

## 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 behavior. 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 behavior 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, & school behavior 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 behavior.
- Most youth who cause sexual harm are not pedophiles and don't behave abusively as adults.
- Students with sexual behavior problems need help to change their behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior by another child or teen.**

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

- Local Child Advocacy Center ([nationalcac.org/find-a-cac](http://nationalcac.org/find-a-cac))
- StopItNow.org (confidential helpline, for parents & staff wondering how to respond)
- Siblingsexualtrauma.com (comprehensive information, links to resources & online support)
- Local sexual assault & exploitation crisis services & helpline ([centers.rainn.org](http://centers.rainn.org))
- 5WAVES flyer for parents who just found out ([5waves.org/printable-info-for-outreach](http://5waves.org/printable-info-for-outreach))



**MORE TOOLS & INFORMATION:**  
**[5waves.org](http://5waves.org), [siblingsexualtrauma.com](http://siblingsexualtrauma.com)**



## *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](https://5waves.org/resources-for-schools). >>>**



Many states require prevention education. Some programs bring in their own educators to present the information. 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 district'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 behavior, and tools for increasing online safety when outside of school.

### *Help Students Find Help*

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 behavior, or how to help a friend, as many tell a friend first.

Suggested sites include:

- [whatsok.org](https://whatsok.org)
- [rainn.org](https://rainn.org)
- [#myfriendtoo](https://myfriendtoo.org)



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