

## ISSUES PAPER 4: PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN OUT OF HOME CARE

The NSW Protective Behaviours Consultancy Group of NSW Inc. receives funding from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services and provides training, information and resources in Protective Behaviours (PB) to many services throughout the community. PB is a program designed for children, young people and adults to help keep themselves safe and work towards reducing violence and abuse in the community. Protective Behaviours NSW Public Fund is on the register of harm prevention charities.

We would like to contribute to the information available for consideration by the members of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Specifically we would like to focus on the following question.

### 1. An essential element of OOHC is for a child to be safe and secure. Are there core strategies to keeping children in OOHC safe from sexual abuse and what is the evidence that supports them?

PB is a living skills and personal safety program designed for children, young people and adults to help keep themselves safe and work towards reducing violence in the community. PB address issues of bullying, harassment, violence and abuse. We believe that a program such as PB includes core themes, concepts and strategies (see Appendix 1) that will help keep children in OOHC safe from sexual abuse.

PB is about the right to feel safe and the right to talk about times when someone feels unsafe. It is a program that is used to prevent violence by helping people to develop the beliefs about the right to feel and be safe as well as the skills to keep safe and talk to someone who can help if we are feeling unsafe. The National Safe Schools Framework and resource manual (MCEECDYA, 2011a & 2011b) recommend for all schools that *a personal safety and protective behaviours curriculum is in place at appropriate year levels*. This is because PB helps to develop personal safety beliefs and skills that:

- are lifelong – as children, as young people, as adults and when we are older
- are for a range of places where we might be unsafe - at home, at school, in the community
- can be applied to a range of unsafe situations including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, bullying and verbal abuse.

Talking to someone about feeling unsafe is a critical aspect of PB. It is never the responsibility of children and young people to deal with abuse. Stopping violence towards children and young people is always the responsibility of adults. Consequently, developing a Network of trusted adults to whom we can talk if we are feeling unsafe is a critical aspect of the PB program. It is important that children have opportunities to revisit their safety skills over time. Each discussion on safety needs to reinforce the themes, concepts and strategies of PB.

PB is a prevention strategy that is applicable at all levels of prevention – primary, secondary and tertiary. Importantly it focuses on issues of safety, rights to safety and strategies to assist the individual to work towards being safe. The program assists with issues of displacement, support, empowerment, and provides an advocacy and intervention role in breaking cycles of abuse and violence assisting in the safety and wellbeing of all people.

*Protective Behaviours* helps people to:

- identify and deal with potentially unsafe situations
- recognise their own personal Early Warning signs if they are feeling unsafe
- develop skills to help keep themselves safe
- develop a Network of people with whom they can talk if they are feeling unsafe
- develop problem-solving, communication and relationship skills.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF PB APPROACH

### Finkelhor

Protective Behaviours is informed by the work of David Finkelhor (1984, 2007) who sees prevention education as having three important aspects:

- First is the aspect of promoting disclosure
- Second, for those who do talk about it, is finding ways to prevent some of the negative outcomes of abuse such as guilt feelings, self-blame, and shame; as well as the many other possible negative outcomes of abuse.
- The third is the creation of a more-sensitive environment among adults, other children, and organisations in general to respond to and help children living with abuse

### 1. Talking about it

PB promotes this aspect so that adults can respond to a disclosure by taking action to keep children and young people safe. Researchers Paine and Hansen (2002) report that children who experience abuse over longer periods of time are at greater risk of negative long-term

outcomes. A child's self-disclosure of abuse is a critical component in initiating intervention to stop the abuse, address its immediate effects, and decrease the likelihood of negative long-term outcomes (Paine and Hansen, 2002).

Ways of helping children and young people to talk about what is happening is especially important since, for example, child sexual abuse is often difficult to identify, and disclosure by the child or young person may be the only means by which adults have to respond to and stop prolonged victimization (Alaggia, 2004).

