

Research Summary

A complex mix of parent, family, child, community, and environmental characteristics can contribute to child abuse and neglect, and the most effective prevention strategies are those designed to address these multiple influences (Daro & Donnelly, 2002). The *Second Step* Child Protection Unit, combined with the *Second Step* program, provides a comprehensive approach to help children feel safe and supported. The Child Protection Unit includes training and resources for administrators, program directors, and staff; lessons and activities for children; and family resources.

Staff-Focused Content

The Child Protection Unit is unique in that it includes a robust training for administrators and program leaders that helps them assess their current child protection policies and procedures. This in turn helps them develop a comprehensive child protection strategy that aligns with current research and best practice, including specific policies and procedures designed to protect children from abuse in a school or youth program setting, such as a staff code of conduct and procedures for reporting staff violations of protection policies.

Teacher and staff education is important for effective child protection programs (Riley & Roach, 2006). The Child Protection Unit training specifically prepares staff to recognize common indicators of abuse and neglect and report according to their school or program's reporting procedures when they have "reasonable cause to believe" a child is being abused and/or neglected. In addition, it trains staff to respond appropriately to children when they disclose maltreatment and encourages development of safe, supportive, and nurturing relationships between children and staff so children may feel comfortable disclosing. It also provides staff techniques to respond supportively to children showing signs of possibly having been abused or neglected.

Child-Focused Content

The Child Protection Unit lessons build on the foundation of social-emotional and assertiveness skills taught in the *Second Step* lessons by teaching children how to refuse unsafe situations and sexually abusive touches. The lessons encourage teaching children to recognize unsafe and abusive situations and report these situations to adults immediately. Since children are more likely to learn personal safety strategies if they are

given many ways to practice the skills (Davis & Gidycz, 2000; Finkelhor, Asdigian, & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995), the Child Protection Unit lessons include a variety of teaching strategies and give children multiple opportunities to practice skills. Each lesson also comes with a fun activity children can do with a parent or caregiver at home to practice the skills.

Family-Focused Content

Encouraging parents and caregivers to talk with children about sexual abuse is a key component of child sexual abuse prevention. Many parents want to educate their children about sexual abuse but are reluctant to because it is difficult to discuss (Wurtele & Kenny, 2010). The Child Protection Unit includes media and resources for families to help them talk with their children about this difficult subject.

The Child Protection Unit is a comprehensive child protection program that, combined with the *Second Step* program, can address the multiple factors needed to prevent and intervene in cases of child abuse and/or neglect. The foundational social-emotional skills provided in the *Second Step* program combined with staff training and child lessons in the Child Protection Unit empower schools and programs to create a safe and supportive learning environment in which children can thrive. The Child Protection Unit carries this one step further by providing family materials that can contribute to greater protection beyond the lessons.

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