

Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in Schools 

Toolkit of Recommendations & Resources to Address Needs



Tier
1

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Universal supports for all students in all settings

Tier
2

SECONDARY PREVENTION

Targeted supports for students with some risk factors

Tier
3

TERTIARY PREVENTION

Intensive supports for students at high risk

▲ Adapted from [Oklahoma Education Prevention Program Planning Guide](#). See also: [School-Based Prevention Services](#) and [Prevention Services Guide](#).

In 2022, the Oklahoma Child Sexual Abuse Workgroup conducted 64 surveys and 23 focus groups/interviews with school administrators, teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, and others to better understand their perspectives on child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention efforts in their schools. Based on those findings, this toolkit was developed to outline current needs and recommendations and provide resources for preventing CSA in schools. The action steps outlined in the following pages are interrelated and often overlap, allowing them to be implemented in tandem. For instance, while staff training is a separate step to consider, it may also be a key part of implementing broader prevention policies.



Creating a Culture of Safety

Prioritizing a culture of safety is essential, as it enables schools to play a key role in primary prevention—stopping child sexual abuse before it occurs—and addressing safety concerns when they arise. Building a safe school environment is the responsibility of all school personnel.

Recommendations & Resources for Administration and Leadership Team:

- ☐ **Create a leadership team or committee** (e.g., a Safety Team). To support each school's unique culture of safety, ensure representation from diverse and relevant areas such as developmental disabilities/special education, transportation services, support staff, extracurriculars, administration, etc. Having at least one employee from each area represented on the leadership team ensures that they can further support their respective areas in enhancing safety and promoting prevention efforts. Utilize these team members to create and review policies for CSA prevention. Consider inviting caregivers who can provide a caregiver's perspective on prevention efforts.

Reminder:

Leadership teams and committees should reflect the cultural diversity of the student body, aligning with their values and preferences. When appropriate, invite trusted community stakeholders—such as representatives from underrepresented groups (e.g., people of color, refugee communities, LGBTQ+, cultural organizations)—to team meetings to ensure their voices and insights are included.

- ☐ **Consider how incorporating [school-based mental health services](#)** further supports the goal of creating a culture of safety in the school.

Important Consideration: Youth-to-youth problematic sexual behavior in schools

Did you know that 20-25% of cases handled by Children's Advocacy Centers and up to 76% of child sexual abuse/assault cases involve a youth who has sexually acted out towards another youth?

School personnel can learn more about Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB) in Youth, including how to prevent and respond to PSB and how to incorporate the issue into school policies and prevention programming.

Resources, guidelines, and articles are available on the following pages.

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Actionable Steps for Teachers, School Counselors, and other Non-Leadership Team Members to Consider:

- ☐ School personnel are often seen as safe and trusted adults by students. Ideally, **every student should have at least three safe, caring adults—whether in school or elsewhere—whom they can turn to for support.**
- ☐ **Integrate safety skills into classroom lessons**, modeling them for students, and reinforce these concepts by displaying supportive signage on bulletin boards throughout the school.
- ☐ **Ensure students are regularly informed about the mandated reporting responsibilities of school personnel and other adults**, emphasizing their role in student safety through visible signage and ongoing discussions. Establishing a safe environment means clearly communicating what students can expect when they seek help from trusted adults.
- ☐ Creating a culture of safety means **building trust and psychological capital** in the school – this can be supported by [active listening skills](#). (Related more specifically to CSA, utilize [Best Practice Guidelines on the ‘Art’ of Listening](#)).
- ☐ **Incorporate the [6 Pillars of a Brave Space](#)** to create a safe classroom and school environment when it comes to discussing and handling sensitive topics.
- ☐ **Create a trauma-informed, inclusive school environment**, where individuals have pro-social bonds and feel connected to one another. Learn more from [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) and find [resources](#) to get started.

Youth-to-youth problematic sexual behavior in schools

Online Resources and Guidelines

[National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth](#)

[What's OK?](#)

[Responding to PSB in Children and Young People: Guidelines for Staff in Education and Care Settings](#)

[Responding to Children's PSB in Elementary Schools: A Resource for Educators](#)

[Understanding Title IX: How Federal Policy Shapes Schools' Responses to Children with PSB](#)

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Creating Policies for CSA Prevention

A multi-pronged approach that involves primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention is needed, where schools create and enact policies to enhance prevention in their school environment as well as collaborate with caregivers and raise up youth voices to support a wide-reaching effect.

Recommendations & Resources for Administration and Prevention Leadership Team:

- ☐ Utilize [School-based Prevention Services: Child Abuse Prevention, Universal Program Planning Guide](#), and [Desk Guide to Prevention](#) to **enact and/or review comprehensive policies** that align with state laws and enhance prevention across all roles in the school.