The importance of a child's self-disclosure, particularly of sexual abuse, can extend beyond the individual child and her or his family. Paine and Hansen (2002) report on research that indicates that sexual offenders commit many more crimes against children than those for which they have been investigated and/or convicted. A child's self-disclosure of abuse may lead to identification of an offender who poses a threat to other children, resulting in therapeutic and legal interventions to prevent and/or stop the sexual victimization of others.

In a very early work Berliner and Conte (1995) found that many of those who had reported their abuse continued to have a wide range of feelings after telling. Not all of these feelings are positive. However 97% of the children said that they believed that it was a good thing to tell. Yet we also know that talking about it is not easy. Breckenridge, Cunningham and Jennings (2008) in their report on *The debilitating effects of silence and denial* say that any disclosure and help seeking behaviour should be regarded as, and responded to, as an act of courage.

## **2. The second task of child protection education**

Finkelhor (2007) talks about is helping to prevent negative outcomes subsequent to victimization such as guilt feelings, self-blame, and shame; as well as the other possible negative outcomes.

We know that children and adults frequently do not disclose their experiences of abuse. For example, in relation to child sexual assault, Alaggia (2004) reported that most studies of disclosure found that between 30% and 80% of victims purposefully do **not** disclose these experiences before adulthood. Given the ways some people continue to doubt children and young people, this is not surprising.

Lindblad (2007) encapsulate the dilemma of disclosure well by arguing that to seek support through disclosing any victim, either child or adult, must first challenge the social reluctance to acknowledge child abuse and respond supportively.

PB can help to challenge such social reluctance – one way is the use the PB discount hierarchy to take people through a process of believing the extent of child abuse in our community, believing that there are things we can do as a society to prevent and respond to child abuse and believing that there is something that *each* of us can do.

Paine and Hansen (2002) say that regardless of the type of abuse experienced by a child, most children feel responsible for their own abuse and say that they did not disclose abuse for many reasons including feelings of shame. PB activities help children and young people recognise and act their *right* to feel safe and to be safe.

Williams, and Nelson-Gardell (2012) found that those individuals who had been abused as children and who also experienced lower levels of school engagement, lower levels of caregiver social support, lower levels of hope and expectancy, experienced a higher level of general behavioural problems or were more likely to be 'less resilient'. Where we are not able to prevent abuse happening, we can help children and young people to develop support networks that engage with schools and their direct caregivers and help them build extended networks of care. In this way we can help prevent further instances of abuse. The PB strategy of Networking is critical in helping to do this.

Williams and Nelson-Gardell's (2012) work also looks at aspects of resilience about 'hope and expectancy'. The PB strategy of 'persistence expectation' is relevant here. Persistence encompasses ideas of perseverance, determination, and assertiveness. In PB persistence includes ideas of resilience, elasticity, recovery as well as prevailing in the long run, retaining what is important, being long-lasting, and a sense of continuing to exist. Most importantly, it involves taking action.

## **3. Finally, a third task of child protection education**

Finkelhor (2007) talks about is the creation of a more-sensitive environment among adults, other children, and organizations in general to respond to and help children living with abuse. Such 'sensitive environments' are a work in progress. Alaggia, (2004) found in her study that many of the behaviours that participants in the study used as a 'behavioural disclosure' of abuse – such as eating disorders, substance abuse, suicidal gestures – are the very ones that sexual abuse predators cite as characteristics which they identify in children who they choose to target for perpetration (Conte, Wolfe, & Smith, 1989).

So the ways young people try to indicate that something is wrong in the first place, can double back on them and make them at risk of further abuse. Consequently, early intervention and programs such as PB are critical in helping to create an environment that encourages children to talk about what is happening to them. This also stresses the importance of Networking – one of the key concepts of PB.

Haley Clark and Antonia Quadara (2010) give us some ideas about how perpetrators are thinking and working on children. They found that use and exploitation of TRUST was identified by nearly all victim/survivors as being key to the perpetration of sexual assault. All victim/survivors, except for those assaulted by a stranger with no interaction in the lead up to the offence, had trusted and felt safe around

the offender before the assault(s). The complex ideas of trust are a focus of PB through the following ways.

