

A photograph of a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white cardigan, smiling warmly as she holds a young child with curly hair. The child is wearing a red and black patterned shirt and denim overalls. They are in a playroom with colorful toys on the floor, including a xylophone, a baseball, and a tambourine. The background wall is decorated with a sun, clouds, and a UFO. The image is tilted slightly to the right.

DARE TO SEE, DARE TO ACT

A TRAINING MANUAL FOR PREVENTING AND
DETECTING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE
AGAINST CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



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This part will provide information about what constitutes violence, different forms of violence, and why staff and children are all in need of knowledge about violence and abuse in close relationships.

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Introduction

This training manual concerns how workers in professions relating to children and adolescents may help detect and prevent violence and sexual abuse against children and youth, in addition to providing help for the children who have experienced such abuses. Being subjected to violence in close relationships is severely damaging and many children will not disclose their experiences until much later in life.

It is important that people working with children and youth possess the knowledge to be able to detect when someone is being exposed to violence and abuse and ensure that they receive help and following up from a professional support system. For children and youth to recognise and understand their own experiences of abuse and the need for help, it is also important that they are made aware of what violence and abuse entails.

In this training manual you will find useful information, tools, and tips for handling the topic of violence and sexual abuse in your workplace. We hope you will find this training manual useful and that it will be of help in the important effort to detect and prevent violence and sexual abuse against children and youth.

Nina Johannesen and Svein Harald Bigum, The Center for Equality

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"You won't see it until you believe it!"

CHAPTER 1

What is violence and different forms of violence

KNOWLEDGE AND LEGISLATION

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

The United Nations has adopted its own children's convention, consisting of rights that apply to all children under the age of 18 worldwide.

Among other things, the United Nations children's convention states that all children:

- have a right to not be physically nor emotionally abused (§19).
- shall be protected against sexual exploitation and abuse (§34).
- who have experienced neglect or abuse, have a right to receive help (§39).

Staff must have knowledge about violence and sexual abuse

Staff working with children and adolescents must have knowledge about violence, sexual abuse, physicality and sexuality to prevent and detect such abuses and provide help to those who have been subjected to them.

Children and youth must have knowledge about violence and sexual abuse

Children and youth require knowledge about violence, sexual abuse and bullying in order to know their own rights. They also need to know how to seek help if they experience violence or abuse.

Children and youth require knowledge about what constitutes violence and abuse to understand what it actually is and to be able to communicate it if they have experienced it. This knowledge and coping ability can help strengthen autonomy and prevent violence, abuse, and bullying.



WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

"Violence is any action directed towards another person through which damage, pain, fear or violation makes this person do something against their will or stop doing something that they wish to do",
Per Isdal, Specialist in Psychology.

According to Per Isdal, violence serves two purposes; 1) Inflicting damage, pain, fear, or violation, and 2) Influencing or controlling the behaviour of another person.

There are many forms of violence and not everyone is fully aware of what constitutes violence. Many victims of violence report having been subjected to more than one form. Below we point out 10 different forms of violence.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS?

Violence in close relationships is any violence between family members. It may be violence between current or former partners, violence against children, or violence against the elderly. Forced marriage, honour-based violence, and genital mutilation are also considered violence in close relationships.

WHAT IS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP?

Close relationship is family, someone you trust, or someone you are dependent on.

In addition to family, violence in close relationships includes people outside of the family with whom one has a trust-based relationship. This includes friends (youth/young adults) or any person one might depend on or trust, such as a coach/trainer, teacher, and so forth. Human trafficking will sometimes begin with a trust-based relationship that develops into a dependent relationship involving a high degree of control and exploitation.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Physical violence is any violence involving physical contact. Some examples are striking, kicking, hair pulling, pushing, shaking, choking, restraining, burning or branding, biting, the use of weapons, or using objects to strike another person. Confinement and isolation are also forms of physical violence. Physical violence used as a method of disciplining children is a serious matter causing severe consequences for the affected children.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Psychological violence is the use of voice and words in ways that threaten, hurt, violate, or control another person. Examples of psychological violence are yelling, threats, hurtful criticism, humiliation, interrogation, ignoring or disregarding, making false accusations, or limiting the freedoms of another person. Psychological violence may also be domineering behaviour such as controlling your partner's e-mail account, mobile phone, or social media profiles.

SOCIAL VIOLENCE

Social violence involves social exclusion, social isolation, or restricting freedom of movement. An example may be that your partner or other family members dislike activities you participate in and want you to stop doing them or want you to stop seeing friends and colleagues.

MATERIAL VIOLENCE

Material violence is any form of violence directed against objects. It may be kicking down a door, punching a table or a wall, breaking a mirror, or destroying interior objects or objects of sentimental value to the owner. Seeing someone break or destroy an

object in anger can be deeply frightening and trigger a fear that in the future this violence may be directed at yourself rather than the objects.

DIGITAL VIOLENCE

This form of violence involves surveillance, threats and harassment through digital messaging, and exercising control using mobile phones, social media, or unpleasant messages posted online. Digital violence also includes threats, harassment, and sexual abuse following contact that was established online. It is important for children and young people to receive training in safe and sane internet usage.

LATENT VIOLENCE

Having experienced violence makes one fear that it may happen again. This means that the possibility and risk of more violence occurring, affects or controls someone's actions by making them hypersensitive to moods, tones of voice, the way someone opens a door, someone's manner of walking, and so on. The violence is consistently "in the air".

