



The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation

Six Pillars for Prevention

WHY WE NEED STRONGER PREVENTION POLICIES

There are times when the future health of our nation requires that we come together to look at what is possible for every child in our country, and times such as these require action from policy and community leaders. Those fighting the health impact of tobacco learned they needed policy changes to hold the tobacco industry accountable and to make it more difficult for people to harm themselves and children through smoking. Policy changes made it easier for people to make healthier choices and helped change social norms related to smoking. Similarly, a wide range of policies are needed to make sexual victimization of children far less likely and to influence social norms toward prioritizing prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

INTRODUCTION

When most people think about policies that might help end the sexual victimization of children they tend to focus either on educating children to protect themselves, reporting after a child has been sexually abused, or implementing policies to help manage those who have already committed sex offenses. The Prevention Coalition developed Six Pillars of Prevention to articulate important elements of a comprehensive policy agenda and to focus attention on ending child sexual abuse **before** a child is harmed. There is consensus that no one policy can do it all.

One tempting approach to social change is to identify one major overarching policy that will make a significant impact. While appealing, it is often difficult to find one strategy that will address such a problem as diverse and complex as child sexual victimization. An alternative approach, referred to as Gulliver's Strategy, is to identify numerous smaller impact policies in a variety of related areas that basically nip away at the giant problem until it topples. Strategically speaking, the Prevention Coalition is proposing that a multi-systemic problem such as child sexual abuse and exploitation requires multiple strategies and policies. Clearly, the Prevention Coalition will not be able to champion all such efforts and differing pillars have varying relevance or priority for each member program.

Today's children and youth have never known a world that is not filled with technology. Since technology is now an integral part of all our daily lives, its impact is integrated within each of the pillars rather than separating it out as a pillar of its own. Therefore, all of the policies included will consider the impact of these technologies on healthy and problematic sexual behaviors.



SIX PILLARS OF PREVENTION

The six key policy pillars the Prevention Coalition consistently identified as necessary to preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children are listed below. The Prevention Coalition encourages its members to use these pillars as a tool to influence the conversation about a comprehensive prevention policy agenda and to expand what is currently considered as relevant prevention policy. The Prevention Coalition is a volunteer network that does not have the ability to actively advance policies on its own. The Coalition hopes these pillars are useful to expand the conversation and strategic planning around prevention related policies in communities across the country.

Strengthen Youth Serving Organizations (YSOs) Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention Capacity

Special attention to stronger policies and best practices within YSOs further reduces the potential for someone to perpetrate sexual abuse or exploitation within these organizations. Simultaneously at the community, state and federal levels, develop policies that require all types of YSOs (e.g., leisure, camps, schools, sports) to actively institute child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention initiatives that address face-to-face as well as technology-facilitated interactions.

Support Healthy Development of Children

Children need quality relational engagement from adults and supportive communities to develop in healthy ways. Early assessment of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) followed by adequate supports and services can also help to diminish the effect of victimization or the development of abusive behaviors whether face-to face or technology-facilitated.

Promote Healthy Relationships and Sexuality Education for Children and Youth

Create policies on healthy relationships and healthy sexuality that ensure quality education - that is both research-based and developmentally appropriate - is available for all children, youth and the adults who educate them, inclusive of face-to-face and technology-facilitated interactions.

End the Demand for Children as Sexual Commodities

Prioritize a range of research-informed efforts that interrupt the flow of activities and practices which feed demand for children as sexual commodities and objects to be used, abused and exploited.

Sustainable Funds for Prevention

Establish a funding stream to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation to assure the development, sustainability and evaluation of evidence-based or evidence-informed strategies and programs. Given the fact that programs need to be evaluated to assess results and outcomes, funding needs to be increased beyond existing funds for basic programming. For example, policy changes could result in a commitment of at least 1% of all funding spent on "after-the-fact" responses (e.g., management and tracking of sex offenders, civil commitment) to be dedicated to prevention. Such funding needs to be a stated priority in appropriate federal, state and local government agencies as well as among foundations.

Prevent Initial Perpetration of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Advocate for policies that support efforts to prevent initial perpetration of child sexual abuse and exploitation. These policies should provide special attention to children and youth with problematic sexual behaviors, including technology-facilitated interactions.

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STRATEGY AND RATIONALE

Even the best policies and ideas sometime languish for decades. For those working to implement prevention policies, there are a few key strategies that can help give these efforts more momentum and to ensure the progress towards implementation is not derailed. Core values informing these strategies include: a belief in the power of collaborative and a commitment to keeping those directly impacted by sexual abuse in the forefront of these efforts. We also want ensure that implemented prevention policies actually do what they are intended to do. Therefore, we strongly support any evaluation of the policy change or program initiative so there is data to continually improve our prevention efforts. Best practices are when all six of these strategies are integrated into policy work.

Collaboration

We can't do this alone. In fact, it is often the key partners and stakeholders that make it possible to successfully introduce policy change.

Include those with direct life experiences

The inclusion of those with direct life experiences with child sexual abuse or exploitation (e.g, survivors and loved ones of those who've been victimized or who have perpetrated harm) are critical to the success of prevention policy advocacy.

Research-based prevention

More research is needed (as well as more funds for programs from which to base the research). We want to support and increase those strategies that have proven results, or that have been evaluated and deemed to be promising practices.

Awareness

Visibility, education and awareness are key to policy work.

Incorporate program evaluation

For every initiative, we need to support funding for a full evaluation of what worked, what did not work, and what needs to change.

Identify prevention champions

Champions are high profile individuals (e.g., sports, music or movie personalities) who have the ability to increase the visibility of child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention. Champions can help bring attention to the issue, partner with advocates to help frame the conversation, and help to open doors to promote policy change. The right champions for a policy initiative can significantly increase awareness and mobilize support involving a much broader constituency.



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