- Talking about the complexity of Trust.
- Talking about best ways to teach children about relationships and rules of relationships and when relationships might be unsafe.
- Talking about teaching children strategies they can use when caught off guard – and understanding and believing that abuse by adults is NEVER their fault
- Helping children to have the power to talk about what is happening – and believe that they have a right to that power.
- Talking about the possibilities of safe Networking.

## Educating

*Protective Behaviours* is the major school-based primary prevention initiative in Australia (Tomison, 1997). It is a key strategy in recent safe schools national policies (MCEECDYA, 2011a & 2011b). Topping and Barron (2009) found that effective prevention education programs involved modelling, reflection and group discussion, and skills rehearsal. They also found that programs need to have the capacity to be delivered to a range of personnel and actively involve parental input.

*Protective Behaviours* has responded to research findings (for example, Lunar & Finkelhor, 1998; Briggs and Hawkins, 1994; Topping and Barron, 2009) and has undergone many developments so that it remains up to date and relevant. For example, in response to the current concerns about bullying and cyberbullying (Cross, Shaw, Hearn, Epstein, Monks, Lester, & Thomas, 2009) PB now includes a strong focus on dealing with bullying, particularly cyberbullying.

PB involves the supporting principles on which many other more specific skills and strategies can be developed. It offers an approach where the multiple issues of children's safety can be expanded and made more specific depending on the issues. At the same time PB is a primary prevention program that focuses on the **physical and emotional safety** of children and young people; developing **pro-social values**; provides a context for specific strategies develop a **supportive and caring school community**; and includes specific skills for **developing social and emotional learning**. The research base for each of these is now discussed.

### 1. Physical and Emotional Safety

Multiple studies have identified a strong link between bullying others and later violent, antisocial and/or criminal behaviour. A strong link has also been identified between violence and a range of mental health difficulties (such as anxiety and depression) as well as loneliness, low self esteem and poor social self concept. Addressing violence in assists the mental health of children and creates a learning environment in which wellbeing can thrive.

### 2. Pro-social values

Many researchers have included the learning of pro-social values as part of their overall and moderately successful anti-violence or child wellbeing interventions. For example, many of the projects in the *Australian Government's Values Education Good Practice Schools Project* have been shown to extend the strategies, options and repertoires of teachers for effectively managing learning environments and for developing positive school and class environments that positively influence both student and teacher behaviour.

### 3. A supportive and caring community

A supportive and caring community is characterised by positive climates; children having a sense of connectedness and belonging; caring, supportive and respectful relationships with adults; positive relationships with other children and involvement by their parents/ caregivers. When children have these experiences they are more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing. Many studies have identified a range of positive benefits from being part of a supportive and caring community such as:

- Increases in academic achievement as a result of the indirect effects of higher levels of participation, higher levels of engagement, attendance and participation.
- Reductions in anti-social behaviour such as bullying, violence and vandalism
- Reductions in children dropping out of school
- Less drug, tobacco and alcohol use
- Increases in mental health and reductions in emotional distress
- Later age for first sexual experience
- Decreases in disruptive behaviour in school
- Greater acceptance of authority and positive community values
- More acceptance of responsibility for regulating their own behaviour.

### 4. Social and Emotional Learning

It is now well established across research studies that social and emotional skills (such as the ability to work cooperatively with others, manage one's emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively) are integral parts of academic success. The outcomes of learning such social and emotional skills include improved school performance, better problem solving and planning, more use of high-order thinking skills and higher levels of pro-social and non-disruptive behaviour. A recent meta-analysis of 207 studies of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs conducted by a CASEL research team (Durlak, Weissberg, Taylor and Dymnicki, et al., 2008) found that children who participated in SEL programs:

- Improved significantly in their social and emotional skills and their attitudes to themselves and others
- Displayed more pro-social behaviour and fewer disruptive and aggressive behaviours
- Experienced lower levels of depression
- Scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized achievement tests, relative to peers not receiving the program.