HONOUR-BASED VIOLENCE

Honour-based violence is a form of violence in close relationships. This violence is performed to protect or restore the honour of a family and is often committed by more than one person. Boys and girls, men and women, may all be subjected to honour-based violence. However, the family's honour is often considered to be tied to the behaviour of the women and girls of the family. Honour-based violence is the assault of an individual that the family deems to have dishonoured them, or that they fear will dishonour them.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence are actions directed at another person's sexuality. This form of violence causes profound harm and may have severe consequences. Examples of sexual violence are; sexual harassment, using force or pressure to make others perform sexual acts, rape or sexualised torture.

GENITAL MUTILATION

Genital mutilation of girls and women is a procedure that alters or removes parts of the outer genital area. Genital mutilation is very harmful and these women may be injured physically and mentally for life. For this reason, female circumcision is illegal in most countries. The procedure is commonly carried out when the girls are between the ages of five and fourteen, but is also performed on infants, youths, and adult women.

FINANCIAL VIOLENCE

Financial violence involves the control of another person's finances. In a relationship one partner may, for example, be denied control of their own personal finances or the couple's shared finances. This person may be denied their own bank account or be manipulated into signing debt documents.

DISABILITY ABUSE

Disability abuse is any violent act exploiting another person's disability. It is often a combination of other forms of violence, such as physical, psychological, sexualised, and/or financial violence. But in cases of disability abuse, the victim has one or more disabilities that tie to the violence. One example may be intentionally obstructing the path of a blind person or someone in a wheelchair.



CHAPTER 2

Consequences of violence and sexual abuse

CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE

Witnessing violence is violence too

Witnessing violence can be as damaging as being directly subjected to violence. Many parents who have committed or been subjected to violent acts do not believe their children have noticed the violence happening. The children, on the other hand, will reveal that they could hear the violent acts happening from a different area of the house or after they had gone to bed. They can sense the unpleasantness of the mood and notice that one parent is afraid or injured, or that objects have been destroyed. Violence against a parent is also violence against the child.

Children are subjected to violence by:

- Being eyewitnesses to violence.
- Overhearing violence.

Overhearing violence can be even more traumatic than witnessing it. Children use their imaginations to create mental images of what is going on, and these images may be even worse than what is actually happening.

Violence leads to:

- Physical injuries.
- Material damage.
- Psychological damage.
- Illness.
- A family dynamic marked by trepidation.
- Weakened parental ability/functioning.

Did you know that children who experience violence and sexual abuse are at higher risk of concentration difficulties?

Children who experience violence and abuse often develop difficulties with learning and memory and may often dissociate, for example in the form of flashbacks. These children are more prone to illness as they are constantly plagued by anxiety and distress, both of which are factors that weaken the functioning of the immune system. This highlights the importance of identifying these children as early as possible, so that they may receive help. You play an important part in this.

A family dynamic marked by trepidation

Having experienced violence even once will make a child all too aware that it may happen again, causing a constant fear of recurrence.

The child does not know what is happening at home when they are not present, nor what may be awaiting them when they return. This causes serious distress.

An infant will notice if its caregiver is frightened and feeling unsafe. When a parent is subjected to violence, they may be overwhelmed by their own predicament and unable to take proper care of the child. Many victims of violence also suffer from psychological damage, leaving them unable to sufficiently care for their children.





GROUPS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Children growing up in families afflicted by crime, substance abuse and mental illness are especially susceptible to violence and abuse. Financial difficulties are also a risk factor. Children and youth breaking with sexuality and gender norms and people with disabilities may also be especially vulnerable to violence and abuse.

People with disabilities

Did you know that international research shows that children with disabilities are at three times the risk of experiencing violence and sexual abuse compared to other children?

Causes may include the disability itself making it more difficult for the child to escape from a harmful situation, call for help, or communicate what has happened. Children with some types of disabilities also require more help with intimate functions pertaining to hygiene and getting dressed, which may be exploited by adults.

Adults' preconceived notions and lack of knowledge about the child's disability may lead to the child's attempts at communicating its experiences not being taken seriously or given enough consideration.

Behavioural changes that would be cause for concern in other children, may be interpreted as having to do with the child's disability rather than being a sign of violence or abuse.



Children and youth breaking with norms of gender and sexuality

Did you know that children and youth who do not identify with traditional gender roles and identities are considerably more subjected to violence and sexual abuse than other adolescents?

Little research has been done on the experiences of violence and abuse in children and youth who break with gender and sexuality norms, but the research that has been conducted shows that young people who do not identify with traditional gender roles and identities are far more subjected to violence and sexual abuse than other adolescents. This especially pertains to physical violence committed by caregivers, psychological violence, parental negligence, and sexual abuse committed by adults. Queer youth are particularly exposed to violence within the family. For this reason, it is especially important to take notice of these children and youth. Those who experience violence must be detected as early as possible and receive proper help.

Greater acceptance of sexual diversity and diverse gender expression should be integrated into the pedagogy of schools and kindergartens in order to prevent violence and sexual abuse, but also as a part of greater anti-discriminatory work. This will contribute to an improved social environment in such institutions, which in turn prevents bullying. Gender and sexual diversity should also be spoken about at parent-teacher conferences.

