

## PARENT-TARGETED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** Education is necessary for children to have skills to prevent sexual abuse. This requires close cooperation between the families and the schools. In practice, this cooperation is, however, not effective since parents face many difficulties in educating their children in sexual abuse prevention skills. Therefore, our training program specifically targeted parents, helping parents overcome their difficulties and best cooperate with schools in sexual abuse education for their children.

**Keywords:** Children, child sexual abuse; child sexual abuse prevention; sexual abuse prevention education;

### I. Current situation of child sexual abuse in Vietnam

Child sexual abuse is current an alarming issue in both the world and Vietnam. In fact, many cases of child sexual abuse result in severe consequences in children's psychological life and safety. Besides immediate physical effects, sexual abuse also leaves mental, long-term, and serious consequences for the children and their families.

According to a report by the Criminal Police Department, Ministry of Public Security, in just 2 years of 2017 and 2018 and the first 3 months of 2019, there were 2,996 cases of child sexual abuse nationwide; that means 3-4 children is sexually abused a day.

The extent of child sexual abuse cases tends to be complicated and severe. Child sexual abuse occurs among different groups of ages and is committed by various types of people, most of whom are acquaintances, family members, or neighbors, and both Vietnamese and foreigners. Children may be abused anywhere, ranging from families, schools, hospitals, parks, restaurants, supermarkets to the Internet.

### II. Difficulties faced by parents in child sexual abuse prevention education

Children acquire the necessary knowledge to build their skills through lessons at school. These skills need more time and practice in different environments outside the class to be built, strengthened, and developed. The collaboration between families and schools in child sexual abuse prevention education is, hence, extremely vital.

Besides, educating children to build child sexual abuse prevention skills also pose parents to various difficulties, specifically:

#### 2.1. Inadequate perception of "child sexual abuse"

Child sexual abuse is commonly thought to be involved in hurting a child's genitals. However, the Law on Children 2016 defines child sexual abuse as the use of force, threatened use of force, coercion, enticement, and seduction of children to engage in sex-related acts, including rape, defilement, copulation, lewdness with children, and the use of children for prostitution and pornography in any form.

#### 2.2. Incorrect perception of sexually abused children

The incorrect thought that only girls are sexually abused is common among many parents. Many parents having boys even have disregarded the sexual abuse education for their kids. According to statistics in Vietnam, sexual abuse, on average, happens to 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys. Notably, the consequences of child sexual abuse left on both boys and girls are equally severe.

Furthermore, many parents suppose that only older children with well-developed bodies become the targets of sexual abusers. Due to this lack of vigilance, educating their children in sexual abuse prevention at an early age is deemed not necessary. However, a disturbing fact is the average age of sexually abused children in Vietnam is 8-9 years old, even some 1-year-old children have suffered sexual abuse.

### **2.3. Incorrect perception of child sexual abusers**

Children are often taught by their parents to be wary of strangers but rarely taught to be wary of those they know or even blood relatives. 93% of child sexual abusers are, in fact, acquaintances of the victims' families, and 47% of them are relatives.

Child sexual abusers are not always healthy adults. Some of them are elderly.

Girls are sexually abused not only by men but also by women. Likewise, boys may be sexually abused by both women and men.

### **2.4. Wrong awareness of child sexual abusers' tricks**

According to the survey, most parents share the thought that children are always suddenly sexually abused. However, most of the actual child sexual abuses are notably sophisticatedly planned by the abusers. Their plan usually consists of 5 basic steps: Identify the target – Build trust (with the child or young parents) – Create secrets with the child – Commit escalating acts – Commit acts of sexual abuse. The carefully prepared plan makes it easy for them to hide their intentions and freely commit depraved acts, even in a repetitive manner, without being detected.

### **2.5. Lack of knowledge about educating their children in sexual abuse prevention and shyness when sharing "sensitive" content with their children.**

When selecting between sending their children to classes on child sexual abuse prevention and directly educating them, most parents prefer the former. Some just buy books or find materials for their children to read and study by themselves while few parents choose to accompany their children in learning about and sharing directly with them on this matter. The shyness of many parents is also one of the factors that lead to their children's wrong awareness and fear of sharing with parents about their situations.

## **III. Parent-targeted child sexual abuse presentation education contents**

From the above analysis, to help parents tackle their own difficulties and better cooperate with the schools, the following solution of parent-targeted child sexual abuse prevention education is provided.

### **3.1. Current situation of child sexual abuse**

#### **3.1.1. Objectives**

To clearly warn parents about the alarming situation of child sexual abuse.

#### **3.1.2. Contents**

- Quantity: According to statistics in Vietnam, there are roughly 1,100 sexually abused children per year, which means there are 3-4 children sexually abused a day, and every 8 hours, there is 1 Vietnamese child sexually abused.

- Age: The average age of sexually abused children is 9 years old.

- There is an insignificant difference in the number of sexually abused boys and girls. Sexual abuse occurs averagely in 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys.

- Child sexual abusers: 93% of abusers are acquaintances of the victims and their families. Among them, 47% are relatives (relatives or family members)

### **3.2. Tricks of child sexual abusers**

#### **3.2.1. Objectives**

To help parents determine the tricks of child sexual abusers and be alert and take prompt handling measures, especially with **planned attacks**.

