

Lesson 3: My body belongs to me Teacher Notes

This lesson is arguably the **most critical** for children in order to reduce the likelihood of sexual victimisation. As noted in the Teacher Instruction Guide, Australian children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, with an estimated one in every three boys and girls expected to experience some form of sexual abuse before they leave school¹. (1 Briggs, F & McVeity, M 2000, *Teaching Children to Protect Themselves*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.)

While some of the content inclusions in this lesson may be considered controversial, they reflect current best practice guidelines in child protection. To ensure children are given the essential safety information they require, *each component of this lesson must be covered*. If you feel personally uncomfortable with presenting some aspects of this lesson, you are encouraged to seek the assistance of a co-facilitator or make other arrangements to ensure all components are taught.

To explain the inclusion of various content components and to assist teachers to deliver this lesson, the following information is provided in this document:

1. A step-by-step guide to Lesson 3 components;
2. Child sex offender dynamics; and
3. Indicators of child sexual abuse.

Additional information is provided on separate handouts, also included on this CD, including:

- Handling disclosures
- An optional Letter to Parents regarding their child's participation in this program and this lesson in particular.

1. Guide to Lesson 3 Components

What happens if students don't come up with suggested responses themselves?

As noted in the previous lesson plan Teacher Notes, depending on their age, developmental level and a range of other factors, students may not come up with the suggested responses noted throughout this lesson plan. Should this be the case, teachers are encouraged to lead students through prompts, or where required, overt suggestions or explanations to ensure the relevant points are clearly addressed.

Introduction:

As noted in the Teacher Instruction Guide, it is important to be aware that students who have suffered abuse, or are suffering abuse, may be in the class. By delivering this type of information, some students may build up the courage to disclose abusive experiences. While this may not be an easy situation to handle, please remember that you may be a child's only opportunity to stop the abuse. It is crucial the disclosure is handled appropriately for the safety of the child and their classmates. Some guidelines to assist you include:

- Where possible, avoid the risk of a public disclosure by setting parameters for the lesson. You could commence the lesson with, 'Today we are talking about how to keep ourselves safe. If you would like to share something that has happened to you, please see [nominate person], rather than sharing your experience with the class. Very personal issues are best talked about with someone who can give you their undivided attention.' *Note:* A support person should be present to ensure students' immediate access to support, if required.
- If someone does disclose an abusive experience, make sure they are taken seriously and receive the necessary support. Report the abuse in accordance with your school's child protection policy. If you are unsure, contact the Queensland Police Service or Child Safety Services, Department of Communities.
- Observe students who may be feeling uncomfortable with the subject matter and, if you suspect they may be a victim of abuse, follow up with them.

Part A: Body Ownership

Discussing body ownership sets the foundation for other content covered throughout the lesson. Our rights and responsibilities regarding body ownership should be covered by way of the discussion about what body ownership means. Our responsibilities include: to look after my body (by keeping myself clean, eating healthy food, etc.); and to respect the choices other people make about their bodies. You may wish to discuss how we can demonstrate our respect of these choices, e.g. ask others before we touch them and respect their decision about touch.

Our rights include that no one is allowed to touch my body, including showing affection (hugs and kisses) unless I say so. You may wish to discuss alternatives for hugs and kisses, such as Hi-5s, shaking hands and a friendly verbal exchange. Role playing what children could do if they do not wish to accept a hug or kiss would be a valuable follow-up activity.

Part B: Private and Public Parts

Teaching children the correct terminology for their private parts and the rules about private parts may be considered controversial, however these inclusions are based on current best practice guidelines. *If this section was to be omitted from the program, children would be significantly less likely to identify and report abuse.* They would be inadvertently taught that discussing sexuality is taboo and therefore embarrassing and “not okay” to discuss with adults. For children with the courage to report regardless of “the embarrassment factor”, without knowing the correct terminology, adults may not understand what the child is attempting to say.

Modelling that you are comfortable to discuss these issues with your child provides perhaps the most valuable means of encouraging them to report abuse, should they ever need to do so.