CHAPTER 3

The traumatised brain. A result of violence and sexual abuse

The brain is moulded by how it is used. If a child spends a lot of time in fear, distress, or a state of hypervigilance because they or a loved one is being subjected to violence, this will affect the child's brain. To understand how the brain reacts to danger and distress, you need knowledge about which functions are controlled by which parts of the brain.

The three parts of the brain

1. The sensory brain/survival brain (the brainstem) regulates heartbeat, breath, balance, sleep/waking, the physical survival mode of the body and brain activation.
2. The emotional brain/relational brain is where we can find emotions, memory function, concentration, attentivity, episodic memory and our ability to connect with other people.
3. The thinking brain processes information and manages planning and decision making. The thinking brain is also home to language processing, reasoning, and consciousness.

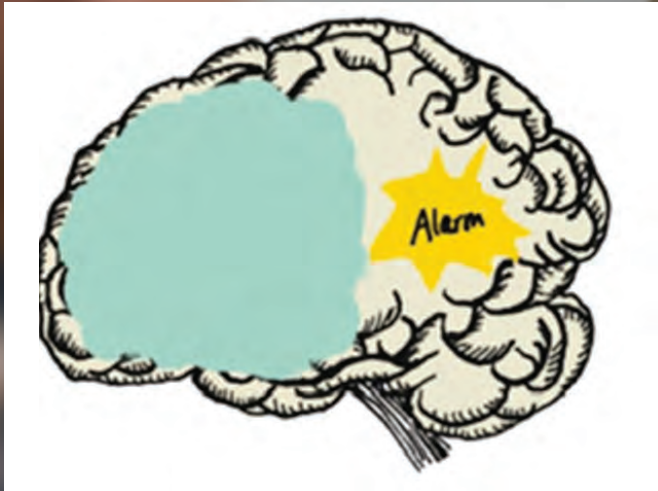
For the brain to function as a unit, it is important that all three parts of the brain are sufficiently developed and interconnected.

The normal brain and the traumatised brain

The next illustration shows the normal brain on the top and a traumatised brain on the bottom. The green area illustrates the emotional/relational brain and the thinking brain. The yellow area shows the sensory/survival brain. Notice the difference in size between the areas.

When we feel safe and relaxed, we are in touch with the sensory brain, emotional brain and thinking brain all at once. We are able to be present in the moment and hold conversations, sense our emotions and feel connected to our bodies.

But if a child is exposed to violence over time, the survival brain will become hypersensitive. Even if the real danger has passed, the body continues to be on guard. When the survival brain is acutely activated, it lowers the functioning of the emotional brain, which stores memory and catalogues what is or is not dangerous. Being on guard reduces the brain's ability to store new information in your memory. Therefore, children who experience violence will often have a harder time learning. It also becomes more difficult to separate real danger from a false sense of danger.



A young man with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and dark pants, is sitting on a wooden floor against a light-colored wall. He is holding his head with both hands, his face is contorted in pain or distress, and his mouth is open as if crying or shouting. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows cast on the wall behind him.

CONSEQUENCES OF TRAUMA

After a child has experienced violence, trauma may occur. The brain will continue to signal danger even after the child has escaped the situation and is safe. Impressions the brain cannot process are stored as intense, subconscious memories. These memories may reappear through flashbacks, nightmares, and physical and emotional feelings of discomfort.

In children who have been subjected to recurring violence and sexual abuse, the brain is organised and built up around danger. If too much brain capacity is spent being constantly on guard, there is less space to develop skills like problem solving and abstract thinking. Focusing on learning in kindergarten or at school may become too demanding for the child when its mind and body exist in a constant state of chaos.

The brain warns of danger

When children and adolescents are exposed to traumatising experiences, the brain is not always capable of piecing together the impressions to form one cohesive experience. This can give the child a lasting sense of ongoing danger, even when the danger is no longer present. The ongoing sense of danger leads to abnormal behaviours. Sometimes the child might react impulsively, displaying bodily unrest, jitteriness, hyperactivity, and aggression. At other times, children may react through passivity, indifference, and emotional numbness. Some children may become prone to daydreaming or withdrawing from interpersonal contact.

Traumatised children and youth may lose their mental balance more easily than their peers, as they are more vulnerable to the pressures of their surroundings. Incidents that have previously contributed to the child's trauma, can lead to behavioural changes in the child. Such things may be the slamming of a door, raised voices, an angry glance, someone pounding the table, smells, sounds, moods, or even different flavours of food and drink. Even if the child is not actually in danger in the given moment, the brain will signal danger and the child may react by storming out of the classroom, attacking adults or other children, become passive, retreat into a world of their own, or freeze up. This is when the child needs your help to regain their mental balance.

How to help children with hypervigilance

Children who have been traumatised have little ability to regulate their distress and emotional responses on their own. They depend on adults bringing attention to their emotions rather than their behavioural expressions. Scolding is not helpful, as children exposed to such reprimanding over time risk further negative impact on their brain's learning, memory, and concentration abilities.

Such losses of function will negatively affect the child's ability to trust and form attachments to other people, in addition to their ability to regulate their own behaviour, including the ability to calm themselves down or provide themselves with comfort. Children who have been subjected to violence and sexual abuse will often have experienced their caregiver(s) not tolerating the child's discomfort. Thus, the child may be lacking in important relational experiences.

