



## Healthy Relationships Project

### Summary

The Healthy Relationships Project is a program for school-based child sexual abuse prevention. The program includes the following components: student lessons, parent / caregiver events, caregiver newsletters, educator, administrator, and staff training. This program meets legal mandates for child sexual abuse prevention education in 32 US states and the District of Columbia. The program is developmentally targeted:

- Care for Kids (Pre-Kindergarten to 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade) (Ages 3 to 8 years old)
- We Care Elementary (3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Grades) (Ages 8 to 11 years old)
- SAFE-T Sexual Abuse Free Environment for Teens (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grades) (Ages 12 to 14 years old)

All aspects of the program are trauma informed and focus on both victim prevention and harmful sexual behavior prevention.

[Purchase the Healthy Relationships Project](#)

[Sign Up for a Training of Trainers in the Healthy Relationships Project](#)

### Target population

(e.g., country/area, gender, age groups, other characteristics) This program is for use in schools, grades Pre-Kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade (ages 3 to 14 years old). The program has been used widely in the U.S. and in Canada, Iran, Honduras, and in a state department school in the United Arab Emirates. The program is provided in classroom settings in which both genders receive the information jointly. This program has been used in public schools, parochial schools, and private schools. Best practices are to include children with disabilities during regular classroom lessons if appropriate. If not, these students can receive the lessons in smaller groups or individually.

### Delivery organisation (e.g. LFF UK, Prison Service of England and Wales)

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont is a not-for-profit organization that began as Parents Anonymous in 1976. The mission is "Prevent Child Abuse Vermont promotes and supports healthy relationships within families, schools and communities to eliminate child abuse." This is accomplished through three departmental focuses: a) Family Support Programs b) Safe Environments for Infants and Toddlers and c) Child Sexual Abuse Prevention.

The Family Support Program has been utilizing the Nurturing Program for Parents and Children (ages 4-12) and has carried out more than 650 Nurturing Programs. PCAVT began working with incarcerated parents from the corrections system in 1998. We carried out Circle of Parents groups, Nurturing Parenting Programs for Fathers' and Nurturing Parenting Programs for Parents in Recovery from Substance Abuse in prisons. The goals of the program are to increase the likelihood of family reunification after release whenever appropriate, reduce recidivism, support family nurturing skills, and create the framework for healthy parent, child and partner relationships.

The Safe Environments for Infants and Toddlers program began in 1997, with the Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma Prevention program. This program teaches parents, childcare providers,

and medical professionals the facts and consequences of Shaken Baby Syndrome along with safe ways of comforting a crying infant and managing parental stress. This department also provides educational materials to new parents about safe sleep practices to reduce risk. Training to increase detection of physical abuse by training mandated reporters and community members is another prevention strategy of this department.

The Child Sexual Abuse Prevention department has three focuses a) Healthy Relationships Project (school-based prevention) b) Adult Responsibility Project (adult-focused training), and c) Training trainers in both the Healthy Relationships Project and the Adult Responsibility Project. The Healthy Relationships Project began in the early 1990s and is updated to keep pace with advances in the field. Technology safety was added to the program in 2008 in response to growing risks of technology-facilitated child exploitation and peer-to-peer aggressive behaviors among youth. With collaboration from generous partners, the program has established a positive approach emphasizing empathy among youth, adult involvement, and community engagement. The Adult Responsibility Project has eight topics currently with content ranging from how to nurture healthy sexual development in children to how to identify and intervene to protect children from groomers. Technology safety is another important topic that is covered to prepare adults to keep children safe in digital environments.

#### **Mode and context of delivery**

(e.g., online, face-to-face, one-to-one, group setting) This program is delivered either face-to-face or digitally to classroom students, their caregivers, and the educators, administrators, and staff of their schools.

#### **Level/Nature of staff expertise required (e.g. professional background)**

(e.g., background, degrees, training required for staff to deliver intervention) Staff who are teachers, school nurses, social workers, counselors, health instructors can easily facilitate this program. These personnel will attend either a 4-hour Facilitator Training or a 7.5-hour Trainer Training virtually. Facilitators are able to implement the program. Trainers, in addition to being able to implement the program, can also train Facilitators. Some choose to become Master Trainers, who can train both Trainers and Facilitators.

#### **Intensity/extent of engagement with target group(s)**

(e.g. length of intervention, number and length of sessions)

Care for Kids includes 6 lessons per grade for students, one caregiver event (approximately 1 hour), 7 caregiver newsletters, and one faculty and staff training (approximately one hour to one hour and a half).