Sexuality education provided by the school, where children have an opportunity to learn about the functions of their private parts, is also suggested to complement this program’s information. In particular, children need to know how their bodies respond to sexual touch. Naïve children who lack this awareness, are far more vulnerable to sexual abuse as they can be made to feel responsible for the abuse, which may feel good despite it being unwanted.

Part C: Rules about our private parts

Defining abuse is regarded as a core concept in safety programs for children and adolescents. This simple list of rules needs to be clearly understood by children.

As children are at greatest risk from known adults, it is imperative that teachers do not over-emphasise the risk posed by strangers. Students are provided with realistic and helpful information if they are informed that people “who break these rules about our private parts” can be men or women, boys or girls, yet they are more likely to be someone you know and sometimes someone you love and trust.

Part D Secrets

Secrecy is a child sex offender’s most common and effective weapon to prevent disclosure. As a result, children must be made aware of the difference between a safe and an unsafe secret, and that unsafe secrets must be told to a trusted adult.

Part E: Responding to abuse

The ‘NO!, GO, TELL’ strategy is reinforced in Worksheets 3.3 for all year levels. While we know in reality it is unlikely children will have the courage to say “NO!” at the time of abuse, particularly to an authority figure, teaching this strategy will increase this likelihood. The more probable action children will take is to tell a trusted adult, but only if they are encouraged to do so and if they believe they will receive the help they need.

Active participation and explicit training are needed to ensure children learn and retain prevention and resistance skills. Role plays of possible abuse scenarios, where children repeatedly rehearse appropriate behaviours, including disclosure, are most useful, as included in Worksheet 3.3 for all year levels.

Worksheet 3.3 for Years 5-6 contains an additional 'Matching Activity' where a range of excuses, lies, bribes and threats told by abusers are exposed. You may choose to conduct this activity in a follow-up lesson either in the context of the matching activity or use the points raised as a class discussion to alert students to common tactics used by abusers.

Conclusion:

Worksheet 3.4 provides a quiz to recap the main points of this lesson. Worksheet 3.5* provides a range of scenarios which can also be used to recap the main points or as a follow up. By discussing and role play different scenarios students are provided with further opportunities to rehearse appropriate behaviours and are subsequently better equipped to handle potentially abusive situations. *Note: There are two versions of this worksheet: Prep – Year 2; and Years 3 – 6.

At the conclusion of the lesson children should be encouraged to speak with you, a nominated support person or another trusted adult if they would like to discuss any personal matters. You are also strongly encouraged to follow up with any children you suspect may be, or may have been, the victim of abuse as a result of your observations throughout the lesson. Your private conversation with them might sound something like "I noticed you were [whatever you noticed e.g. looking a bit uncomfortable when we were talking about the rules about our private parts]. Is there anything you'd like to talk with me about?". Even if the child does not disclose anything to you at the time, remind them that you are there should they ever wish to talk about anything that makes them feel unsafe. You may also wish to encourage the child to speak with another trusted adult if they would prefer not to discuss a matter with you.

Risk to boys

Boys are less likely to define sexual victimisation as abuse. They are more likely to blame themselves for their victimisation and believe they could have stopped it. Boys are also far less willing to disclose abuse. As a result, you are encouraged to be particularly mindful of these factors and to encourage the active participation of boys, particularly in role play activities. Boys who provide far-fetched responses to abuse situations, for example "I'd just karate chop them and dive out the window", should be gently reminded of more realistic responses.

2. Child Sex Offender Dynamics

Child Sex Offenders:

- are mostly known to the child (90 – 96%)^{1 & 2}: including parents, relatives, family friends or care providers.
- are most commonly heterosexual males. It is estimated female perpetrators abuse 20% of boys and 5% of girls⁶. Male offenders who abuse boys often do not view themselves as homosexual.
- cannot be typified by age, class, profession, race, religion or family status.
- often begin offending in childhood or adolescence. Sibling incest is widespread and poorly recognised.
- actively seek access to children and place themselves in positions where they can obtain legitimate, unrestricted, unsupervised access to children.
- work hard at being liked and accepted.
- target vulnerability, such as: passive, emotionally needy children; those with a low self esteem; naïve children who have received little or no sex education; children who are quieter, less likely to object or put up a fight.
- adopt a grooming process to not only groom the target, but may also target the child's parents. Offenders use this grooming process to enable the abuse to take place and to discourage children from reporting. Grooming can take place over weeks, months and sometimes years. The offender often spends time alone with the child, building up trust with the child and their parents. The offender may give the child gifts and touch the child in a non-sexual manner before the child is introduced to sexual touching. Child pornography is often used by offenders in an attempt to 'normalise' sexual touching between adults and children.
- silence children with gifts, secrets, threats, emotional blackmail and/or violence.
- rarely have a criminal history (less than 5%)⁵.
- who abuse children outside their family can often also be abusing children within their family.

