

# Responsible Behavior with Younger Children (RBYC)



## **Type of intervention**

Responsible Behavior with Younger Children (RBYC), is a primary prevention program to reduce the likelihood of young adolescents engaging younger children and their peers in inappropriate, harmful, or illegal sexual behavior.

## **Target group/s, level/s of prevention and sub-group/s:**

Neurotypical young adolescents ages 11-13 years old (6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students)/classroom-based universal, primary prevention intervention/English, intervention is based in the United States of America (USA)

## **Target population**

Young adolescents 11-13 years of age (6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade students)

## **Delivery organisation**

RBYC was developed by faculty at the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in collaboration with experts from the University of Maryland School of Medicine and Curry School of Education at University of Virginia. The development and preliminary evaluation of the program was funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the National Institutes of Health in the USA.

## **Mode and context of delivery**

The RBYC program consists of 10 interactive and discussion-based sessions. Four sessions include student-led family activities to enable the greater dissemination of intervention messaging. Sessions are delivered on a weekly or biweekly basis by teachers or other youth-serving professionals who have been trained to implement the program. RBYC is designed for stand-alone delivery or for integration with other violence prevention, health education, or sexual education curricula in diverse school and non-school settings.

## **Level/Nature of staff expertise required**

The RBYC program is designed for implementation by educators or youth-serving professionals after a brief training.

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

The full RBYC program consists of 10 sessions, each 45 minutes in length.

## **Description of intervention**

The primary goal of RBYC is to reduce the likelihood that young adolescents will engage preadolescent children and peers in harmful, inappropriate, or illegal sexual behavior. RBYC aims to accomplish this goal by improving young adolescents' knowledge of child sexual abuse and how to prevent or intervene around the sexual abuse of younger children and peers. Sessions also highlight that sexual behaviors between adults and young

adolescents are harmful and illegal and illustrate how information learned in RBYC can be applied to identifying and preventing sexual behaviors between adults and young adolescents as well.

The authors recognize that the majority of sexual assaults and child sexual abuse offenses at the hands of adolescents are solitary incidents, that often occur as a result of low knowledge and a lack of clear rules about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors. Providing young adolescents with the appropriate knowledge and clear rules could therefore help to prevent these offenses.

**The Responsible Behavior with Younger Children program sessions include:**

- **Session 1:** Introduction, program objectives, and definitions of important terms
- **Session 2:** Developmental differences between adolescents and younger children
- **Session 3:** Perspective-taking and empathic responding
- **Sessions 4 & 5:** Healthy vs. unhealthy adolescent-young child relationships
- **Session 6:** Child sexual abuse facts and legal ramifications
- **Session 7:** Why child sexual abuse by adolescents occurs and responsible behaviors for preventing child sexual abuse
- **Session 8:** Responsible behavior with peers
- **Session 9:** Being a good bystander or upstander
- **Session 10:** Program review

Four take home family activities are dispersed throughout the sessions. These brief activities are provided as a handout with discussion ideas for adolescents to have with a parent or other caregiver. The activities provide an opportunity for greater dissemination of the program messaging and to foster important conversations about child sexual abuse prevention at home.

To mitigate risk of distress in young adolescents who may have experienced victimization or engaged in inappropriate or harmful sexual behaviors, RBYC content and delivery techniques were developed based on the Four Rs of Trauma Informed Care: realize the potential for trigger effects, recognize and respond to participants showing signs of distress, respond in a sensitive manner. Safeguarding resources are also provided.

**Evaluation**

A three-phase study was conducted across four urban public middle schools in the USA.

- **Phase one** consisted of focus groups with educators ( $N = 18$ ), parents ( $N = 4$ ), and students ( $N = 10$ ) to obtain feedback on the feasibility and acceptability of the program content and procedures. Overall RBYC was well-accepted by all three stakeholder groups. Feedback included suggestions to slowly introduce content to make students more comfortable discussing child sexual abuse and worries that busy parents may not have time to engage in the family activities.
- In **phase two**, small portions of the program were delivered in six 7<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms and feedback was obtained from students about program content and interactive components. Overall, students enjoyed the sessions, especially participating in role plays. Some students admitted it was a bit uncomfortable discussing child sexual abuse, but felt it was an important topic to learn about.

- **Phase three** included a pilot randomized controlled trial with 160 students in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. A waitlist control design was used so that all participating students eventually received the RBYC program. Preliminary results show that students who received the RBYC program reported increased knowledge about developmental differences between adolescents and younger children, the behaviors that constitute child sexual abuse, laws surrounding child sexual abuse, sexual harassment behaviors, and consent. Students who received the RBYC program also indicated increased self-efficacy to prevent child sexual abuse and peer harassment. After RBYC was delivered, interviews were conducted with educators ( $N = 7$ ) to assess feasibility and acceptability after viewing implementation of the program. All educators expressed strong support for RBYC and endorsed continued implementation in their classrooms. Several educators highlighted the importance of RBYC sessions focused on consent, the laws surrounding child sexual abuse, and safe adults.

### **References**

Ruzicka, A. E., Assini-Meytin, L. C., Schaeffer, C. M., Bradshaw, C. P., & Letourneau, E. J. (2021). Responsible behavior with younger children: Examining the feasibility of a classroom-based program to prevent child sexual abuse perpetration by adolescents. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33554776/>

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