By observing, listening, speaking to, and maintaining physical contact with the child, your safe and active presence can help the child. You may do this by comforting and signalling to the child that this is a safe space where they will be cared for. Your calmness may rub off on the child. These experiences of care and safety will help the child gradually develop their capacity to regulate their own emotions and tolerating stressors without becoming overwhelmed.



CHAPTER 4

Gender, norms, and violence

Have you considered that the notions we have about how boys and girls should behave are closely connected to problems relating to violence and sexual abuse?

Notions about gender and the legitimisation of violence

When someone is expecting a child, our first question might often be “Is it a boy or a girl?” Even before the child is born, we are having ideas about how the child’s life is going to turn out. Gendered expectations are a part of this. Research shows that parents, teachers, and other adults will treat even very young children differently based on their sex, often subconsciously.

Children develop their identities and self-understanding in response to the expectations they encounter in life. Through socialisation, children learn what is allowed and accepted from them and for them. Your expectations of sex and gender are a substantial part of the socialisation of the children you spend time with.

Perhaps the ideas we have about gender can even make us accept violence under certain circumstances? If a boy is teasing a girl, adults will sometimes say it is because he has a crush on her, implying that this makes it okay for him to tease her.

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED COMMENTS LIKE THESE?

- “Boys are just so sensible. When they’re having a disagreement, they’ll just get into a little brawl and consider the matter solved.”
- A father is picking his daughter up from kindergarten. At the same time, a mother arrives to pick up her son. On their way out, the boy approaches the girl to give her a hug, but the girl does not want the hug. The mother says to her son: “Don’t worry about it, that’s just how we girls are. We play a little hard to get.”
- A four-year-old girl does not want to give her grandmother a hug. Her father tells her: “Go on and hug your grandmother, or she’ll be very sad.”



Gender matters

Did you know that girls are more exposed to violence in close relationships, and that boys are more exposed to physical violence from their peers?

Your gendered expectations are of consequence in uncovering violence and abuse. We know that violence and sexual abuse against children often goes undetected or is not detected until a long time has passed. Most children will not share their experiences of abuse directly, and it is even more difficult for boys to talk about having experienced abuse. Also, make note of how easy it can sometimes be for us to assume that sexual abuse happens to girls and not boys.

Have you considered which role models children get to identify with?

Common expectations of boys and men are that they are supposed to be tough, strong, not cry, and not show their emotions. Children breaking with norms of gender and sexuality can be especially vulnerable to bullying, discrimination and violence in kindergartens, school, and in their free time. Therefore, it is important for anyone working with children to also be aware of gender stereotypes. Children in male bodies who break with the ideals of masculinity, are the most subjected to negative sanctions. You need to be especially mindful of these children.

If we are to detect and prevent violence and sexual abuse, kindergartens and schools must work towards empowering children to express their emotions. Men and women need equal opportunity to express themselves without being limited by traditional ideas of gender. The goal is to make it easier for children to share stories of any painful experiences they may have had.

There is also another downside to expecting boys and men to not talk about their feelings. Suppressed feelings can lead to anger, rage, and, in the worst-case scenario, violence. Providing children with knowledge about feelings, relationships, violence, and setting boundaries, increases their chances of making sensible choices in life. The ability to make good choices prevents violence and abuse.

Do we have an unfortunate masculine ideal?

Did you know that approximately twice as many men as women have experienced severe violence after the age of eighteen?

Committing and receiving violence is a part of many boys' everyday lives. Boys are more often subjected to physical violence from their peers than girls are. Many boys train to endure violence and pain. Committing and receiving violence is also a part of many boys' upbringing.

We must ask ourselves if it is easier to overlook boys as victims of violence because we make assumptions about boys being the perpetrators of violence and girls being the victims. The tough and decisive male gender role can increase social status. That boys can also be victims, may break with our masculine ideals.

If the anger is all we see in the boys concerned, and not the seriousness and what may lay behind it, we risk ending up with the assumption that boys are angry by nature or simply unruly. This notion can be damaging in different ways. For one, it may lead to us partially accepting the use of violence, and secondly, it can entail that these boys do not receive the help they need.

Have you considered that twice as many men as women take their own lives?

Fewer men than women are diagnosed with anxiety and depression. Mental illness in men is harder to detect and help is often late to arrive. Men also take longer to see a doctor than women. Perhaps seeking help is not compatible with the masculine ideal?

Rape

Did you know that girls are subjected to sexual abuse and sexual violations twice as much as boys are?

Out of children who display harmful sexualised behaviour, approximately 90% are boys and 10% are girls. A significant share is under the age of fifteen. It is important to recognise harmful sexual behaviour in children as early as possible so that the necessary steps are taken and help given to them before they commit violent or sexually abusive acts against other children.

Having knowledge about the normal sexual development of children is important for several reasons. You need to know what is considered harmful sexual behaviour to be able to recognise it in children as early as possible.

To recognise and help children displaying harmful sexual behaviour, you need to be aware of certain individual factors that are common in these children. Many of them experience or have experienced neglect. Approximately one in three have been subjected to sexual abuse themselves or have witnessed harmful sexualised behaviour at home. Other signs may be issues with attachment, self-regulation, learning, concentration, and social interactions.