A child's level of social competence and their friendship networks have been shown to be predictive of both their current and future academic achievement. Social skills are seen as "academic enablers", that is, skills that help children to make the best of their ability. Using pro-social skills such as active listening, helping, cooperating, and sharing can help children to function more effectively in both social and academic contexts, as both contexts require similar skills. Experiencing ongoing positive emotions has been found to enhance an individual's capacity for optimistic thinking, problem solving and decision making and to lead to more flexible, innovative and creative solutions.

In her doctoral thesis and subsequent publications, Laws (2011) examined the dominant practices around children and young people who are taken into the care of the state and named as living in out-of-home care. This naming seems to evoke a status of 'other' than 'proper' living arrangements with one's biological family. There are issues around state care for children, the development of a focus on the protection of the child, and the placement of children in situations most like the fiction of a 'real' family. Children are removed from their homes by the state because it is not possible for them to live with their family, usually because of abuse or maltreatment. Yet the dominant discourses seem to double back on them, and the children are the ones who come to be positioned as somehow getting it wrong as 'appropriate children'. In the dominant discourses, it is the specific behaviours of those taken in care that seem to become the focus of those supporting children living in out of home care. Protective Behaviours seeks to unpick these discourses by focussing on rights, safety and empowerment of those living in out of home care.

#### **SOME ACHIEVEMENTS PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOURS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

- Protective Behaviours NSW has completed training with refuge workers throughout NSW of which, those workers estimated they would work with at least 3000 children and young people and over 1000 women.
- In NSW, there have been over 21,000 people, since the early 90's, who have successfully completed either one, two or five day training programs in Protective Behaviours. This includes a knowledge the themes, prevention strategies, legislative framework, perpetrator behavior and impact of abuse on children and young people
- Based on data taken from all people who attend training across NSW we estimate that as a result of training the program has reached over 1.1 million children.
- The Protective Behaviours Consultancy Group of NSW Inc. receives requests to present training workshops to a range of organisations including: NSW Police Force, Juvenile Justice, Education - both Government and non Government, Nursing, Community schools, T.A.F.E., Early Childhood / Child Care Services, Women's and Youth Refuges/Services, Community Centres, Family Support Organisations and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services.
- Because of historical links with the Police Force, training has occurred with many officers with varying roles and responsibilities ranging from Domestic Violence Liaison Officers, Joint Investigative Team Officers, Community Safety Officers, Youth Liaison Officers, NSW Police Academy Tutors, Police Citizens Youth Club Officers and Detectives.
- The development of resources to support implementation that have been distributed on a state, national and international level. Such resources have been made possible by the expertise and knowledge of members of the Board and the many PB trainers.

**PB is a building-block program which can be adapted in many ways to suit particular incidents, circumstances and contexts. Many resources have been developed to support the implementation of the program (See attached Pamphlet). Consequently, to keep children in OOHC safe from sexual abuse, we see it as critical that children and young people living in OOHC, and their carers, receive regular Protective Behaviours training.**

*Cath Laws*

Dr Cath Laws on behalf of Protective Behaviours Consultancy Group of NSW (Inc.)

## Appendix 1

### About Protective Behaviours

Protective Behaviours has two themes around which the concepts and strategies are developed.

Theme 1: We all have the right to feel safe all of the time.

Theme 2: Nothing is so awful that we can't talk about it with someone.

When presenting the program, a number of the concepts and strategies are presented with each of the themes.

Theme	Concept	Strategy
Theme 1	Safety	Theme Reinforcement
Theme 2	Early Warning Signs	One Step Removed
	Networks	Network Review
	Persistence	
	Protective Interrupting	

### Overview of key terms

#### Safety

Safety refers to a physical and emotional state and, in the context of Protective Behaviours, individuals identify how they feel safe, when they are safe, and how they experience personal safety. This skill is important as it helps us to identify when we may be feeling unsafe. Safety is experienced differently by each individual.

