Questions about Child-Focused CSA Prevention

1. Is providing information to young children for avoiding CSA? We do not know. It is still unclear whether providing information to children is effective (Kaufman et al., 2002; Topping & Barlow, 2000; Zorr et al., 2008). Furthermore, there is no agreement as to what constitutes effectiveness (Green & Hagaadager, 2015); and evaluations can include measuring: knowledge through questionnaires or interviews, skills through hypothetical scenarios, behavioral responses to simulated situations or disclosure rates. Regardless of which of these are measured, the effectiveness of CSA programs can only ever be ascertained through “proof” (Wurdbi, 1981). "Proof" means “presumed to be predictive of skills in the actual situation” (MacMillan et al., 1994, p. 870). Some studies have shown that children can be taught to spot CSA (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Kel & Cosden, 2001; Pekovits et al., 1992).

2. Do young children understand and are they able to enact prevention strategies? It may be an uncertain expectation. Some claim that it is unrealistic to expect children to protect themselves against sexual abuse (Bernik & Gilbert, 1991; Daro, 1994; Kaufman et al., 2002; Melvin, 1992; Repucci et al., 2005). Education for young children about CSA and protective behaviors is based on the assumptions that children are able to: (a) identify the nuances of an abusive or exploitive encounter, touch, relationship, or situation; (b) counter the social, psychological, and physical manipulations or threats of an abuser; (c) challenge the authority of an adult; (d) forgo affection, attention, and/or material incentives that may be provided by the abuser; and, (e) be willing to report someone they potentially abuse, possibly with the knowledge that there will be consequences for the abuser, and potentially, the family and the victim themselves.

Some studies have demonstrated that children find it difficult to learn important prevention concepts, such as: that familiar adults or someone in their family might touch their private parts; that secrets are not always to be kept; that adults do not always have to be obeyed; saying no to an authority figure; recognizing the feelings associated with being unsafe and free; identifying and responding to normal and abnormal boundaries (Leifer et al., 1994; Liang, 1997; Tuory, 1994).

3. Are there unintended outcomes of CSA education for children? There is some risk for negative consequences. The possible negative effects of telling a child that he or she may be the target of abuse, especially among the families of abused children, can be significant, and should be considered. Research shows that some children may experience fear, anxiety and confusion about other family and friends, thereby becoming fearful (Berrick et al., 2000; Leifer et al., 1994). The possible negative outcomes for children are: (a) reduction of children’s confidence and fear; (b) reduction of children’s self-esteem; (c) reduction of children’s self-efficacy; (d) reduction of children’s ability to cope with stress; (e) reduction of children’s ability to make healthy decisions; (f) reduction of children’s ability to seek help; (g) reduction of children’s ability to communicate; (h) reduction of children’s ability to improve their self-esteem; (i) reduction of children’s ability to improve their self-confidence; (j) reduction of children’s ability to improve their social skills; (k) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (l) reduction of children’s ability to improve their athletic performance; (m) reduction of children’s ability to improve their artistic performance; (n) reduction of children’s ability to improve their musical performance; (o) reduction of children’s ability to improve their financial performance; (p) reduction of children’s ability to improve their physical performance; (q) reduction of children’s ability to improve their emotional performance; (r) reduction of children’s ability to improve their mental performance; (s) reduction of children’s ability to improve their cognitive performance; (t) reduction of children’s ability to improve their intellectual performance; (u) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (v) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (w) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (x) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (y) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (z) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance. Therefore, the possible negative outcomes for children are: (a) reduction of children’s confidence and fear; (b) reduction of children’s self-esteem; (c) reduction of children’s self-efficacy; (d) reduction of children’s ability to cope with stress; (e) reduction of children’s ability to make healthy decisions; (f) reduction of children’s ability to seek help; (g) reduction of children’s ability to communicate; (h) reduction of children’s ability to improve their self-esteem; (i) reduction of children’s ability to improve their self-confidence; (j) reduction of children’s ability to improve their social skills; (k) reduction of children’s ability to improve their athletic performance; (l) reduction of children’s ability to improve their artistic performance; (m) reduction of children’s ability to improve their musical performance; (n) reduction of children’s ability to improve their financial performance; (o) reduction of children’s ability to improve their physical performance; (p) reduction of children’s ability to improve their emotional performance; (q) reduction of children’s ability to improve their mental performance; (r) reduction of children’s ability to improve their cognitive performance; (s) reduction of children’s ability to improve their intellectual performance; (t) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (u) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (v) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (w) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (x) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (y) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance; (z) reduction of children’s ability to improve their academic performance.