While essential, policies and training should extend beyond tertiary prevention (i.e., responding to and reporting abuse disclosures). They must also focus on primary prevention by ensuring a safe physical environment. Consider the following steps:

- Complete thorough background checks (state and national), follow screening protocols, and carefully select volunteers and employees.
- Create specific guidelines on appropriate, healthy, and safe interactions among all individuals in the school (e.g., students, staff). Include limits on time when staff or students are alone behind closed doors, and outline a code of conduct related to online (e.g., phone, email, social media) contact between students and staff.
- Identify how the school plans to monitor staff and student behavior.
- Ensure that all aspects of the school environment are safe, which might include: establishing procedures for bathrooms/showers/changing areas, designating separate bathrooms for staff; identifying unsupervised locations; ensuring clear sightlines; utilizing security mirrors and cameras; defining and securing off-limits areas; and adding windows to doors and/or rooms.
- Develop clear policies for addressing and reporting inappropriate behavior or noncompliance with established procedures.
- See more ideas in [Steps Toward Child Abuse Prevention & Creating Safe School Environments](#), [What Teachers can do to Prevent CSA](#), and [Evidence-Based Strategies to Prevent CSA in Schools](#).

Review drafted policies to establish clear, actionable, and consistent guidelines for every role in the school, ensuring clarity to reduce ambiguity and prevent a fragmented approach.

Youth-to-youth problematic sexual behavior in schools

Articles Supporting Prevention and Response

[Response and Interventions into Harmful Sexual Behavior in Schools](#)

[Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harm in Schools – From Broken Rules to Broken Systems](#)

[Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges](#)

[Addressing Harmful Sexual Behaviors Between Students at School](#)

[Responsible Behavior with Younger Children](#)

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- ☐ **Provide ongoing education to ALL school personnel about current policies and practices** to ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in prevention. Every employee plays a part, so policies should be clearly communicated and easily accessible. Consider making them available online and posting them in employee-only areas.



Special consideration: Unclear policies have led to a heavy reliance on school counselors. Administrators should clearly define and communicate the [role of school counselors](#) in relation to child sexual abuse prevention.

- ☐ **Establish ongoing training for ALL school personnel** on prevention, focusing on recognizing red flags (in both the school environment and among students) and reporting ([Oklahoma Directory](#)). Interactive, practice-based, in-person training led by local experts is often preferred. Schools should incorporate their specific policies and procedures into this training for better understanding of recognition and reporting practices in the local context.



Reflection: Is it possible that some staff (e.g., contracted or support staff, those not paid for professional development) will not receive this training? If so, problem-solve and take steps to ensure that everyone in the school can receive ongoing training on prevention.



Full circle: Staff may be concerned about “missing the signs” of CSA. When ongoing training is provided to all staff, and students receive instructional programming in the context of a safe school environment, students may feel safe to disclose to a trusted and caring adult. These prevention efforts interrelate and come full-circle, which can help reduce anxiety for staff who are balancing multiple professional demands while wanting to ensure they are not “missing the signs.”

- ☐ Outside of formal training and education, **create ongoing conversations and openness among all staff around prevention efforts.** Incorporate refresher education and discussions into regularly scheduled meetings. Invite [local experts](#) into these conversations to answer ongoing questions. These efforts will enhance school personnel’s confidence and comfort, while complementing the development of an instructional program for families.
- ☐ Consider identifying and **establishing an instructional program** ([Oklahoma Directory](#); [National Resource: Stop It Now!](#)) **for students and their caregivers.** These efforts would ideally occur across the lifespan of students, as prevention evolves based on the student’s development and ongoing maturation (e.g., including information on healthy relationships, [sexual violence](#), and [dating violence](#) for teen students). Review how the implementation of an instructional program for CSA prevention meets [the Oklahoma Academic Standards of Health Education](#).



Reflection: Are any age groups missed in current/identified instructional programs?

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Reflection: Is the current/identified instruction program a good fit for students with unique educational and developmental needs?

Did you know that youth with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to experience abuse or neglect compared to their peers? Ensure prevention-focused instructional programs are meeting the needs of ALL students, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (see [resource](#)). Programs that include visual aids, concrete examples, developmentally-appropriate and standardized vocabulary, and are interactive have been suggested. Prevention educators should partner with students' special education teachers and assistants in program instruction.



After reviewing the [Oklahoma Directory](#), complete this [form](#) if you are having trouble finding an instructional program in your area.



Note: Prior to implementing instructional programs for students, school personnel should receive ongoing training on recognizing and responding to child sexual abuse, ensuring they feel equipped and prepared.

- ☐ **Provide resources and information about the school's prevention policies and instructional programs directly to caregivers** to increase their understanding of the school's goals and ensure caregivers are playing an active part in the prevention of CSA. Schools that actively and enthusiastically communicate the importance and benefits of policies and programs—such as CSA prevention, safety, and promoting healthy student behaviors—will strengthen caregiver support and advocacy.
- ☐ **Consider how comprehensive sexual health education supports the prevention of CSA and dating violence.** In fact, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) “supports broad access to comprehensive sex education, wherein all children and adolescents have access to developmentally appropriate, evidence-based education that provides the knowledge they need to: Develop a safe and positive view of sexuality, build healthy relationships, and make informed, safe, positive choices about their sexuality and sexual health.”