CHAPTER 5

Signs of violence and sexual abuse



"If we require absolute certainty that a child has been subjected to violence or abuse before we act, we have waited too long."

In this chapter you will learn about signs to look for in children who experience violence and sexual abuse. The bullet points below are examples of signs that violence or sexual abuse may have occurred, but they can also be symptoms of neglect or other harmful issues the child may have experienced. Either way it is important that you try to detect the cause of the symptoms and help the child.

SYMPTOMS OF VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE IN CHILDREN UP TO SIX YEARS

Emotional, behavioural, and physical symptoms:

- Severe reactions to changes in routine.
- Increase in anxiety and unrest.
- Separation anxiety, clinginess.
- Regression – loss of skills the child has previously had.
- Difficulties with concentration.
- Frequent displays of anger and frequent tantrums.
- Difficulties sleeping, sleep disturbances, and nightmares.
- A fear of people or places that have previously been perceived as safe.
- Hypersexualised behaviour.
- Sadness.

SYMPTOMS OF VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE IN CHILDREN SIX YEARS AND UP

- Unrestful sleep and nightmares.
- Invasive thoughts and sensory impressions that are difficult to process.
- Concentration difficulties: trouble learning, receiving information, or following instructions.
- Avoidant behaviour.
- Physical afflictions: stomach pains, headaches, and nausea.
- Frequent displays of anger and frequent tantrums.
- Severe reactions to changes in routine.
- A fear of people or places that have previously been perceived as safe.
- Hypersexualised behaviour.
- Depression/sadness.
- A loss of interest in things they have previously enjoyed.

- Abnormal anxieties.
- Avoiding things that are reminiscent of their painful experiences.
- Flashbacks/dissociation.

PHYSICAL INJURIES THAT SHOULD AROUSE SUSPICION

You should consider that a child might be experiencing violence or sexual abuse if you notice any of the physical injuries listed below, and/or when the explanations given by the child or a caregiver seem unlikely.

Bruises:

- in children who cannot yet move on their own.
- in soft tissue areas such as cheeks, the outer ear, neck, upper arms, inner thighs, palms of hands, soles of feet, buttocks, and genitals.
- in shapes that are consistent with blows from objects or hands.
- with matching shapes, often grouped together or on two sides of the body, “dual shaped injuries”.
- injuries on or around the throat or neck, wrists, or ankles.

Burns:

- in children who cannot yet move on their own.
- in areas that are unlikely to come in contact with hot objects or liquids by accident, such as the back of the hands, soles of the feet, buttocks, or back.
- in the shape of an object, such as a clothing iron or a cigarette.

Fractures:

- in children too young to walk.

CHAPTER 6

Speaking to children about violence and sexual abuse

“Nobody can help everybody, but everybody can help somebody.”

In your line of work, you will be having various forms of conversations with children and adolescents every day. A significant part of the effort to uncover violence happening to children and adolescents, occurs by talking to children. It may be a spontaneous conversation about an ongoing activity as well as a pre-planned conversation about a specific topic. There is no single correct way of having conversations with children and youth as they all differ from each other on the basis of age, maturity level and context. We have gathered some advice on how to talk to children about difficult topics like violence and abuse.

TAKE CHILDREN’S SIGNALS SERIOUSLY

It is important for those of us who work with children and youth to be on the lookout for and particularly conscious of signals and symptoms of a child being subjected to violence and sexual abuse. In our professions, spending so much time with children and youth gives us a unique opportunity to detect those who experience violence and abuse.

It may be something the child says or does that will make you suspect something is not right. Various physical ailments, sudden behavioural changes, regression, concentration difficulties, or a loss of interest in things the child has formerly enjoyed, can, as previously mentioned,

be a sign that something in the child’s life is not as it should be. In addition, we may encounter children with physical injuries that may arouse suspicion that the child is experiencing violence at home.

Seize the opportunity – it might not come back

If a child tells you directly or makes a statement that causes you to suspect that they may be subjected to violence or sexual abuse, it is important for you to talk to the child about it.

If the child makes such a statement in a teaching situation or during a meal, you can pull them aside to talk about it later. Do not postpone the conversation any longer than necessary, as it might make the child feel it was not taken seriously. This creates a risk of the child not bringing it back up at a later time, with you or anyone else, and the painful secrets stay secret.

PLANNED CONVERSATIONS

For a child to feel safe opening up to you as an adult, it is important to establish a safe and friendly relationship and for the child to trust you. You need to be aware that a child telling you about serious incidents must be met with understanding, empathy, and genuine interest.





How can you prepare yourself for conversations with children about violence and sexual abuse?

It is important to take the time to consider your own thoughts and feelings, as it is necessary to be mentally prepared. This will better enable you to receive information from the child. Questions to ask yourself prior to the conversation include:

- What are my thoughts about the child's situation?
- How does this situation affect me?
- What type of wording should I use?
- How might I react if I am told something distressing?

How can you prepare the child for the conversation?

- Tell the child you wish to have a conversation.
- Be clear about the topic of the conversation.
- Ask if it is all right by the child.
- Set up a time and a place.

Are the physical surroundings relevant?

The physical surroundings of the conversation can be highly relevant. It is important to find a place where the child can feel safe, where you feel comfortable, and where you will remain undisturbed throughout the conversation.

