

6. Personal safety or Protective Behaviours programs

The other major primary prevention initiative is the education of school-aged children to teach them the means of avoiding unwanted sexual or physical advances, and/or to seek assistance. Currently the major school-based primary prevention initiatives are personal safety and Protective Behaviours programs. Personal safety programs have the aim of educating school-age children to protect themselves from sexual abuse. The programs attempt to involve the children's parents in order to raise community awareness of sexual abuse and to teach parenting skills related to protecting children and detecting signs of abuse (Plummer 1993). In contrast, Protective Behaviours programs focus on teaching children to avoid a wide range of potentially unsafe situations, only some of which involve child maltreatment.

For all such programs however, the objective is to *educate* children, not to make them solely responsible for their own safety (Plummer 1993). The most common and consistent positive outcomes of such programs have been children's heightened knowledge of sexual abuse, increased child disclosures of abuse (Plummer 1993; Reppucci & Haugaard 1993; Michaelson 1997; Staiger, Wallace & Higgins 1997) and, in personal safety programs, an improvement in parents' awareness and ability to protect their children (Plummer 1993)¹⁶.

Personal safety and Protective Behaviours programs accounted for 10 per cent of the programs collected for the Audit. The programs are delivered in most schools, and a variety of other settings, across the nation. It would have been possible to merely take examples of the major versions of the programs – using State personal safety/Protective Behaviours training and curriculum packages and collecting information on other, less widely used programs. However, it was apparent that despite the existence of State-wide training packages and curriculum material, precisely how the programs were used, and their position in the school curriculum, appeared to vary considerably between schools within the same State and same region.

Thus, the decision was taken to incorporate virtually all of the programs provided by the departments of education, schools and other agencies, as a means of highlighting the diversity of program usage and the various models employed, under which school-based prevention programs are provided.

Describing the Audit programs

Of the 178 programs included in the Audit, over two-thirds were based on the Protective Behaviours model. Examples of two State-wide education department Protective Behaviours packages are described below.

¹⁶ There is some controversy as to whether such school-based programs are actually *primary* prevention programs at all. The available evidence provides strongest support for an ability to prevent the recurrence of maltreatment (via an increased rate of children's disclosures of abuse) (Plummer 1993; Reppucci & Haugaard 1993; Michaelson 1997; Staiger et al. 1997); that is, a clear role in tertiary prevention. There is little evidence that the programs can prevent the initiation of abuse, particularly intrafamilial abuse.

'Says Who?' Students explore the issues: Sexual harassment; 'Enough's Enough', Protective Behaviours, Education Queensland, North Rockhampton (Qld). 'Says Who?' (for high school students) and 'Enough's Enough' (for primary school students) are resource kits developed and distributed free to all Queensland state schools by Education Queensland. They are a series of class-room activities which aim to teach students about abuse related issues and how to protect themselves. Participants of the program include students with intellectual impairments. The programs are taught by guidance officers, who provide a primary and secondary prevention service, responding to the needs of children 'at risk' in their district and providing educative programs to kids about their rights with a focus on child empowerment. As well as group-type programs, guidance officers provide individual support to students and their families.

Protective Behaviours – A Whole School Approach, Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) (SA). This is a new course requested by clients and conducted by DETE for all school and preschool staff who have undergone basic Protective Behaviours training. Training aims to assist participants with a whole school approach to implementing the Protective Behaviours program in their schools/centres. Group work is led by Protective Behaviours-trained trainers to determine the current status of the program in the participant's school/centre, and a SWOT analysis of that program. An action plan is created and examples of frameworks used in other schools are provided as models. As an outcome of the course, participants should be able to identify areas of need in their school's Protective Behaviours program and incorporate Protective Behaviours into their teaching program. This course is a half-day addition to the Basic Training Course.

The remaining one third of programs were based on personal safety programs, or other less widely used programs, such as *Safe Start Safe Future* and the *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program*:

Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (CSAPP Program), Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (Vic.). The Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program seeks to prevent the sexual abuse of children and young people through the provision of widespread community education. Objectives of the program include: to provide children and young people with information and skills that may be used to detect and avoid potentially abusive situations and to access appropriate assistance if such a situation is experienced. In addition, the programs aims: to prevent the sexual abuse of children and young people by providing adults with the information and skills required to more adequately protect children and young people; to relieve the suffering and distress of children and young people who have been sexually abused; to expand the operations of the project so that it is easily accessible to all Victorian primary, secondary and special schools; and easily accessible to populations at high risk of sexual abuse, including children in care, homeless young people and children with disabilities. Activities of the program include: a workshop for teachers; parent information nights; parent workshops; and school day programs. Enhancing coping skills and children and young people's resiliency is a key component of the program.

