disclosure confidence and disclosure intentions.
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The summary in brief

In this study, two interventions were tested for children in grade 1 (5-7 years old). One is a conventional school-based sexual abuse prevention programme to recognize and respond to dangerous, potentially abusive situations. The other is a single session ‘In Situ Training’ (IST) for children where a potentially dangerous situation is simulated. In this scenario, during a routine interview as part of the study, the child is left alone for a few minutes when a stranger appears and asks the child to go with them. The stranger then asks the child not to tell anyone about their interaction. The interviewer returns and resumes the interview noting if the child discloses the encounter or not. Children thereby get a chance to ‘practice’ disclosing.

The research study tested each of the interventions alone and in combination compared to a waitlist control group.

Grade 1 students (5-7 years) from various schools in Queensland, Australia were randomized to one of four groups: three interventions (IST alone, group education programme, and combination of both) and a control - which was a waitlist who would get the intervention/s later. All intervention arms led to increased disclosure intentions and confidence (compared to waitlist) but there were no differences in safety identification skills across groups. The two groups which got the ‘practice’ improved more than the one which just did an education programme; and the group which got the combination improved the most.

Children’s anxiety (a possible harm) did not increase from participating in the interventions.

This study highlights the importance of combining comprehensive educational programs with in-person training to make child protective behaviours interventions more effective. Giving children the chance to practice disclosing abuse helps them to protect themselves. By using in-person training alone or as a booster alongside existing programs, educators and professionals can give children the skills and confidence they need to report abuse. This could lead to early intervention and prevention of further harm.

Type of study: RCT. Peer-reviewed journal article.

The intervention

This school-based research study looked at how teaching children to disclose potential abuse situations can be helpful on its own or when combined with a child protective behaviours education program. The goal was to see if in-person training in real-life situations could improve children's ability to tell someone about abuse and if it provided extra benefits when used with an educational program.

The Observed Protection Behaviours Test (OPBT) in-person training is a single session to promote disclosure (of abuse) by a child. The study calls this in-situ training (IST). The IST interviewer is alone with a child conducting an interview like how baseline data was collected. The interviewer 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 (meant to simulate 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.

The second is a classroom-based sexual abuse prevention educational programme called 'Learn to be safe with Emmy and friends,' a very commonly implemented type of child protective intervention for young children. Five, one-hour weekly sessions are delivered by trained facilitators at school. The sessions cover "emotion knowledge and regulation, early warning signs of danger, personal space, private body area, safe and unsafe secrets, disclosure and disclosure networks." "Emmy" is the programme mascot that is part of the curriculum that is delivered via didactics and group work. The goals are to help children recognize risky situations and to disclose.

The trial

Nearly 300 children 5-7 years old in Grade 1 from many schools in Australia's Queensland participated in the trial. They were divided at random into four groups: one group received in-person training only, another group received the educational program only, the third group received both and the fourth group were waitlisted, i.e., they served as the control group for the research study. In the in-person training sessions, children learned how to recognize abuse and tell a trusted adult about it. The educational program taught children about protecting themselves from abuse and how to prevent it.

The researchers measured the results by giving the children questionnaires before and after the interventions, and then again 3 and 6 months after the intervention ended. The questionnaires asked about their knowledge of protective behaviours, how they felt about telling someone about abuse, and if they could recognize potential abuse situations. The researchers also recorded how many children actually told someone about abuse using confidential reporting methods.

How is the programme meant to work? The theory of change

No specific theory is mentioned. The programme is built on behavioural skills training (BST) which is used in different forms (group, individual) for interpersonal harm reduction.

Did the intervention work?

The results showed that both the in-person training and the educational program helped children improve their knowledge of protective behaviours and their ability to recognize potential abuse situations. ***The in-person training alone led to more children telling someone about abuse compared to just the educational program.*** This suggests that the interactive nature of the in-person training sessions made children feel more comfortable talking about sensitive issues.

The group that received both the in-person training and the educational program had the best outcomes. These children showed the highest levels of knowledge, positive attitudes about telling someone about abuse, and a higher number of actual reports of abuse compared to the other groups. The in-person training seemed to reinforce the lessons learned in the educational program and made children more confident about disclosing potential abuse situations. However, safety identification skills weren't different between groups.

Adverse outcomes: Participation in the intervention did not increase children's anxiety.

Has the intervention been implemented at scale?

No. This is a small-scale research study.

What does the intervention cost?

The study does not report any data on cost although it is mentioned that web-based training could theoretically be cheaper than in-person training.

How reliable is the evidence?

The study is rated as having a low risk of bias.

Overall risk of bias	Randomisation process	Deviations from intended interventions	Missing outcome data	Measurement of the outcome	Selection of the reported result
Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk

Cells in which this study appears:

The study relates to both prevention and disclosure:

- Intervention = prevention; outcome = child maltreatment disclosure (5 studies)
- Intervention = prevention; outcome = child mental health
- Intervention = prevention; outcome = child knowledge and awareness
- Intervention = disclosure; outcome = child maltreatment disclosure
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