

# Social Emotional Learning as a Component of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

**Social-emotional learning (SEL) is critical to empowering youth with the skills to recognize, report, and refuse sexual abuse, as well as to stop youth from ever offending.**

## Child sexual abuse is widespread.

Child sexual abuse is reported to affect one in four girls and one in 20 boys in the United States, a statistic that's probably even lower due to vast underreporting, with those affected often experiencing long-lasting negative effects.<sup>1</sup>

## Some youth might be at a greater risk.

Child sexual abuse affects youth from all backgrounds. There's also increased risk of vulnerability for youth who identify as LGBTQ,<sup>2</sup> are living in foster care, disabled, homeless, or have run away.<sup>3</sup>

SEL is integral to a comprehensive research-based child sexual abuse prevention program, with a multifaceted approach that helps children feel safe and supported and prevents child sexual abuse.<sup>8</sup>

## Child sexual abuse is preventable.

The most effective way to prevent child sexual abuse—including responding to diverse needs<sup>4</sup>—is twofold. Train all the adults who interact with youth, and teach students the skills for recognizing, reporting, and refusing sexual abuse.<sup>5</sup> An early, school-based child sexual abuse prevention program<sup>6</sup> can accomplish this with a comprehensive approach that includes research-based strategies for policies and procedures, staff training, student lessons, and family education.<sup>7</sup>

Child sexual abuse currently is reported to affect **1 in 4** girls and **1 in 20** boys in the United States

## SEL lays the foundation for prevention.

- One focus of prevention for young people is to empower and promote skills that prevent victimization and that lead to disclosure if targeting or victimization occurs.<sup>5</sup>
- Evidence-based SEL programs teach children skills to be assertive and ask for help in difficult and dangerous situations; assertiveness skills lay the foundation to recognize unsafe and sexually abusive behaviors, immediately report those behaviors to an adult, and assertively refuse the situation when possible.<sup>8</sup>
- SEL strengthens protective factors that decrease a child's vulnerability to potential harm.<sup>9</sup>
- SEL can also help prevent people from engaging in harmful sexual behavior before it occurs, by fostering their empathy, conflict management, and interpersonal and healthy relationship skills.<sup>10</sup>
- SEL provides benefits to kids across all backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

For more information, go to [cfchildren.org/policy-advocacy](https://www.cfchildren.org/policy-advocacy)

## Policy Recommendations

- Create a framework for schools to equitably provide developmentally appropriate, evidence-based awareness, prevention, and protection instruction concerning sexual abuse and assault.
- Create a framework for schools to provide periodic evidence-based educator training on prevention, identification, and intervention for sexual abuse of young people.
- Provide sustainable funding streams for schools to implement SEL as a Tier I intervention on a continuum of student supports.
- Provide funding to support research-based prevention strategies and to continue research to improve and evaluate promising prevention practices.
- Develop programs and other supports that specifically address youth who might be at greater risk.
- Develop programs and other supports that are responsive to diverse influences on disclosure and reporting.
- Promote students' access to social-emotional competency development in educational settings.

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