

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



Volume 6, Issue 3

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Dear Colleague,

This month's issue provides an overview of prevention efforts within youth-serving organizations. With the increasing media coverage of this issue--from the Penn State and Catholic Church tragedies--more research and attention is being paid to the impact that the environment will have on someone's choice to abuse or to intervene. Sandy Wurtele is clear that with a safer organizational environment, children will be safer and the chance that abusive behavior will go unnoticed is dramatically changed. Providing organizational safety is a crucial component of our prevention efforts.

If you have not had a chance to participate in our FREE webinars, please join us on April 2nd with GERALD BLANCHARD who will speak about **Ancient Ways: Indigenous Healing of Sexual Abuse in the 21st Century.**

If you missed one of the previous webinars with Phil Rich, Robin Wilson, Rob Longo, Keven Creeden, or Pat Wilcox, you can listen to the recording on our website at www.nearipress.org. Upcoming webinars will feature NEARI Press authors Tom Leversee and Susan Robinson.

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Organizations as the Front Line of Prevention

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

Question

What can organizations do to prevent sexual abuse and protect children from harm?

The Research

Sandy Wurtele (2012) recently published an overview of the role of youth-serving organizations in sexual violence prevention. In her review, Wurtele--a passionate proponent of sexual abuse prevention--notes increasing media reports in the last ten years of adults in positions of authority using their position to access children and teens in their care.

Contrary to popular perception, Wurtele explains that most sexual abuse within organizations is not caused by deliberate "professional perpetrators" and provides research showing that most individuals who have abused appear to make a series of bad decisions that lead up to the devastating harm of sexual abuse.

Using a public health framework called the ecological approach (which for these purposes is about understanding the situational factors that lead staff to abuse), Wurtele outlines steps that professionals can take at the individual, relationship, community, and society levels--from national and state policies to what can be done with youth-serving organizations.

After providing an overview of the emerging problem, Wurtele argues for the importance of creating adequate policies, training and procedures within youth-serving organizations to prevent sexual abuse, emphasizing that certain characteristics of an organization increase the risks of staff boundary violation or abuse. These include the organization's culture (the sum of the organization's attitudes, values, norms, beliefs, prejudices, history, personalities, and ethics), the screening approaches taken by an organization, monitoring and supervision of staff, the code of conduct, which includes the use of social media, and education and training for staff, parents and youth.

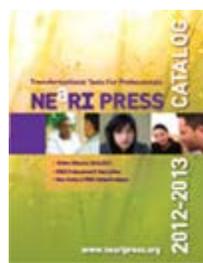
In particular, Wurtele emphasizes the importance of personal and professional boundary education, and provides a listing of the types (and examples) of sexual boundary violations. She also provides a self-assessment checklist for staff to use to check their own behaviors. Unfortunately, Wurtele does not address the prevalence or policies that might address older child to younger child sexual

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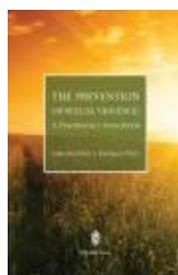
As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413-540-0712, ext. 14.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis



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FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES



The Prevention of Sexual
Violence: A Practitioners
Sourcebook

Edited by Keith L. Kaufman

This comprehensive volume brings together the expertise of leading practitioners, researchers, and policy makers to prevent sexual violence.

Through a progression of 30 chapters, the Sourcebook provides practical approaches to

abuse within these organizations.

Wurtele finds that there are no consistent laws across the country pertaining to child sexual abuse by staff in youth-serving organizations. Some states are considering introducing the requirement that all organizations receiving public funds must have certain child sexual abuse policies in place, encouraging organizations to be proactive in their approach to prevention.

Implications for Professionals

The mission of youth-serving organizations is typically to help children and adolescents explore their lives and challenge themselves in new ways. This includes building the essential strengths and protective factors they need to become healthy adults. Unfortunately, without adequate safeguards the same programming that encourages independence and exploration among youth may also put the child or teen at greater risk to be abused. Comprehensive, visible policies send clear messages that abuse will not be tolerated, decreasing the situational opportunities that can lead to abuse. These policies are the foundation of programs that work with youth with sexual behavior problems but are rarely addressed in more mainstream organizations and programs.

Professionals working with at-risk children and teens can learn a great deal from the professionals and organizations serving adolescents who have sexually abused. For example, the clarity of physical and emotional boundaries is an aspect of the workplace environment that every adult working with kids should know. The checklist of sexual boundary violations that Wurtele describes is an excellent example of the knowledge base every professional should have.

Implications for the Field

The ecological model for prevention makes clear that the work of caseworkers and clinicians working at the individual and relationship levels every day is but one important piece of the puzzle. Part of the work is ensuring that boundaries are established and maintained, the harm of sexual abuse is understood, and healthy relationships are actively talked about. Each of these is essential to prevention. However, if the goal of our field is to stop sexual violence before a child is harmed--including abuse that may be perpetrated within organizations serving youth--then the field may need to expand individual prevention efforts and coordinate with those that are making organizations and communities safer through policies, training and education. The public has little understanding of how anyone (adult, adolescent or child) could sexually abuse a child. Professionals working with this population have a unique opportunity (and we might even suggest responsibility) to provide essential skills and information to organizations and communities about those who abuse to those working in communities and organizations.

Abstract

This article discusses child sexual abuse (CSA) by staff members in youth-serving organizations (YSOs) including schools, residential treatment and correction facilities, scouting, clubs, faith centers, and sports leagues. Over the last ten years there have been highly publicized reports of adults in positions of authority, such as teachers, coaches, and ministers, sexually exploiting youth under their care. Using an ecological perspective, the author suggests preventing institutional sexual exploitation by addressing such macrosystem factors as national and state policies and legislation, and at the organizational level by implementing risk-management strategies and by training staff in how to have close connections with youth while avoiding sexual misconduct. Providing training,

prevention from internet safety, influencing public policy, and addressing sex offender notification practices, to creating effective prevention programming for children and teens, organizations, adults in the community, and young adults on college campuses.

This Sourcebook is an essential tool for any professional who wants to incorporate the prevention of sexual violence into their practice or enhance the quality of existing services.

Hardcover, 524 pages
ISBN: 978-1-929657-45-2
PRICE: \$59.00

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monitoring, and supervision for youth-serving staff to help them maintain appropriate professional boundaries will not only help protect the integrity of the agency but most important, may help prevent institutional child sexual exploitation.

Citation

- Wurtele, Sandy. (2012). Preventing the sexual exploitation of minors in youth-serving organizations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 2442-2453.

To print a pdf of this article, click [NEARI NEWS](#).

NEARI Press Webinar

Ancient Ways: Indigenous Healing of Sexual Behaviors for the 21st Century

APRIL 2, 2013

2:00pm-3:00pm EST

In the next one-hour NEARI Press Webinar, Geral Blanchard will introduce an exciting approach to working with young people.

By combining traditional indigenous wisdom with contemporary neuroscience and psychotherapeutic innovations, Blanchard offers a comprehensive model for psychological healing.

Space is limited, so please register now to be guaranteed a spot! To register for this webinar, [click here](#). After you register, we will send you information about how to sign on.

Two more webinars are scheduled in our series, featuring internationally recognized experts: Su Robinson and Tom Leverage. If you have liked these webinars, please consider becoming a sponsor and helping us continue to provide these free resources.

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