- Remove any elements that may be disruptive to the conversation, such as mobile phones, magazines, and books.
- Keep materials for writing and drawing at the ready.
- Preferably, make available something for the child to hold – a stuffed toy, for example.

How can I establish proper contact with the child?

Take your time to establish contact with the child in the moment.

- Start by engaging the child in conversation about topics of their own interest.
- Express your interest on the child's terms
- Effectively communicate your intentions of listening to the child.

How can I introduce the child to the subject matter?

You need to address the things the child has previously said or expressed. The challenge is to be candid and goal-oriented at the same time.

Ask open-ended questions that encourage a natural and spontaneous account:

- “You’re saying that...”
- “I’d like to hear more about that.”
- “Tell me more about that.”

One example:

“The last time you were going to your mother’s house you said you didn’t want to go and that you think she’s mean and nasty. I’ve been thinking about what you said. I wonder what it’s like for you when you’re with your mother. I want you to tell me about it.”

Be prepared to receive the information the child gives you. You need to be inquisitive and curious, but also a good listener and able to tolerate pauses and silence.

How should I wrap up the conversation?

- Loosely summarise the conversation.
- Ask the child if you have understood them properly and if there is anything else they wish to tell you.
- Talk to the child about what will happen in the time to come.
- Offer the opportunity of further conversation later.
- Close the conversation by circling back to everyday topics.

ENCOURAGING CONVERSATION

Encouraging conversation is used in both planned and unplanned conversations. Unplanned conversations may occur in situations or cases such as a child suddenly or spontaneously sharing that they have been subjected to sexual abuse.

Ask open-ended questions

Asking children open-ended questions involves not making assumptions or leading the question.

Asking open-ended questions gives the child the opportunity to speak for themselves and based on their own subjective experiences. A closed-ended question might just make an insecure and unsafe child confirm your inferences, and you risk getting incorrect information.

Examples:

- An open-ended question would be: “Tell me how you are feeling.”
- A closed-ended question would be: “Are you very upset?”

Actively listen

Active listening involves expressing interest and paying attention by acknowledging and supporting what the child is saying by nodding, telling them you understand, or asking them to tell you more. This way, the child can keep talking without the need for you to ask further questions.



Accept silence

Handling silence can be challenging. It is important to remember that this silence could mean that the child is thinking and recalling memories. Adults might often ask more questions too soon if the child goes quiet. Think twice before you ask any further questions. Give the child the time they need.

Be clear

You should give the child clear information about why you wish to speak to them.

Examples:

- "I need to speak to you because..."
- "What you just told me is very important, and for it to get better I have to..."

Support the child

You need to show the child that you are interested, that you are taking them seriously, and that you can handle hearing what the child has to say. Try separating your own emotions from the emotions you perceive the child to be displaying. You can communicate that you accept the child's feelings by acknowledging them and putting them into words.

Examples:

- "I can see that you're restless, what are you thinking about?"
- "You went quiet. I understand that it's hard but try telling me anyway."

CHILDREN'S BOOKS – AND HOW TO USE THEM IN CONVERSATION

Children's books can be a good starting point for conversations with children about violence and abuse. It is important for you to be secure in your position and prepared for what the child might tell you. If a child tells you that they have been subjected to violence or sexual abuse, communicate that you can handle what the child is telling you and provide the assistance needed for the child to receive proper help.

Literary content

- Consider which children's books you might use in conversations with children concerning emotions, violence, and abuse, as well as physicality and sexuality.
- Books that highlight physicality, sexuality, violence, abuse, and emotions like anger, shyness, love, fear, jealousy, grief, and happiness may all be relevant.
- We recommend using books that are constructed in a way as to stimulate children and youth into forming their own thoughts and reflections, as well as having discussions.

Reading out loud with children

Read the books concerning serious subjects just as you would any other book. Here are some tips on what might be important to consider when reading these kinds of books to children and adolescents.

- Become familiar with the book in advance and reflect on the topic(s) it explores.
- Know that for some children, these will be familiar experiences.
- Before reading it to the children, it may be a good idea for you to shed some light

on what the book is about.

- With small children, it is not always necessary to read the entire book.
- If you do not read the entire book, summarise the story and assure the children of a happy ending.
- Read slowly and take your time when reading to children.
- Let the children ask questions along the way.
- Make time for conversation after reading.
- The contents of the book may help the children build the vocabulary needed to talk about difficult feelings and incidents.

Reading a book about a difficult subject matter should never end abruptly. You need to facilitate a conversation to give the child the opportunity to open up to you. It is important to be open to receiving what the child has to say. You have to dare to immerse yourself in the conversation and the situation, even if it is challenging.



CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN ABOUT PHYSICALITY AND SEXUALITY

Have you considered that having conversations with children about physicality and sexuality is a preventive measure?

Physicality, sexuality, and gender are topics that are not sufficiently talked about in kindergartens and schools. Perhaps many people perceive these subjects as taboo?

It is important for you to be able to teach children to put matters into words and express themselves regarding sexuality, boundaries, and their own gender identity. If the child has a secure and positive relationship to their own body, it becomes easier for the child to separate between healthy, normal touching and problematic touching. This may also lower the child's own threshold for notifying someone if they are ever subjected to violations or abuse.

Learning about physicality and respecting the boundaries of others is crucial in preventing violations. Learning to put things into words and expressing yourself about sexuality, boundaries, and gender identity thus becomes an important part of the effort to prevent and uncover violence and sexual abuse.

