Teaching Personal Safety in a Counselling Setting

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Session Overview

- Who is Bravehearts?
- Definitions
- What is Personal Safety?
- Why teach Personal Safety?
- Personal Safety overview & activities
- Responding to disclosures
- Case planning
- Resources
- Questions and comments
Who are Bravehearts?

A national organisation founded in 1997 by Hetty Johnston

**Bravehearts’ mission:** To stop child sexual assault in our society

**Bravehearts’ vision:** To make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child

**Bravehearts’ guiding principals:** To, at all times, do all things to serve our Mission without fear or favour and without compromise and continually ensure that the best interests and protection of the child are placed before all other considerations.
Bravehearts Programs

- Counselling
- Advocacy and Case Management
- Education and Prevention Programs
- Bravehearts Information and Support Line
- Training and Workshops
- Research and Lobbying
- Royal Commission
- Child Place Health and Safety
- Community Engagement and Fundraising
- Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme
Definitions...
Child Sexual Assault

• Any act of inappropriately exposing or subjecting a child, under the age of 18, to sexual activity, contact or behaviour
• Child Sexual Assault (CSA) can be physical, verbal or emotional, and involve contact and/or non contact offences
• Definition varies depending on:
  • Age
  • Developmental differences
  • Power or authority differences
Problem Sexual Behaviour

• Children 12 years and under
• Engaging in sexual behaviours
• With children who are not their normal playmates and/or are not within a year of their developmental or chronological age.
• Redirection of behaviours is unsuccessful.
• Possess sexual knowledge above what is age appropriate.
• Causes emotional distress, physical pain or discomfort to the child or others.
Sexual Harm

• Any sexual behaviour between a young person (13-17 years) and another child or young person who - due to their age or stage of development - is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim.
  - Use of coercion and force

• Normal sexual exploration between consenting adolescents at a similar developmental level is not considered sexual harm.
Bravehearts Personal Safety Education

 ✓ Aimed at children 4 to 10 years of age
 ✓ Can be adapted for older children & adolescents

Main Topics:

• Feelings and warning signs
• Private parts
• Boundaries
• Rules around touch
• Secrets
• Trust and safety network
Personal Safety

A program that provides children with skills and strategies that will enhance personal safety in all areas of their lives.

Increases a child’s awareness of safe and unsafe situations, and teaches them who to seek for help if they feel unsure or unsafe.

This aims to reduce the incidence of child sexual assault or other at-risk situations.
Ditto Keep Safe Adventure Show
Ditto’s Rules

Ditto’s Rule No.1

“We all have the right to feel safe with people”

Ditto’s Rule No.2

It’s OK to say “NO!” if you feel unsafe or unsure!

Ditto’s Rule No.3

Nothing is so yucky that you can’t tell someone about it!
Why Teach Personal Safety?

• Average age of first offence is **8 ½ years old**
• 65% of CSA is perpetrated against children **under 10 years old**
• 70-90% of children are sexually assaulted by someone they know
• **1 in 5** people will experience CSA in some way before they turn 18
Why Teach Personal Safety?

The emphasis is on learning:
- communication skills,
- assertiveness, and
- problem solving.

These are life skills and can be used in day to day situations, as well as at-risk situations.
Personal Safety Education does not:

- Investigate whether a child has been sexually assaulted, or
- Put the responsibility on the child to protect themselves.

The message that is delivered is:

- There are safe adults who can help them when they are feeling unsafe, and
- That all adults should know how to respond to a child who is feeling unsafe or unsure.
Introducing Personal Safety

### A common cause of anxiety for practitioners

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Be confident in your communication of why Personal Safety Education is important</th>
<th>Avoid using jargon</th>
<th>Be sensitive to children who may have experienced trauma</th>
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Be confident in your communication of why Personal Safety Education is important. Avoid using jargon. Be sensitive to children who may have experienced trauma.

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Role Play – Introducing Personal Safety Education
Feelings

YES & NO
Feelings
Warning Signs

Physical or physiological sensations that may occur when a person experiences or perceives threat.

With older children this can be linked to the concept of instincts.
Private Parts

My mouth
& chest,
between my legs
& my bottom
Children have a natural desire to explore the world and test boundaries.

Children with an understanding of personal boundaries are thought to be more likely to disrupt the grooming process.
Boundaries - Video
Boundaries – Parent Education

• Model appropriate boundaries for children.
• If a child invades personal space or asks personal questions, supportively re-establish appropriate behaviour.
• Establish age-appropriate family privacy for using the toilet, bathroom and changing.
• Avoid insisting children hug or kiss others.
Trust Network & Safety Plan

Choose 5 adults the child can trust, feel safe with, and go to if they have a ‘no’ feeling.
Responding to Disclosures
Tips for responding:
✓ “Mmhmm”
✓ “Could you tell me more about that?”
✓ “And then what happened?”

You may be required as a witness if this is a first or new disclosure.

**CHECKLIST**

**LISTEN:** Listen, don’t investigate and avoid leading questions.

**AFFIRM:** Tell the child that you believe them. “Thank you for telling me”.

**DON’T BLAME:** Not their fault. “No one should make you feel that way” or “you are not in trouble”.

**SUPPORT:** Acknowledge it must have been difficult for them to tell. “That must have been difficult to tell me”.

 Bravehearts®
Tips for responding:

✓ Document exact notes when possible
✓ Check your state’s reporting policy

CHECKLIST

SAFETY: Let the child know that you will help them. “I will need to tell someone about this so that we can try to keep you safe”.

DOCUMENT: Detailed case note.

CHECK: Check your organisation’s policy on reporting.

ACT: In the best interests of the child, report the disclosure to your State’s statutory child protection authority or the Police.

CALL BRAVEHEARTS: 1800 272 831
Incorporating Personal Safety into a Case Plan

Personal Safety Education may be delivered in isolation or as part of a counselling case plan. A group format may also be suitable.

If a child has experienced sexual assault or is displaying sexualised behaviours, personal safety would focus on the child’s presenting issue/s.

Parents and caregivers involvement
Important Considerations

- Are there suspicions or disclosures of sexual assault?
- Has the child displayed any problem sexual behaviour?
- Are there any indicators the child has experienced trauma?
- Has there been any previous counselling or Personal Safety Education?
- Is the child at current risk? Will teaching Personal Safety put the child at greater risk?

✔ Avoid ‘stranger danger’ language
In summary...

• Personal Safety Education is an important program to raise children’s awareness of feeling safe and unsafe.
• May be completed on its own, or as part of counselling; individually or in a group format.
• Important to involve caregivers in the education, and consider caregivers wishes and their vocabulary at home.
“Children who have been taught Protective Behaviours are more likely to recognise threats to their safety, and use personal safety strategies, than children who have not undertaken Protective Behaviour education”
Questions or Comments?
Resources

www.bravehearts.org.au or 1800 BRAVE 1

• Free tip sheets online
• Ditto’s Keep Safe Adventure! CD-Rom, DVD, activity book and associated products
• Bravehearts Toolbox for Practitioners

Contact details:
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References


