

Bringing Primary Prevention into Current Efforts

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The shift to primary prevention is not about throwing away all of the good work you're already doing, and it's also not about continuing to pursue programming with which you are comfortable when it may not be the most effective or appropriate effort in terms of ending sexual violence. This shift is really about embracing a process – a process with which most individuals in crisis services are not familiar, and a process that involves some risk and a decent amount of trial and error. Nothing can replace the importance of a community-based planning process for effective, comprehensive primary prevention. However, while you are in the middle of your community planning process, you can also begin to incorporate principles of primary prevention into some of your current programming.

One of the difficult aspects of incorporating primary prevention into current activities will be to do so with the understanding that,

through your community-based planning process, you and your workgroup may decide to direct your efforts elsewhere due to identified community needs. It's important to remain open and flexible while also knowing that you can begin making significant steps in the direction of primary prevention now. In order to do this, it is helpful to focus on some of the basic tenets of primary prevention such as:

Address Root Causes

One of the tasks of your community workgroup is to identify community-specific risk and protective factors so that primary prevention efforts can be tailored for your community. Even though you may not yet know what specific root causes or contributing factors are more prevalent in your community, you can still begin to address some of the common risk factors* for sexual violence
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*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
-Margaret Mead*

Around the State

In an effort to help their community partners understand primary prevention of sexual violence and engage them in the planning process, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc. is hosting a full day primary prevention summit. The summit will include training on primary prevention in the morning and a facilitated planning session in the afternoon where the attendees can begin to develop an action plan for ending sexual violence in their community. It is designed to provide invited community members with



information and tools related to primary prevention and time to immediately begin planning for action.

Similar events could be easily replicated in communities across the state to help establish community workgroups or to bring community workgroups to the next step in the planning process. If you need help planning a similar event in your community, please contact Morgan (*see page 3 for contact information*).



Bringing Primary Prevention into Current Efforts, cont'd

in your current efforts.

Maintain a Positive Focus

In your school and/or community-based education or awareness efforts, focus on positive, healthy relationships and communication and on what it means to be a healthy community. Very frequently, we only talk about the problem of sexual assault, but focusing on and encouraging healthy behaviors, communication, and relationships might feel like a refreshing change, in addition to helping individuals develop necessary skills.

Incorporate Skill Building

Prevention of sexual violence requires that community members have certain skill sets. Most sexual assault education efforts have focused on imparting knowledge about sexual violence (causes, impact, myths, etc) and/or changing attitudes. However, these forums can also be used to help individuals develop useful skills for the prevention of sexual violence. Part of your job in prevention is to help community members develop skills to become agents of prevention, and there is a broad range of skills that will be valuable in this work. For example, incorporate components into your programs where individuals can learn and practice skills to intervene when they hear harassing or demeaning comments. Or incorporate skills for talking to community leaders about the importance of policy and funding related to the prevention of sexual violence. You can also include skill building around healthy relationships and communication in this category.

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Reinforce your Message

As a part of primary prevention, you will be sending the message that sexual violence is preventable, and you will also be sending messages about healthy behavior, norms,

expectations, etc. Consistency in your message and sending the message in multiple ways increases the likelihood that your message will be effective. You can make sure that all of your materials mention something about sexual violence being preventable and about the importance of building safe, healthy communities. Your staff should be able to model healthy, non-violent communication and power-sharing. Work with community partners to coordinate efforts and to make sure that you are all sending similar messages about healthy behaviors and relationships.

Consider ALL of Your Programming

While traveling around the state to train on primary prevention this last year, I discovered that many crisis centers are already offering programming that is primary prevention-based. However, these programs were frequently not considered "prevention" by the staff or the crisis center, or they were offered as part of domestic violence services and therefore not seen as connected to sexual violence. It's important to remember that primary prevention of sexual violence incorporates addressing a broad range of issues that may not seem to be directly linked to sexual violence. You may already have successful programming in some of these areas (e.g., healthy parenting, healthy relationships, etc.).

Although engaging in community-driven primary prevention efforts is a time-consuming process, creating effective strategies will benefit your entire community. As you are learning and planning, feel encouraged to begin incorporating some primary prevention based activities into your current work.

*For examples of risk factors, see the CDC publication *Sexual Violence Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue* www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/SVPrevention.pdf

"To get the bad customs of a country changed and new ones, though better, introduced, it is necessary first to remove the prejudices of the people, enlighten their ignorance, and convince them that their interests will be promoted by the proposed changes; and this is not the work of a day."
Benjamin Franklin (1781)



News & Events

Training / Technical Assistance Available

Are you unsure what your next steps should be in planning for community-based primary prevention efforts? Are you having trouble engaging your community in the planning process? Are you still unsure what primary prevention is? If you need help related to primary prevention, please don't hesitate to contact **Morgan Curtis** at TAASA (mcurtis@taasa.org, 512.474.7190 x31) or **Peggy Helton** at the OAG (Peggy.Helton@oag.state.tx.us; 512.936.1423). They can assist with training on primary prevention and with community-based planning processes.

TAASA Prevention Materials Online

Archives of the e-newsletters, in addition to the current e-newsletter, are available on TAASA's website. The - *Engaging Communities in Sexual Violence Prevention* guidebook is also available online. The documents can be accessed at www.taasa.org/prevention.

Primary Prevention Listserv

If anyone would like to be added to TAASA's primary prevention listserv, please e-mail Morgan (mcurtis@taasa.org). This low volume listserv is used to send out materials and pertinent information related to primary prevention. There should be no more than 4-5 e-mails per month.

Prevention Connection Web Conferences

Prevention Connection hosts various web conferences and web dialogues throughout the year. The next one is *The Workplace: A Dialogue on Organizational Practices to Prevent Violence Against Women* on **August 15** at 1PM. You can register at www.preventconnect.org. Additionally, they have archives of previous web conferences and web dialogues, many of which include links to audio recordings in addition to PowerPoint handouts and transcripts. They also operate an active listserv for prevention workers across the country.

Resources

Poised for Prevention: Advancing Promising Approaches to Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence

Although this document from the Prevention Institute is focused on intimate partner violence, the information within the document is also pertinent to the primary prevention of sexual violence. Some of what is discussed in the report is also in the document *Sexual Violence and the Spectrum of Prevention: Toward a Community Solution*. The two documents complement each other nicely.

www.preventioninstitute.org/rwjf_ipv.html

What About Our Daughters

A grassroots, blog-led campaign to "combat the destructive portrayals of African American women in popular culture."

whataboutourdaughters.blogspot.com

Engaging Men & Boys in Changing Gender-Based Inequity in Health

A study by the World Health Organization examining effective and promising practices in working with men around issues of gender equity, domestic and sexual violence, and health.

www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf



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Question? Comments?

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