# Ten Best Practices for
# Prevention Programs

- **Follow a victim-centered approach.**
- **Assess the effectiveness of prevention programs and adjust when needed.**
- **Minimize or eliminate fear based messages.**
- **Reflect online risks accurately.**
- **Stay focused on behavioral goals.**
- **Encourage a multi-pronged approach to prevention.**
- **Work and plan collaboratively with the host school or agency to provide Internet safety training for staff.**

- **Include skill building information about responding to harmful online behavior.**
- **Provide Internet safety education to parents.**
- **Offer additional resources.**

## 1 Follow a victim-centered approach.

Encouraging victims to seek support should be a central goal of all prevention education. Victims are less likely to reach out for support when the messages blame or shame them. Messaging should indicate that the responsibility for victimization lies with the perpetrator, not the victim.

Remember that audiences may include children and/or adults who have experienced victimization. Be prepared for disclosures.

Victimization experiences are complex with many dynamics at play. Situations could include peer pressure, romance manipulation or trickery, bullying, extortion, and other power imbalances. The adult or peer's role is to be there to give help and support.

*Example:*
A child discloses they are a victim of sextortion. It started when they sent a nude image during what they thought was harmless flirting.

- *Unintended Shaming Response:* "You shouldn't have sent nude images to someone you didn't know. Let's figure out what to do next."
  - *They know they made a mistake.* This type of response puts blame on the victim for being manipulated (something that isn't their fault) and may limit a full disclosure.
- *Victim-Centered Response:* "I'm so glad you asked for help. This individual took advantage of you. Everyone makes mistakes, let's figure out next steps together."

## 2 Assess the effectiveness of prevention programs and adjust when needed.

It is important to assess the effectiveness of prevention programs and make changes to the programs as needed.

Mechanisms should be put in place to obtain feedback on presentations and presenters to ensure effective and consistent messaging. This may include evaluations from the host agency, supervisor/colleague observations and feedback from presenters.

It is important to review research on Internet safety and prevention best practices and stay up to date on emerging trends.

Adapt efforts as appropriate to reflect evolving knowledge and awareness.
- Utilize various ways to measure effectiveness:
  - Local statistics
  - Disclosures
  - Reports to police
- Presentation evaluations
- Update presentations regularly and frequently.

# 3

## Minimize or eliminate fear-based messages.

For youth who have already experienced harm, fear-based messaging can prevent them from reporting and seeking help.

Learning about worst-case outcomes seldom changes youth behavior because they typically believe it won't happen to them. Instead, share realistic, age-appropriate examples to help youth identify risks.

Provide actionable steps for a safer online experience.

*For Example: If you are being targeted online...*
- Remind yourself that you can stop the problem.
- Tell the person to stop.
- Take screenshots so that you have a record.
- Stop communicating.
- Tell a trusted adult.
- Remember that telling law enforcement is an option. They can help.

Consider addressing fear-based messaging with parents, as well. Youth should hear a consistent message from everyone.

Remember to emphasize open communication rather than avoidance of technology. The goal is to guide children to be responsible digital citizens on their own.

# 4

## Reflect online risks accurately.

Discuss online risks (including statistics) accurately and ensure examples are developmentally appropriate and relevant for your audience.

Focusing on criminal justice consequences may not be age appropriate for youth audiences. Instead, focus on social and emotional consequences.

- An "it's illegal behavior" message can increase barriers to reporting.

Frequently update any references in presentations or materials with up-to-date data or popular apps, games and websites. (Also stay current on app updates!)

Ensure your messaging relays that children can be victimized by people they know online and offline and by both adults and peers.

Recommended statistics come from resources that cite their data sources, describe the numbers accurately, and provide the information without bias.

# 5

## Stay focused on behavioral goals.

Effective messaging will focus on safe behavioral goals, understanding risks, and ways to mitigate dangers.
- Empower kids to use social media for good.

Online safety programs should focus on what to do, who to talk with, and how to get help if something scary or harmful happens online. Prepare youth for what can happen, what to do to if something scary or harmful happens, how to report, and what to expect when reporting. Encourage bystander intervention and peer support.