Personal safety in context

Two trends were evident in the provision of school-based prevention programs. First, the majority (72 per cent) of the programs were provided within a context of broader service provision (for example, as part of a child and youth counselling program or health education package). This may result from the recognition that personal safety programs are merely one facet of a comprehensive attempt to prevent child abuse and neglect and/or that the programs in isolation, are not enough to prevent the maltreatment of children and young people.

The role of schools

It is also likely however, to be a reflection of the broader role schools have been expected to play in the past few years in the area of health education. There is a perception that education should not be limited to purely academic areas (Cohn 1990, as cited in Oates 1990; Crime Prevention Committee 1995), but should be strongly involved in preparing young people to function in society. As a consequence, there has been a general reliance on the school system to provide the primary access to children, young people and their families for the prevention of a number of social ills, including youth suicide, substance abuse and child maltreatment, (Tomison 1997a), and the promotion of health and wellbeing. One fifth of all programs in the Audit, covering a wide range of issues, were run in schools, or in association with schools.

It is clear that such programs have placed increasing demands on the school curriculum, and that there has only been limited support available to resource such programs. In addition, there is a growing recognition that child abuse and child abuse prevention are too complex for schools, or any one sector, to manage alone (Tomison 1997a). One possible solution advocated by Conte and Fogarty in 1990 was based on the premise that many of the different health programs share some basic goals: the encouragement of independent thinking; the resistance of peer pressure; the development of decision making, assertiveness and effective communication skills.

Conte and Fogarty perceived some benefit in developing a general prevention curriculum, primarily promoting mental health and empowering individuals (protective factors), but with a secondary focus on applying the generic skills to specific problems and situations. In theory, the adoption of such an holistic approach to prevention would also encourage cooperative ventures between a number of professional fields, such as drug and alcohol services and child protection services. This approach, enhanced by research on protective factors and resiliency, appears to form the basis for the current 'health education' programs being taught across the country.

Specifically, a wide range of maltreatment issues and other social ills are addressed, and a variety of family and student supports are provided, within a framework of enhancing general health and wellbeing and the development of healthy social relationships. Some examples of varying health education approaches are provided below (note the incorporation of personal safety programs or concepts as integral parts of the Aquinas College and Drouin Secondary College programs).

Promoting Relationships and Relationship Programs, Croydon Secondary College (Vic.). The general aim is to increase/ promote strategies that students can use in dealing with conflict; promote resilience; present role models; break the cycle of abuse. The anger management program, for example, targets 'at risk' individuals, while other programs involves all students in a particular year level. There are several peer support programs covering all year levels in the college. In addition to this the college delivers curriculum in such a way at junior levels that two teachers work intensively with a class and follow through the two years (7 and 8). The results of this are enhanced relationships/pastoral care and a smooth transition to secondary schooling. There is a full-time student welfare coordinator and chaplain who assist students/families and provide links with community agencies. The college also has services of a psychologist two days a week. College programs aim at prevention of alienation and early intervention. However intervention and postvention are also provided.

Social Skills Program, Ashley School, Ashley Youth Detention Centre, Deloraine (Tas.). The primary objectives of the program are to promote resilience, address socialisation deficits, broaden educational experience and promote the value of education.

Strategies include guest speakers, programs such as 'Raw' and 'Talk To Yourself' and the use of specific texts. Topics covered by the program include goal setting, tolerance, friendship, racism, anger management, health and hygiene, drugs, sexuality, parenting and family roles. Protective factors are harm minimisation, conflict resolution and support services available.

School-based Prevention Programs: Domestic Violence and Children's Issues Group, Parent Education, School Visits, Protective Behaviours, Mentor Programs, Aquinas Catholic College, Ashmore (Qld) Aquinas Catholic College runs several school-based prevention programs including raising awareness of domestic violence issues, with guest lectures followed up in the classroom. There is a Protective Behaviours Program focusing on child empowerment, information sessions on Al-Anon and a mentor program for boys ('T Sessions'). In addition, there is a parent education program which involves skill building and information sharing, based on 'STEP'. A program on grief is to be implemented.