Other important facts about child sexual abuse:

- Small children are particularly vulnerable targets because of their difficulties in disclosing the abuse and their vulnerability to threats, bribes and coercion. The vast majority (82%) of child sexual abuse victims are under 10 years old when they first experience sexual abuse⁵.
- Children are reluctant to report for reasons of fear, shame, confusion and guilt. When children do eventually tell a trusted adult (if they ever do), it is usually indirectly through disguised hints. Most disclosures of abuse are made months or years after the incident occurred, particularly when the offender was known to the child.
- Children can be psychologically harmed by the reaction of significant adults upon disclosure. It is vitally important that when a child discloses abuse adults remain calm, accept what the child is saying and organise professional intervention.

References:

- 1 Briggs, F & McVeity, M 2000, *Teaching Children to Protect Themselves*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- 2 McMenamin, B 2006, *Childwise Speak Up – An Australian campaign to protect children from sexual abuse*, Melbourne Vic.
- 3 ASCA (Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse) 2008, Child Abuse – figures (online), Available http://www.asca.org.au/childabuse/ca_figures.html [Accessed 12 May 2008].
- 4 QPS (Queensland Police Service) 2005, *Protective Behaviours* (brochure), QPS, Brisbane
- 5 SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare) 2007, *Through Young Black Eyes*, p.55, Victoria.
- 6 Childwise 2005, *Choose With Care Presentation*, South Melbourne

3. Indicators of Child Sexual Abuse

Physical indicators- genital and anal areas:

- Bruises, scratches or other injuries not consistent with accidental injury
- Itching, soreness, discharge or unexplained bleeding
- Painful and frequent urination
- Signs of sexually transmitted infections
- Semen in the vagina, anus or external genitalia, or on clothing

Physical indicators (general):

- Bruises, bite marks or other injuries to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen and thighs
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Torn, stained or bloodied underwear
- Recurrent urinary tract infections
- Persistent headaches or recurrent abdominal pain
- Unexplained pain in the genital area

Sexual behavioural indicators:

- Sexual knowledge or language inappropriate for child's age/development
- Displaying unusual interest in the genitals of others or sexual matters
- Sexual themes in child's artwork, stories or play
- Hints about sexual activity through actions/comments inappropriate to child's age or development level
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour or play with self, doll, toys, adults or other children
- Open displays of sexuality, for example, repeated public masturbation
- Promiscuity, repetitious sexually precocious behaviour
- Fear or avoidance of any aspect of sexuality

General behavioural indicators:

- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour
- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares
- Regressed behaviour e.g. bedwetting
- Change in eating patterns
- Lack of trust in familiar adults, fear of strangers/men
- Aggression, lying, stealing, unexplained running away
- Withdrawn behaviour
- Loss of concentration and school performance
- Appears socially isolated
- Reluctance to undress
- Excessive bathing
- Inappropriate displays of affection between child and parent
- Fear of going home
- Appears disconnected or focused on fantasy worlds
- Fear states e.g. anxiety, depression, phobias, obsession
- Starting fires or a fascination with fire
- Destroying property, hurting or mutilating animals
- Promiscuity
- Creating stories, poems or artwork about abuse
- Suicidal feelings or attempts at suicide
- Overly compliant behaviour
- Being seemingly accident-prone
- Unwillingness to participate in physical/recreational activities
- Self mutilation
- Unexplained accumulation of money or gifts

Younger children may think they are disclosing abuse by making comments such as: "I don't like (name) anymore"; "I don't want to see (name) anymore"; "(name) plays funny games". Pay attention if children make an effort to avoid someone whose company they previously enjoyed.