

Responding to Sibling Sexual Trauma (SST)

What Schools Can Do

Be Aware

Sibling sexual trauma is real, common and possible in any family. It is happening to students at your school. An estimated 2-5% of children are victims of a sibling's harmful sexual behaviour. For half of them, it begins before age 8. For most, it continues for years in their own home.

It can happen to any student who has a sibling, regardless of gender, age, ability level, or family circumstances. However, some children are at **higher risk**:

- females
- younger siblings
- those regularly cared for by a sibling
- those who are part of a stepfamily, adoptive family or foster family
- those with a family history of domestic violence, sexual abuse or other types of abuse
- those with physical, social or intellectual disability or diversity

Unfortunately, young people can and do cause sexual harm.

- **The peak age for harmful sexual behaviour toward a child or sibling is 12-14 years old.**
- **Youth of any gender can sexually harm siblings of either the same or a different gender.**
- Most who harm have social skills, intelligence and school behaviour that is average or above.
- Yet children who struggle with impulse control, social isolation or with delayed social or intellectual development may be at higher risk to sexually harm a child.
- Rising exposure to explicit online sexual content has led to increasing rates of early and problematic sexual behaviour.
- Most youth who cause sexual harm are not paedophiles and don't behave abusively as adults.
- Students with sexual behaviour problems need help to change their behaviour and deal with contributing factors. They need supervision and accountability without shame.

Sibling sexual trauma or abuse is a possibility to consider when there are concerns or changes in a child's behaviour or emotions. However, many children show no outward signs.

Educate staff on the messages children most need to hear if they talk about any type of abuse:

- "I'm sorry this happened to you."
- "I'm glad you told me."
- "This wasn't your fault."

Educate staff that mandatory reporting includes abusive behaviour by another child or teen.

Additional referrals for principals and psychosocial service staff to have ready include:

- Childhood.org.au (Australian Childhood Foundation, healing services for child trauma)
- StopItNow.org.au (confidential helpline for parents and staff wondering how to respond)
- Siblingsexualtrauma.com (comprehensive information, links to resources and online support)
- Bravehearts.org.au/get-help/ (support and help for child sexual abuse victims and families)
- 5WAVES flyer for parents who just found out (5waves.org/printable-info-for-outreach)

Be Ready to Respond



MORE TOOLS & INFORMATION:
5waves.org | siblingsexualtrauma.com



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What Schools Can Do (continued)

Work Toward Prevention

"I'm a very big enthusiast for comprehensive school-based prevention education. I think it's one of the best tools we have [to prevent child sexual abuse]...one that I think deserves our priority attention." David Finkelhor, Director, Crimes Against Children Research Center

Select and implement body safety and consent education.

Start early and repeat on a yearly basis.

See suggestions at 5waves.org/resources-for-schools. >>>



When choosing or modifying a curriculum, look for:

- Inclusion of students with all learning styles, needs and diversities.
- Information on respecting others' boundaries as well as protecting your own.
- A strong internet safety component.
- Specific mention that body safety rules apply to other children and to family members.
- A trauma-informed approach (many children participating have experienced abuse).
- Educational materials for parents to complement what children learn.
- Materials to notify parents ahead of time and allow opt-out or alternatives.
- Plan for children to follow up confidentially if they have more questions or concerns.
- Plan to support families, students and school staff if a child discloses abuse.

Model and remind students about principles of body safety, boundaries and consent in all school environments. Enforce expectations without shaming.

Make internet safety a priority:

- Make sure your school's technology plan includes multiple layers of protection.
- Give options for students to do homework on paper or on a device without internet.
- Regularly share information with parents on age-appropriate ways to talk about online behaviour and tools for increasing online safety when outside of school.

Provide students with multiple, trusted, age-appropriate options for guidance and support about sexual and/or online activity. This includes addressing questions and concerns about what has happened to them, their own behaviour, or how to help a friend, as many tell a friend first.

Suggested sites include:

- shorespace.org.uk
- kidshelpline.com.au 1800 55 1800
- #myfriendtoo

Help Students Find Help



MORE TOOLS & INFORMATION:
5waves.org | siblingsexualtrauma.com