Knowledge about physicality and sexuality may:

- Prevent abuse.
- Provide children with knowledge about what is okay or not okay for others to do to their bodies.
- Contribute to children having an easier time disclosing if they have been subjected to violence and sexual abuse.
- Ensuring that children have a healthy relationship to physicality and sexuality.





Sexuality develops throughout life

Have you considered that sexuality is an integral part of human beings' personalities and continues developing throughout life, from the cradle to the grave?

It is natural, regardless of age, to express your sexuality. Staff working with children should be knowledgeable about what is considered normal sexuality at different ages so that they do not restrict children's natural sexuality and generate feelings of insecurity and guilt. At the same time, it is important to detect when children display worrying sexual behaviour so you can provide help.

Children's vocabularies are of the essence in efforts to uncover violence and sexual abuse

Did you know that if children are to be able to talk about having experienced abuse, they need to know the words for genitals and that it is not taboo to talk about physicality and sexuality?

Staff working with children need to provide the children with a healthy relationship to their own bodies and their own emotions. Children who do not know what genitals are called and who are insecure and experience guilt about their own feelings and their own bodies, have a harder time talking about abuse, violence, and other uncomfortable situations.

If children are not permitted to talk about physicality and sexuality at home or in kindergartens and schools, it becomes difficult for them to know what violence and sexual abuse is, and speaking about it.

Checklist:

- Have knowledge about sexual abuse and the signs of it.
- Talk about sexuality. Talk about what is okay and what is not okay.
- Talk to children and youth about setting boundaries. They need to discover their own boundaries.
- Teach children and youth that boundaries are individual. They must learn how to say no when someone oversteps their own boundaries, but also respect when others say no.



HAPPY
FLOWER

JENNY AND THE
SUMMER
MY FRIENDS ROBERT
HAPPY HAPPY
HAPPY WALK
THE MAGIC NIGHT

Santa Claus was looking at
the fox while giving he gave
his present to Mr.Snowman.

CHAPTER 7

Contingency and action plans

CONTINGENCY AND ACTION PLANS IN KINDERGARTENS AND SCHOOLS

Contingency and action plans can be developed with predetermined goals in mind. The legislative obligations of kindergartens and schools in relation to uncovering violence and sexual assault should be stated in these plans. The purpose of the plans is to contribute to knowledge about violence and sexual abuse against children, in addition to establishing routines and procedures for handling suspicions of violence and abuse, or for when a child reveals that they have experienced violence or abuse.

"Save the Children Norway" have created a template for schools and kindergartens to use as a starting point that can be changed and adjusted according to their own circumstances and needs. Below, you will find bullet points illustrating themes that should be covered in action and contingency plans.

Preventive measures

Kindergartens and schools must:

- Have a plan to provide children with age-appropriate knowledge about physicality, violence, and sexual abuse. School-aged children must also receive information about where they can get help.
- Provide parents and guardians with information about violence and sexual abuse, for example at a parent-teacher conference. Parents and guardians should not receive information about when the subject of violence and sexual abuse is to be discussed with the children.
- Collaborate with boards/committees within the establishment and any relevant external agencies about the effort to prevent and uncover violence and sexual abuse against children (health centres, child protective services).
- Ensure successful collaboration among staff members.
- Implement efforts to prevent and uncover violence into daily routine.
- Ensure methodical and solid cooperation with parents and guardians.
- Set goals that can be measured and scheduled.
- Evaluate efforts routinely.



“You won’t see it until you believe it.”

Knowledge and practice tasks

All staff in schools and kindergartens must have basic knowledge about violence and sexual abuse, know what to do when they are worried about a child, or if a child speaks up about violence or sexual abuse. Children will tell staff members they trust.

- All staff members must review this plan upon being hired.
- All staff and leadership must receive training in the handling of violence and sexual abuse.
- All staff must receive regular professional updates regarding violence and abuse, and knowledge about existing legislation.
- Staff must routinely perform practice tasks handling various types of scenarios, such as:
 1. a child being subjected to violence in the family.
 2. a child being subjected to violence/sexual abuse by someone in their home.
 3. a child being subjected to violence/sexual abuse by someone outside the home.
 4. a kindergarten or school staff member subjecting children to sexual abuse.

These practice tasks should also include how to interact with the child according to their age and maturity level, and how to proceed to contact any relevant external agencies.

What can you do when you are worried about a child?

- Show care and ask how the child is feeling.
- Speak to the child and say you want to help.
- Consult your colleagues and create a plan for what you may do to help the child open up.
- Consult external agencies if you are in doubt about what to do.

What can you do when a child tells you about violence or sexual abuse?

- Listen to the child. Communicate that you believe what you are being told, even if you are finding it difficult to believe.
- Be an active listener by repeating back what the child is telling you or saying, “tell me more”. It might be a good idea to ask who else knows about it, if it has happened to anyone else, and whether they think it might happen again.
- Write down what is being said by you and the child. Documentation is important to ensure that the matter receives proper following up. Explain to the child what you are writing and why.
- Do express that you are moved and upset by what the child is telling you but remain clear that you can handle hearing it and that talking about it is the right thing to do.

Reporting the matter further

If a child is being subjected to violence or sexual abuse it is important that the child receives proper help and following up.

