

SAFETY BULLETIN

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Spotlight on Training | Issue 10

The third element in Praesidium's Safety Equation™ is training. Regardless of your good intentions and those of your employees and volunteers, without specific, timely, and meaningful training, they cannot ensure the safety of children in their care. This Praesidium Safety Bulletin focuses on how to make your abuse prevention training effective. ■

FAST FACTS



- Without specific, timely, and meaningful training, employees cannot ensure the safety of the children and vulnerable adults in their care.
- Abuse prevention training must include four content areas: how child molesters operate; high-risk activities and locations; warning signs; and removing barriers to responding.
- One-shot training, like an annual workshop on preventing child abuse, will not, by itself, sustain behavior change.
- Effective training includes six components:
 - 1) A convincing explanation;
 - 2) Obviously useful information;
 - 3) Knowledge *and* skills;
 - 4) Practice and feedback;
 - 5) Booster training, and
 - 6) Accountability.
- Supervisors must be held accountable that training requirements are clear and enforced.
- Effective training uses a variety of training delivery systems, including e-learning, platform, blended learning, on-the-job (OTJ), incident-driven, and booster.

Critical Content for Abuse Prevention Training

Abuse prevention training must include four content areas: how molesters operate; how to identify high-risk activities and locations; how to recognize warning signs in adult/child and child/child interactions; and how to respond to warning signs.

How molesters operate. Child molesters behave in predictable ways. Some establish relationships with their favorite children, shower them with special attention and gifts, arrange opportunities to spend time alone with them, and increase physical contact that culminates in sexual abuse. Others look for opportunities where they can quickly and without witness, or anonymously, make sexual contact with a child. Understanding how these two types of offenders operate can put your employees and volunteers on alert.

High-risk activities and locations. Not all activities and locations provide equal opportunities for abuse to occur. For example, most sexual activity between children occurs in bathrooms. Activities that involve water also involve partial nudity; partial nudity increases the risk of abuse. Activities and locations that permit privacy increase risk: rooms with closed or locked doors or without windows, one-on-one circumstances, and overnight trips require clear supervision policies and extra attention.

Recognizing warning signs. In most cases of sexual abuse in organizations, after the fact employees and volunteers can describe warning situations that made them “uncomfortable” or that they thought were “weird.”

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However, they often don't know what to do, or they feel uncomfortable, or they "didn't see anything illegal," so they didn't take action. We know that sexual activity is private behavior, not likely to be witnessed by others. To use an analogy, the announcement heard often in today's airport doesn't instruct people to report when they see a bomb explode; it instructs them to report suspicious actions or unattended baggage.

Removing barriers. Even when employees and volunteers can recognize warning signs, they often fail to report them for three reasons: they fear their anonymity will be violated; they don't know what will happen if they make a report; and they don't want to accuse someone of being a child molester. You can remove these barriers by setting up an anonymous reporting system; by making clear and public the steps your organization takes when it receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate conduct; and by teaching people that a report isn't an accusation, instead it's a way to keep co-workers safe from false allegations and children safe from a molestation. Both outcomes benefit everyone. ■

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Components of Effective Training Programs

An effective training program includes six components: 1) A convincing explanation about why the content is important; 2) The inclusion of obviously useful information; 3) A focus on knowledge *and* skills; 4) Opportunities for practice and feedback in the real world; 5) Booster training, and 6) Accountability.

If participants understand why the training content is important, they will pay closer attention and learn more. The closer this "why" hits home, the greater impact it will have. For example, in poultry processing plants, workers learn quickly the correct way to operate cutting devices—so they don't lose a finger or two. In abuse prevention training, participants should learn how a child's life may be profoundly affected by a single incident of sexual abuse, whether by an adult or a peer.



The more quickly participants see how the training content applies to them—how mastering the content will pay off—the more engaged they become. Effective training programs repeatedly tie the information presented to the employees' needs on the job. Examples from the field ring true and help participants make connections between the content and their responsibilities.

Knowledge is information that is considered justified, true, and believed; skills are how the information is translated into actions that can be applied. **Effective training programs specify at the onset what information participants will master and what skills they will be able to demonstrate at the conclusion of the training.** If these aren't clear early on, results will be inconsistent.

Training can only be effective if it also includes opportunities for participants to transfer their new knowledge and skills to real-life situations. Even though this appears obvious in some situations (for example, you couldn't learn how to swim by watching a videotape or hearing a lecture), many training



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programs simply assume that after a single classroom experience participants will be sufficiently capable and comfortable to apply what they've heard. Opportunities to practice, and to receive feedback, make the difference between "understanding" something and "doing" something.

One-shot training, like an annual hour-long workshop on preventing child abuse, won't sustain behavior change over time. **If you expect your employees and volunteers to retain and use what they have learned, they need to relearn it, frequently, in real time, and on the job.**

Finally, **supervisors must be held accountable that training requirements are clear and enforced.** Scheduling problems, late hires, and myriad other excuses are simply that: excuses. In court, excuses won't get the organization off the hook, and excuses certainly won't ease the pain of a parent whose child has been molested. ■

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Training Delivery Systems



Effective training uses a variety of training delivery systems, including e-learning, platform, blended learning, on-the-job (OTJ), incident-driven, and booster.

E-learning enjoys several benefits over more traditional methods: it ensures that all employees receive the same content; it can be updated easily and frequently so the content remains fresh and accurate; it permits easy tracking of who has completed the training; it doesn't require a skilled trainer, a location, or setup; and users can complete the training at their own convenience.

Platform training permits interaction between participants and the instructor, such as role-play activities, discussions, and questions and answers. When used with e-learning

in a **blended learning model**, it can enhance the participant's experience. Praesidium recommends that e-learning be used first to give participants the information they need immediately, followed up with platform training sometime later to discuss how they used the content on the job. This model facilitates transfer of skills and knowledge to the field.

Supervisors should also use **real-time or on-the-job training** often. Anytime they see an employee interacting correctly with a child or implementing a safety practice (such as escorting children to the bathroom), they should commend the employee. Likewise, if they see an infraction, a reminder can be meaningful. Similarly, using the first 5 minutes of staff meetings to review an important safety practice can keep employees adhering to standards.

One of the best training opportunities occurs **following an incident or a 'near miss.'** Use the incident or near miss to discuss with employees or volunteers what went wrong and what could have been done differently. This process, described as root-cause analysis, can help employees understand the benefits of particular policies or practices. ■

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How **STRONG** is your abuse prevention training program?

Answer these six questions to assess the strength of your training program:

1. Is there a line item in my budget for training?
2. Are training requirements specified and enforced?
3. Is training content and delivery periodically reviewed for quality?
4. Does training employ a variety of delivery systems, including OTJ, incident-driven, and booster?
5. Can employees and volunteers articulate the practices and policies covered in training?
6. Are employees and volunteers held accountable to use what they have learned?

Platform Training Workshops

Praesidium offers half- and full-day training workshops that provide employees, volunteers, and youths with the knowledge they need to protect against abuse.

Popular workshops include: Preventing Peer-to-Peer Abuse, Monitoring and Supervision, Volunteer Screening and Selection, Risk Management for Leadership, Creating a Culture of Safety, and Incident Investigation.

Call 817.801.7773 to schedule a training workshop for your staff!

Praesidium
P.O. Box 202002
Arlington, TX 76006
817.801.7773
www.PraesidiumInc.com

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About Praesidium

Praesidium is the national leader in abuse risk management offering a full range of products and services to help you protect those in your care from abuse and to preserve trust in your organization.

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