Health Education: Issues and You, Drouin Secondary College, (Vic.) The primary objectives of the Health Education Unit's Issues and You program, which is conducted in all Year 7 classes, are to assist students to develop skills to make lifestyle decisions that will enhance their health and wellbeing; to assist students develop effective coping strategies to deal with issues that may challenge health and wellbeing in their own life time. Some of the activities are drawn from the Protective Behaviours program and incorporated into the 6-week unit. The Unit addresses issues that may challenge personal safety and rights and responsibilities to self and others, including physical, sexual and emotional harassment. These issues are taught through role plays, discussion, games and worksheets.

The nature and development of the health education-type programs, and the extent to which they have been adopted, has been influenced by State and Territory education department policy. In the Audit, it appeared that Victoria and Queensland, in particular, have facilitated the establishment of a large number of well-developed health education programs.

Schools as communities

Another approach to reduce some of the load placed on the school curriculum, has been to refocus efforts to involve the community as a whole in the prevention of child maltreatment and other social ills. The New South Wales *Schools as Community Centres* program recognises the need for a 'whole-of-community' response, using schools as venues to access children and families and to promote community health and wellbeing.

Schools as Community Centres, Depts of School Education, Community Services, Health and Housing¹⁷ (NSW). The program was established to reduce the impact of disadvantage for children entering school by providing integrated services for families in severely disadvantaged communities. The focus of the program is one of support rather than intervention, prevention rather than remediation. A facilitator is located in a community centre at the local public school at each of the six sites (an additional five sites to be funded under the *Families First* strategy). The facilitator works with a local management committee and community advisory committee to identify and respond to local service needs and issues for families with children aged 0-8 years, with a focus on the health and welfare of pre school aged children. The service aims to strengthen communities through interagency collaboration and community

¹⁷ The project is administered by the Department of School Education.

participation in decision-making processes related to the provision of services. Examples of projects include: Anger Management, Peer Parent Training (Chertsey), Healthy Mums, Healthy Babies Group (Coonamble); First Time Parents Support Group (Curran); and a Multicultural Women's Expo (Redfern).

Adaptability

A major criticism of school-based programs in the past, has been that they are too generalist and need to be tailored for specific audiences (Plummer 1993; Tomison 1997b). That is, that they need to cater for children's different developmental stages, gender and capabilities and for those identified as being at greater risk of maltreatment, such as children with disabilities, children living in women's refuges, or Aboriginal children (Tomison 1996b).

In this Audit, 100 of the 181 programs in the Child Abuse Prevention Programs database (55 per cent) could be defined as traditional, primary prevention programs. These included:

Pippy the Platypus: Protective Behaviours Program for Preschoolers, Macquarie Sexual Assault Service, Dubbo (NSW). This program is an initiative of rural and remote sexual assault workers in New South Wales. Sponsored by Burnside, the program targets young children aged three to five years and their carers in rural and remote areas. The program is designed to support the relationship between children and their carers and to enhance the personal development curriculum in preschools and schools, including areas of self-esteem, self-awareness, assertiveness and problem-solving skills.

Extending a shift in practice identified in the 1997 NSW Audit (1997b), the second trend apparent in the National Audit was for key personal safety components to be frequently incorporated into secondary and tertiary prevention programs (45 per cent of programs), and concomitantly, adapted in a variety of ways to address the needs of the Australian community. Specifically, the forms of maltreatment that were being addressed in the programs had often been extended to cover a variety of forms of child maltreatment, domestic violence and other forms of violence. *The Child Sexual Assault Prevention Program* (see above) developed in the mid-1990s in Victoria, is a good example of a program taking an holistic approach to violence prevention, while maintaining a focus on child sexual abuse issues. Other examples identified in the Audit were:

Gender Construction/Dating Violence/Anti Bullying, All Hallows School Brisbane (Qld). The school conducts three education programs for secondary students that include 'Gender Construction', 'Dating Violence', and 'Anti-Bullying'. The later two programs promote student's self-reflection, identify abusive behaviour and teach personal safety skills.

School Violence, Family Violence and Relationship Violence, Heatley Secondary School/Townsville Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Aitkenvale (Qld). The program provides education about and strategies to deal with school bullying, family violence and relationship violence to students at Heatley Secondary School. It uses Protective Behaviours themes, involving videos, questionnaires, Human Rights information, safety plans and support agencies that can be accessed.