Routines for reporting

- You are legally obligated to report.
- Notify managing director.
- Managing director notifies police.
- The victim must receive a professional health examination.
- Consult a doctor if you are in doubt.

Measures if you become an immediate witness to violence or sexual assault

- Secure evidence.
- Secure the scene.
- Secure/lock up documents/objects.
- Ensure a written log.
- Limit the spread of knowledge about the assault.
- Do not confront the presumed assailant.
- Report the matter to the police.
- Leave police work to the police.

Handling information

Information should be withheld from anyone who does not need it to handle the matter or provide care for the child.

If we suspect that a child is subjected to violence or sexual abuse, its guardian(s) should not be notified, as many children are subjected to violence and sexual abuse by their guardians.

Collaboration

Partnerships with skilled external parties should be established before an incident occurs. It is useful to keep a list of agencies or organisations you can contact for guidance, and who are responsible for providing further help to the child.

Checklists

Checklists can be used to outline what is being done within the establishment to prevent and uncover violence and sexual abuse.

Checklists can also be used as a basis for planning specific measures and for cataloguing the progression of the work.

Example: List of collaboration

Agency	Contact person	Telephone number

Example: Checklist. The establishment itself needs to consider what is relevant to their practice.

Anchoring efforts to prevent violence	Tick
Does the establishment have set goals for their efforts to prevent and uncover violence and sexual abuse?	
Has the establishment developed a contingency plan for ensuring that violence and sexual abuse is detected and for the prevention of violence and sexual abuse?	
Organising efforts to prevent violence	Tick
Efforts to prevent violence are recognised by and anchored in the establishment's leadership.	
The prevention of violence is the designated field of work for one or more staff member(s).	
Leadership is receiving/has received training in the efforts to prevent and uncover violence.	
Plans for efforts to prevent violence have been approved.	
It is clear which member(s) of staff is/are in charge of implementing the efforts to prevent violence into daily routines.	
The topics of gender, physicality and sexuality are included in the pedagogical work.	
Does the establishment have set goals for training and competence development in relation to preventive measures?	
Does the establishment offer its staff training in relation to dealing with violence in close relationships and sexual abuse?	
Does the establishment facilitate staff spending time and resources on detecting and preventing violence in close relationships?	
Staff is sufficiently knowledgeable about and aware of at-risk groups of children.	



CHAPTER 8

Reflective tasks

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN OUR WORKPLACE TO PREVENT VIOLENCE?

The reflective tasks in this chapter are intended as a tool to develop and improve your skills in preventing and uncovering violence and sexual abuse against children and youth. You should reflect on which areas you master and which areas can be improved. The tasks require you to have read this training manual in advance – they will be of more use to you this way.

EMOTIONS AND GENDER

Consider:

A university lecturer showed two different groups of students a video of a crying baby. He told one group that the crying child was a baby boy and asked them why they thought he might be crying. The students answered that they thought the boy was crying because he was angry. The lecturer showed the second group of students the same video and said the crying child was a baby girl and asked them why they thought she might be crying. The students answered that they thought the girl was crying because she was frightened.

- What can this situation tell us about our ideas about gender?
- Could whether we think a child is crying out of anger or out of fear affect how we choose to comfort the child?

Reflective tasks about emotions:

- Why is it important to talk to children and youth about emotions?
- How can you talk to children and youth about emotions?
- What can you do to make particularly boys better at talking about their feelings?

Reflective tasks about masculinity and violence:

- In which ways could there be a correlation between our ideas of gender and the acceptance of violence?
- Boys are more subjected to violence from their peers during adolescence. What are your experiences with violence in boys' childhoods and how it has been handled?
- What may cause our tendencies to assume that boys are not subjected to violence and sexual abuse?

Working with gender, norms, and violence:

- What can you do to combat gender stereotypes in your kindergarten or school?



BODIES AND SEXUALITY

- Why is it important to speak to children about physicality and sexuality?
- How can you speak to children about physicality and sexuality?
- What can you do to get better at speaking to children about physicality and sexuality?
- How can you help children set their own boundaries and respect the boundaries of others?

VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

- What can you do to get better at speaking to children about violence and sexual abuse?
- What might cause children to find it difficult to talk about having experienced violence and sexual abuse?

TRAUMA

How to help children who have been traumatised (See Chapter 3).

- How can you help children who react impulsively through physical restlessness, jitteriness, hyperactivity, and aggression?
- How can you help children who react passively through indifference, and whom you struggle to connect with?

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN OUR WORK-PLACE TO UNCOVER VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE?

Reflective tasks:

- How can you get better at detecting violence and sexual abuse?
- Which symptoms can you look for in children who may have been subjected to violence and sexual abuse?
- How can you speak to a child when you suspect that they may have been subjected to violence or sexual abuse?
- How can you make use of books in conversations with children about difficult subjects?
- Why should you not contact parents/guardians if you suspect that a child is being subjected to violence or sexual abuse?

Parental cooperation

- In what ways can you promote awareness and work together with parents regarding the topics of this training manual?







The Centre for Equality is a Norwegian ideal foundation established in 1983. We work to address equality issues in all layers of society. Our vision is an inclusive and fair society ensuring equal opportunities for all.

We work with a broad definition of equality that includes most potential reasons for discrimination: gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disabilities.

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