We Care Elementary includes 6 lessons per grade for students (approximately 45 minutes each), one caregiver event (approximately 1 hour), 3 caregiver newsletters, and one faculty and staff training (approximately one hour to one hour and a half).

SAFE-T includes 10 lessons per grade for students (approximately 55 minutes), one caregiver event (approximately 1 hour), 3 caregiver newsletters, and one faculty and staff training (approximately one hour to one hour and a half).

#### **Description of intervention (max. 600 words)**

(e.g. content covered, type of intervention)

The Healthy Relationships Project is a school-based child sexual abuse primary prevention program that is developmentally appropriate, trauma informed, and includes both victim prevention and the prevention of children developing problematic sexual behaviors.

**Care for Kids (Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade)** was originally created in Ontario, Canada as a health-based early childhood healthy sexuality and abuse prevention curriculum. Since 1996, Vermont has used the Care for Kids curriculum in childcare facilities, schools, and home visitor settings. In 2015 Prevent Child Abuse Vermont (PCAVT) became the sole proprietor for the Care for Kids program nationally and internationally.

Children in this age group are receptive to learning about body parts, health and boundaries, making this an ideal time to lay the foundation for abuse prevention. Care for Kids contains 6 units: Asking for Help, Feelings, Bodies, Babies, Asking for Permission and Wrap-Up. Each unit teaches and reinforces 2 to 4 simple, age-appropriate messages via a circle time, a book, and an activity or craft. The activities are designed to complement the fact that children of this age group learn naturally through play and use schemas to assimilate new information. Information is presented in a matter-of-fact way using anatomically correct language.

**We Care Elementary (3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Grades)** was developed by PCAVT to promote healthy relationship skills and behavior patterns in late elementary aged children. Children in this age range have a robust set of developmental tasks. Children develop awareness of self as well as of peers and social groups. With this newfound awareness comes the capacity for empathy and establishing their ideas about how to be in the world and how to treat others. Physiologically, older children are approaching puberty and beginning to wonder about sexual development. All of these factors make sexual abuse prevention especially timely for this age group and also make it especially important that the content is delivered in a developmentally appropriate way.

The We Care Elementary curriculum includes six lessons at each grade level. Each grade focuses on different topics related to healthy relationships. We Care Elementary moves beyond the concrete and physical nature of the Care for Kids lessons, capitalizing on children's capacity for generalizing information and reflecting on their emotions and experiences.

The **Sexual Abuse Free Environment for Teens™ (SAFE-T) (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grades)** program was designed by PCAVT to promote healthy relationships and behaviors in middle school communities, helping youth identify those areas that put them at risk for being hurt and for hurting others. Through ten lessons, SAFE-T continues the process of developing social emotional skills and introduces age-appropriate information about topics such as sexual harassment and sexually abusive behaviors.

Early adolescence is a challenging time for young people and caregivers alike. Teens are beginning to make independent decisions about their sexuality and relationships. At the same time, they are highly vulnerable to sexual harassment, violence, and risky influences from peers, drugs and alcohol, and the media.

While early adolescence is such a vulnerable time, it is also an accessible time. Early adolescents are developmentally available to the proactive intervention of caring, creative adults. The reality of their new capacity for independent action and thought means they are available to tackle the larger debates about ethics, relationships, and values. Their cognitive jump to abstract thinking means they are forming a world

view. And, in terms of being available to learn at many levels, young adolescents are still able to learn by through activity, given a socially and emotionally safe space.

### **Evaluation**

(summary of any evaluations of the interventions completed or underway)

All of the Healthy Relationships Project programs have [excellent internal evaluation results available publicly](#). Additionally, Care for Kids and We Care Elementary are the subject of an ongoing longitudinal study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that is being carried out in Washington D.C. schools. The primary investigators are housed in Northeastern University with collaboration from the Jane Addams School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago and with support from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The results of this 4-year study, which commenced in 2022 and is anticipated to be completed in 2026, will be published in peer reviewed journals at the end of the research period. SAFE-T has been [externally evaluated by the University of New Hampshire](#) and [evaluated by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#). These studies yielded evidence of the effectiveness of the program.

The Healthy Relationships Project has been used in more than 30 states, the District of Columbia, as well as in Canada, Iran, and Honduras.

### **References**

(e.g. references to evaluations; reports and articles on intervention)

[Care for Kids evaluation results are available publicly.](#)

[We Care Elementary evaluation results are also available.](#)

[SAFE-T evaluation results from the University of New Hampshire are here.](#) [SAFE-T evaluation results from the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services are here.](#)

### **Contact details**

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