*For Example:*
- Adults should proactively discuss online safety with youth. Adults should offer to be a resource if an online situation becomes uncomfortable or threatening.
- Youth audiences can be taught specific interventions to utilize in the moment, such as assertive communication and boundary setting, how to intervene when they witness it (screenshot and report), how to seek support, and what to expect.

## 6 Encourage a multi-pronged approach to prevention.

There are many benefits to collaborating with multiple stakeholders when building prevention programs.

- Consider partners who have an interest in keeping children safe online.

- It is critical for law enforcement to have community partners, such as schools, and to share information in relevant places, such as social media.

Collaboration reinforces your message and increases its effectiveness through quality repetition from credible sources.

Use multiple presentation options, including presentations to students (e.g., school assemblies, classroom presentations, afterschool programs), parents and guardians (e.g., evening presentations, PTA meetings), and other stakeholders.

There is a benefit to engaging your community collaboratively so that your audience and stakeholders will feel like active participants in the mission of keeping children safe online.

- Include Peer Messengers. Youth to youth messages can be very powerful.

- It is important to use correct language to keep kids engaged and reflect the problem appropriately.

- Be cognizant of the different cultural influences and traditions that may be present in a specific community, and how words may need to be adapted slightly.

## 7 Work and plan collaboratively with the host school or agency to provide Internet safety training for staff.

Know your community (the community where you will present). What will incentivize attendance? (consider time of day, translation services, etc).

Prepare the host agency for the presentation with resources and prevention information.

Provide guidance to the host organization about the likelihood of disclosures and ensure professional staff have a plan for responding to disclosures and reporting.

Encourage schools to incorporate Internet safety training into other professional training, such as bullying and mandated child abuse reporting.

- Child abuse mandated reporting laws may include requirements to report exploitation that occurs online, including technology facilitated abuse, grooming on digital platforms, and other forms of online harm. Regulations and guidelines about reporting online exploitation are addressed specifically in some states, while others address it under broader child abuse and neglect laws. It's important to be familiar with the laws in your state and provide information on reporting procedures accordingly. It's also important to note that these laws are rewritten and amended frequently, so be sure to stay up to date on changes in your state.

Ensure that the host agency has trained staff attending Internet safety presentations and/or who are available for assistance or support following presentations.

Leave talking points and resources for follow up discussions (handouts, email follow-up, etc)

# 8 Include skill-building information about responding to harmful online behavior.

Youth are vulnerable to online harm because of their natural curiosity and interest in building relationships.

Presentations must include practical skills that will help children identify and respond to harmful and manipulative behaviors.

- Include information about positive online behaviors.
- Include information about risk taking decisions.

Provide students with an array of potential responses to harmful and manipulative behavior and provide opportunities to apply/practice the skills.

*Example:*
- What would you do if someone asked you to trade nude photos? What are some ways that you can respond, or actions you can take?
- Consider language/message: Stranger danger vs. Tricky people, or friend you know/friend you know of. Due to online connections, the 'stranger danger' message is less effective.

# 9 Provide Internet safety education to parents.

Parental engagement is crucial for effective Internet safety.

Internet safety programs should include information, resources, guidance, and tips for parents and guardians on how to identify risks, how to respond to disclosures, and how to support youth.

A whole-family approach to Internet safety includes presentations for parents and youth together. Hearing the same message inspires healthy conversations.

Provide host agencies with resources to share with parents in advance of Internet safety programming for youth (ex: fact sheets, guides and tip sheets, additional resource lists, etc.).

- Consider various presentation options: Parent-only, Parent/Child together, Child-only.
- Conduct parent-directed education and/or resources in conjunction with child-directed education. (ex: Same day presentations to drive conversation).

# 10 Offer additional resources.

Effective Internet safety should also include making additional resources available, including materials that allow for a deeper dive into the skill-building components of Internet safety or that address related topics, such as healthy relationships, bullying, and intimate partner violence prevention.

Information about additional resources for specialized support like helplines and mental health services should also be provided to host organizations and parent audiences.

Consider providing host organizations with an up-to-date resources list of community resources and national hotlines.

Consider providing a range of translated resources when possible.