Considerations for rural schools: The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) notes that “Adolescents who live in rural communities have faced disproportionate declines in formal sex education over the past two decades,” and students in rural communities want [relevant, relatable, and reliable information](#).

Read [Tips for Engaging Parents](#) to address concerns around sexual health education and provide [Resources for Parents and Trusted Adults for Talking with Youth](#).

Consider utilizing [Resources for Educators](#) and [Inclusive Sexual Health Education Resource Hub](#).

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Responding to Youth Disclosures and Reporting

Many schools have effectively implemented training and awareness programs for reporting child sexual abuse. However, ongoing support is essential to enhance ALL school personnel's familiarity and confidence with policies and procedures, as well as their comfort in reporting incidents.

Recommendations & Resources for Administration and Prevention Leadership Team:

- ☐ **Create, review frequently, and share widely the school's policies and procedures around reporting disclosures.** Utilize [Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting Best Practices](#) and [Sexual Assault Reporting Best Practices](#) guidelines.

As noted in the guidelines and as appropriate, utilize [Child Abuse Reporting Form](#) and [Child Abuse Investigation Form](#).

Incorporate resources created by the local Children's Advocacy Centers into policies and procedures, including what information is helpful to get when a child discloses and what should be left to other professionals. Please see the [ROAR Disclosure Form \(Appendix A\)](#) for guidelines around disclosure and strategies for gathering pertinent information without excessive questioning of the child.

Consider creating and widely sharing a decision tree that clearly outlines steps for handling disclosures and reporting as well as who should be contacted in these events, with a note that internally sharing a student's disclosure to a principal or school counselor does not fulfill the person's mandate to report the disclosure to Oklahoma Human Services and law enforcement. Whomever the child discloses to should be the reporting party.



Consideration for policy development: Students may prefer to disclose to a peer-age friend. That friend may then share with a school employee. How should school personnel respond if a student shares with an employee that their friend disclosed to them?

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- ☐ As noted above, **establish ongoing training for school personnel on prevention that involves recognition and reporting** ([Oklahoma Directory; CARE Center Training; Abbott House Training and Brochure; National Resource: Darkness2Light](#)). Ideally, to further support confidence and comfort with responding to youth disclosures, this training involves hands-on practice with case examples, various types of child disclosures to individuals in various roles, and a walk-through of how to respond to the student, which should include: minimal questioning coupled with what key information to gather, a supportive response,⁽¹⁾ a reminder of the requirement to report,⁽²⁾ and letting the student know what will happen next. This training should also include important considerations for and how to make a report, practice with the reporting phone call, and support for the employee after a student discloses to them.⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Responding responsibly to a child's disclosure with empathy, support, reassurance, and calmness is essential. As provided in above linked resources, be sure to incorporate best-practice responses to child abuse disclosures into training for school personnel.

⁽²⁾ Trainers may be able to provide sample scripts for school personnel related to appropriate "compassionate interruptions," such as politely pausing the student to ensure the adult's full attention is with the student, quickly resuming the conversation and ensuring urgent matters are addressed immediately, or thoughtfully reminding the student of the adult's requirement to report to keep the student safe.

⁽³⁾ There are many demands placed on teachers, school counselors, and other school personnel. Therefore, school procedures that delineate how support will be provided to staff following a child's disclosure should be prioritized.

- ☐ Enhance awareness of the local mental health agencies and resources that support youth following disclosure (learn more using the [School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit](#) and [Behavioral Intervention Services and Supports in Schools](#)).

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Appendix A

Care Conversation Resource

Conversations Handled with

Commit to confidentiality

A child trusted **YOU** with their story, so it's **YOUR** responsibility to report it. Keep the details of the disclosure to yourself, but notify your administrator that you have called the authorities. Unnecessarily involving others makes them liable to report.

Avoid over-interviewing

Thank the child for sharing and keep questions to a minimum. Your job is to find out **WHO** did **WHAT** and **WHERE** the abuse occurred. Obtain demographic info from school records to avoid overwhelming the child with questions.

Report, **THEN** support

Call OKDHS (1-800-522-3511) and your jurisdiction's non-emergency line ASAP. After reporting, offer comfort and resources, but don't revisit the disclosure or ask for further details. If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Empower **ALL** students

Talk regularly about body safety and the importance of disclosing abuse to a safe adult. For more info, contact The CARE Center at info@carecenterokc.org or 405-236-2100.

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UNITED WAY
Central Oklahoma



The
CARE Center

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Childhood sexual abuse is a significant public health problem, with deleterious emotional, social, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for victims. The Oklahoma Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Workgroup was established to examine the efforts and gaps in addressing the prevention of child sexual abuse in Oklahoma. The Workgroup is composed of members from state and nonprofit agencies who have programs focused on child sexual abuse prevention, problematic sexual behavior of youth, sex education, and/or healthy relationships for youth. This Toolkit was developed by a sub-committee of Workgroup members who contributed valuable input and feedback to support the mission of preventing child sexual abuse in schools. Thank you to Workgroup members for their contributions on this project.



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