#### Early Warning Signs

These are specific, internal, physical sensations that are experienced by each of us internally and non-verbally. These are body sensations that serve as indicators that we are at risk of being potentially unsafe or that risk is increasing.

#### One Step Removed

This strategy requires that sensitive issues are framed in the third person or so that children are not asked to place themselves in potentially unsafe situations – even by 'pretending'. This is extremely important and relatively easy to do. For example, we discuss safe strategies in the context of a story such as 'Someone has fights at school' rather than 'Suppose you have a fight at school'. This strategy is critical in helping children feel safe while letting them explore issues. We also invite children to participate in problem solving by asking 'What if?' type questions which are open-ended and encourage children to explore ideas as safely as possible.

#### Theme Reinforcement

The two themes are kept constantly in our awareness. We can reinforce the two themes verbally and/or in visual form with posters, through songs and activities and in as many creative ways as possible.

#### Networks and Network Review

Networks are trusted adults to whom children can turn. Children identify four trusted adults, in addition to the ones in their family, they can contact if they are not feeling safe. Children regularly review the responses of the people they have listed on their network and the continued availability of these people.

#### Persistence

This means providing encouragement to ourselves and others to work through our network people until enough intervention has happened, Early Warning Signs have gone, and we feel safe again.

#### Protective Interrupting

This strategy is used to protect children from disclosing personal information in a group setting. It requires sensitivity and adults could use statements like 'That sounds important – let's talk about it at lunch' or similar protective and redirecting statements.

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*And the dedicated and talented professionals who are  
Protective Behaviours NSW trainers*



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"Let's talk about being safe"

# The Protective Behaviours Consultancy Group of NSW Inc.



## About Protective Behaviours

Protective Behaviours is a living skills and personal safety program which can be helpful when working with children and young people. It enables people of all ages to develop strategies to help them deal with all forms of difficult situations. As a personal safety program it can also be used as a non-threatening method of looking at the more specific areas of child abuse and domestic violence.

Protective Behaviours can be used by children, young people and adults to help keep themselves safe and work towards reducing violence in the community. It can provide the basis for helping children be safe at school and address problems such as bullying. It can also help everyone learn to stay safe from the risks and challenges that surround us in everyday life. Many members of the community who work with families and children find training in Protective Behaviours a valuable resource.

## Why do we need Protective Behaviours?

- To protect children and young people because we simply cannot be with them every minute of the day
- Because 85% of abused children are abused by someone known and trusted by them
- To give children and adults permission to talk about problem or difficult situations they face
- To empower people with the right to feel safe and act to keep themselves safe.

The program is based on two themes:

- We all have the right to feel safe all of the time.
- Nothing is so awful that we can't talk about it with someone.

In conjunction with the two themes are the three major concepts of the program:

- **SAFETY:** an individual feeling and a basic right for every person
- **EARLY WARNING SIGNS:** specific physical indicators that alert us to possible risks to our safety
- **NETWORKING:** identifying people to talk to and developing communication skills.

## Training with Protective Behaviours

- Training workshops are run with various Government and Non-Government organisations; School, Early Childhood Centres, NSW Police Service, Department of Community Services, Residential Care Workers, Youth Workers, Health Professionals and various other community based groups.
- Our one day training workshops focus on such things as the history and goals of the Protective Behaviours Program and primarily looks at methods of implementation of the Themes, Core Concepts and Strategies.
- Further to our one day training we can provide a second day which can concentrate on issues of abuse or if requested look at further implementation strategies.

- ✓ Training is available throughout NSW.
- ✓ To help with the training and implementation the consultancy group has available an extensive range of resources suitable for all age levels.
- ✓ All training can be organised and resources purchased through our office in Sydney.
- ✓ All our resources are listed on the reverse of this pamphlet and may be ordered by phone, fax, e-mail or mail. Postage and packaging charges apply and all orders are sent with an invoice for ease of payment.

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