



National Alliance to  
End Sexual Violence

## **Policy Statement: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Policy and Erin's Law**

**July 2016**

The National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV) appreciates the focus that popular state legislation known as Erin's Law has brought to the issue of child sexual abuse nationwide. Many of the topics that the Erin's Law model addresses are important. However, to prevent child sexual abuse effectively, federal and state legislation must take a more comprehensive approach that considers impacts, interventions, and prevention strategies for children, people that care for children, and the systems and institutions that impact children's lives.

Some model policies, including the Erin's Law model, would require public schools to implement a "prevention-oriented child sexual abuse program which teaches:

1. "Students in grades preK-5th grade, age-appropriate techniques to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult
2. "School personnel all about child sexual abuse
3. "Parents & guardians the warning signs of child sexual abuse, plus needed assistance, referral or resource information to support sexually abused children and their families."<sup>i</sup>

The legislation that has been introduced or passed in over 43 states<sup>ii</sup> to implement this model tends to promote a narrow selection of often less successful approaches to prevention, such as teaching children good touch and bad touch. By themselves, these approaches rely too heavily on children to prevent their own abuse and can promote a spirit of victim-blaming when children are unable to prevent abuse.

Learning healthy boundaries and healthy sexuality are paramount to all healthy development and support valuable protective factors for children, but this cannot be the only focus of prevention efforts because it reinforces a narrative that victims are responsible for their own abuse. As the North Carolina Coalition for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse states, "Children are not expected to protect themselves from any other type of injury/violence/maltreatment. ... Good touch and bad touch are ambiguous concepts frequently difficult for [even] adults to differentiate; [after all,] the majority of sexual offenses against children do not use violence or force, but manipulation and coercion."<sup>iii</sup>

Child sexual abuse occurs from an imbalance of power and control. Children are vulnerable because of their age; development; and dependence on adults, other children, and systems. Supporting healthy development for children will not in and of itself prevent abusive behaviors of adults and other children. As the North Carolina Coalition notes, truly effective child sexual abuse prevention requires "strategies that focus on adult responsibility and strengthening adult capacity to care for their children ... [as well as] programming that teaches children about appropriate boundaries and healthy relationships as part of a well-rounded health curriculum."<sup>iv</sup> Effective strategies also address perpetration of sexual abuse such as the early detection of anti-social behaviors, appropriate early interventions, and promotion of treatment and accountability for those who abuse. The clear truth is that child sexual abuse will never be eradicated without getting to the root causes of perpetration.

In exploring a comprehensive approach, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault recommends addressing the "10 core concepts" to preventing child sexual abuse.<sup>v</sup>

- Sexual Health & Development
- Gender Socialization
- Intersections of Oppression
- Boundaries
- Empowerment & Body Ownership
- Pro-Social Behavior & Skills
- Understanding, Identifying & Responding to Trauma
- Bystander Intervention
- Information About Sexual Abuse
- Safety & Risk Reduction

Under each concept are four specific elements. Effective public policies and programs address each component across multiple levels (Individual/Child; Parent/Guardian; Other Adults; Systems/Community) for the full range of child and youth ages. While many of the core concepts involve skill building for children, they also require the education, collaboration, and accountability of adults and systems that impact children's lives. The meaningful prevention of child sexual abuse requires community engagement in the development of strategies, improved institutional response to and prevention of sexual abuse, and supportive services and skills for parents, caregivers, and those who work with children of all ages.

There are experts in each state who can recommend or directly provide the instruction called for in these policies, specifically rape crisis centers. Sexual assault coalitions can provide guidance to the state departments of education as to age-appropriate, evidence-based curricula, and evaluation components to be used to measure the effectiveness of prevention programming.

The trend of focusing on educating children about sexual abuse is not, by itself, an effective

method of preventing child sexual abuse because it does not go far enough to change our systems and social norms that have silenced, stigmatized, and isolated survivors of childhood sexual assault. NAESV urges lawmakers to take the broad and comprehensive view that is necessary to end child sexual abuse. NAESV and partner organizations across the country are eager to collaborate on such thoughtful and impactful policy.

*For more information, contact Ebony Tucker, NAESV Advocacy Director, at [ebony@endsexualviolence.org](mailto:ebony@endsexualviolence.org).*

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted from <http://erinslaw.org/what-is-erins-law/>

<sup>ii</sup> See Assembly Bill 691 / Senate Bill 501 at <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/proposals/ab691>; See <http://erinslaw.org/about/what-is-erins-law/>

<sup>iii</sup> North Carolina Coalition for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse. Recommendations for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in North Carolina. February 2015. See

[https://www.preventchildabusenc.org/images/Documents/Recommendations\\_for\\_Prevention\\_of\\_CSA.pdf](https://www.preventchildabusenc.org/images/Documents/Recommendations_for_Prevention_of_CSA.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>v</sup> Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault. 10 Core Concepts for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention. February 2016. Access the concepts, their elements, and supporting research and rationale at [http://www.wcasa.org/file\\_open.php?id=1369](http://www.wcasa.org/file_open.php?id=1369). A brief version with just the concepts and their elements is available at [http://www.wcasa.org/file\\_open.php?id=1371](http://www.wcasa.org/file_open.php?id=1371).