#### **3.2.2. Contents**

- Unplanned attacks

- Planned attacks: usually involve 5 steps

+ Identify the target

+ Build trust with the victim or his/her family

+ Create secrets with the victim for controlling purposes

+ Commit escalating acts

+ Commit acts of sexual abuse

### **3.3. Consequences of sexual abuse on children**

#### **3.3.1. Objectives**

To help parents be aware of the severe consequences caused by sexual abuse on their children, thereby being more active in educating and providing their children with skills to prevent sexual abuse.

#### **3.3.2. Contents**

- Physical consequences:

+ Causing damage to health, especially severe damage to the genitals

+ Potentially causing unwanted pregnancy to girls, endangering themselves and their unborn children

+ Possibly making children infected with social diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS

- Mental consequences:

- + Causing children to have behavioral disorders and conduct disorders
- + Affecting children's cognitive abilities
- + Causing children's conditions of anxiety, panic, and guilty feeling, which may lead to depression if prolonged.
- + Possibly causing gender distortions
- + Pushing many children into difficulties in their future sex life
- + More seriously, causing many sexually abused children to commit suicide due to mental shock.

### **3.4. Signs of child sexual abuse**

#### **3.4.1. Objectives**

To provide parents the signs to quickly recognize when their children are sexually abused, thereby taking timely support and handling measures.

#### **3.4.2. Contents**

- Children has wounds on their bodies, especially on the genitals
- Bloodstains appear on their bodies or belongings
- Children experience urinary problems, such as burning pain and painful urination, etc.
- Children are afraid of bathing or take too many baths.
- Children suffer abdominal pain, headache, insomnia, bedwetting, etc.
- Children feel anxious, scared, and easily cry and get angry.
- Children appear to be afraid of someone or somewhere.
- Children often draw pictures of or ask questions about genitals.

### **3.5. Things parents need to teach their children**

#### **3.5.1. Objectives**

To help parents determine things that need to be taught to their children at home and cooperate with the schools in building their children's skills to prevent sexual abuse.

#### **3.5.2. Contents**

##### **3.5.2.1. Teaching children about private areas of the body**

- Private areas (underwear areas):

+ For boys: buttocks; genitals

+ For girls: buttocks; breasts; and genitals

- Private areas are their own, and no one is allowed to touch, look at or talk about them, except for family members bathing the children at a young age and doctors examining the children with their family members nearby.

- Children must pay attention to their dressing, walking, standing, sitting, lying down, bathing, or clothes changing manners to prevent others from seeing their swimwear areas.

##### **3.5.2.2. 5-finger rule**

This rule helps children to behave appropriately with those around them.

- The thumb symbolizes the closest family members like the parents, the grandparents, and the siblings. The children can hug, kiss, share the bed with them, and agree to have them see and touch his/her underwear areas while bathing, changing their clothes when she/he is young.

- The index finger symbolizes close friends, teachers, or relatives of the family such as aunts and uncles. These people can approach and hold the child's hands but cannot see or touch the child's underwear areas.

- The middle finger symbolizes acquaintances like neighbors, far-blood relatives, friends of the child, or friends of grandparents and parents. The child can approach, greet and play with them but should not allow them to see or touch his/her underwear areas.

- The ring finger symbolizes safe strangers whom the child has just met for the first time but can easily realize their identity, origin, and occupations through their costumes, nameplate, or letters of referral such as police, doctors, teachers, electricians, officers, or workers. The child should not let them get close without anyone around or stand from a distance to talk, if necessary, and absolutely prevent them from seeing or touching his/her underwear areas. The case where the doctor examines the child with a family member nearby is an exception.

- The pinky finger symbolizes unsafe strangers whom the child has just met for the first time but has difficulty identifying who they are. The child should absolutely prevent them from approaching, looking at, or touching his/her underwear areas.

##### **3.5.2.3. Five danger warnings**

Any of the following situations indicate that the child is in danger. The child needs to say "no", leave the place and immediately notify his/her family or people around.

- Looking warning: When someone wants to see the child's underwear areas or wants the child to look at their underwear areas (or force the child to watch a movie or picture showing the characters' underwear areas)

- Speaking warning: When someone wants the child to talk about his/her underwear areas or wants the child to hear them talk about their or someone else's underwear areas.

- Touching warning: When someone intentionally touches the child's underwear areas or wants the child to touch their (or someone else's) underwear areas
  - Alone warning: When the child is alone in a godforsaken place or surrounded by strangers.
  - Hugging warning: When someone other than the parents, grandparents, and siblings deliberately hugs the child; or when the parents, grandparents, or siblings hug the child while the child feels uncomfortable.
- 3.5.2.4. Things to do when children are in danger
- Saying no to all requests and dangerous acts
  - Seeking help from people around by calling for help, screaming, crying, smashing things around to get attention
  - Staying calm and cleverly taking some defense measure to escape from bad people if there is no one around them;
  - Taking immediately with people around after escaping from bad people.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Most parents face difficulties in providing their children with skills to prevent sexual abuse. Many do not have a thorough understanding of child sexual abuse, the actual situation of this problem, and its consequences for children, families, and society. Deficiency of knowledge about the tricks of the abusers and what to do to help their children build the skills to protect themselves against abusers also parents' challenges. Therefore, child sexual abuse prevention training courses and propaganda with the involvement of both parents and children are vital to offer parents a comprehensive perspective and help children acquire skills to prevent child sexual abuse in the most effective manner.

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