Solving the Jigsaw, EASE, Bendigo (Vic). 'Solving the Jigsaw' program is focused on the key areas of violence, bullying, depression, anxiety and abuse. The program provides opportunities for young people to feel safe and secure, to reflect and consider, to listen and be heard, to feel and show compassion, to feel and show trust and respect, to develop responsibility and optimism, to experience connection and support, and to have their uniqueness valued and to have fun. The program runs for one-and-a-

half weeks in each of the three schools in the Calder cluster; Inglewood PS, Bridgewater PS, Marong PS. The program is run for five weeks in 1999 and will run for 20 weeks in 2000. The program is run for Grades 5 and 6 students. It also includes an eight-week parenting component.

Secondary and tertiary interventions

As a result of the greater acknowledgment of the need to target specific populations, a variety of secondary and tertiary level personal safety prevention initiatives were identified in the Audit. For example most of the programs for children who have witnessed domestic violence (secondary/tertiary) incorporated aspects of personal safety programs; there were also Protective Behaviours programs designed specifically for children with disabilities.

Protective Behaviours Program, Family and Children's Services, Centacare and FamilyLink (NT). The Protective Behaviours Program is a 12-session program, run once per visit to target communities. The objectives of the Protective Behaviours Program are to provide culturally-appropriate education for young boys and girls in target Aboriginal communities on appropriate and inappropriate touching, talking about sexual 'humbug' (harassment) of young girls. The program aims to promote awareness of what sexual assault is; identify protective strategies; and consult with the community to develop a method of keeping the strategy in place. Mothers are engaged in the course and the program targets primary-school-aged children from target Aboriginal communities where sexual abuse has been reported or where significant numbers of young girls are being married and/or getting pregnant.

Human Relationships Education – Protective Behaviours for Children with Disabilities, Mt Gravatt Special School/Family Planning (Qld). The Human Relationships Education program is structured and designed for the student group, most of whom have a significant intellectual impairment. The program includes: initial collaborative planning between a small group of parents, school staff and the consultant to determine needs, roles and responsibilities; an introductory session for parents; and flexibility in grouping (that is, students can be withdrawn from topics that may not be meaningful to them).

The following programs exemplify the types (and range) of tertiary-level personal safety programs currently available.

Support Group For School Aged Children Affected By Domestic Violence, Manly-Warringah Pittwater Women's Resource Centre (NSW). The aim of the group is to offer children support; validate their experiences; emphasise their strengths, qualities and their achievements through age-appropriate activities that are safe; and offer alternatives to violence. The group also aims to increase awareness of Protective Behaviours through discussion of feelings, identifying when they feel unsafe and developing a safe people network.

Children in Shelters, Alice Springs Womens' Shelter (NT). The Alice Spring Womens' Shelter uses a variety of resources from Children in Shelters and The Right to Feel Safe to work with children who have witnessed domestic violence and/or been exposed to other forms of maltreatment. A casual relaxed environment is provided where painting and other activities are done and where topics of conversation are introduced. The focus is on 'feeling safe' and giving empowering strategies for children (and adults) to prevent and interrupt violence and abuse. Building self-esteem is focused upon in activities such as, 'what makes me special', listening to your legs (early warning signs such as jelly legs), identifying emotions and creating personal networks.

Young Homeless People and Sexual Assault Outreach Project, Brophy Family and Youth Services Inc., Warrnambool (Vic.). The objectives of the Outreach Project are to raise awareness of issues related to the sexual assault of young people; promote self-protection strategies for young people at risk of sexual assault, for example, assertiveness, self-defence and self-awareness; to provide individual support if young people disclose sexual assault or if their behaviour indicates sexual assault. The project consists of general workshops, small group work and individual support in schools and outreach work. There is a self-defence instructor who teaches self-defence skills.

In summary

Personal safety and Protective Behaviours programs remain strongly utilised, school-based prevention programs, although their nature and usage has changed as a function of changing trends in prevention and recognition of the benefits of applying the programs' principles across a range of violence prevention initiatives. The development of a health promotion approach in schools, as exemplified by the trend towards multifaceted 'health education' programs, has meant that traditional, personal safety programs no longer drive schools' prevention strategies, but are maintained as vital components of an holistic approach to school-based prevention.

Yet at the same time, the range and usage of personal safety programs and concepts has extended through a general trend towards adapting personal safety and Protective Behaviours programs for specific target groups. Thus, what has traditionally been a universal, primary prevention program has been tailored for use as a secondary and/or tertiary prevention initiative. These changes have occurred in conjunction with a general expansion of the 'risk' situations incorporated into many programs and reflect, for example, greater acknowledgment of issues around domestic violence and other forms of societal violence (for example, harassment and bullying) and, in particular, children witnessing domestic violence.