



Body Safety – Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Evaluation 2023.

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Background and Introduction

The partnership between the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) and Body Safety Australia (BSA) goes beyond immediate child sexual abuse prevention; it lays a solid foundation for promoting healthy sexual behaviours later in life. By instilling body safety concepts and boundaries from an early age, children are empowered to develop a positive understanding of their bodies and recognise the importance of consent and respectful relationships as they grow.

Studies have shown individuals who receive comprehensive sex education from a young age are more likely to make informed decisions about their sexual health and engage in responsible behaviours later in life. Early learning centres play a critical role in shaping a child's understanding of relationships, personal boundaries, and body autonomy. By integrating the "Super Stars" program into these centres, we can positively influence the long-term sexual health behaviours of the children we reach.

Through age-appropriate and evidence-based curriculum, the "Super Stars" program equips educators to facilitate open discussions about body safety, consent, and appropriate boundaries. As children become more aware of these essential concepts, they develop a sense of autonomy and confidence in expressing their feelings and setting boundaries. This empowerment during their formative years can have a lasting impact on their ability to navigate healthy relationships and sexual experiences as they progress into adolescence and adulthood.

The partnership between CERSH and BSA also recognises the critical role parents and guardians play in a child's development and safety. To create a holistic and comprehensive approach, the "Super Stars" program actively involves parents and caregivers in the learning process.

By collaborating with early learning centres, the program offers parent workshops and resources that provide insight into the curriculum being taught to their children. These workshops serve as a platform for parents to address any questions or concerns they may have about child sexual abuse prevention, body safety, and fostering healthy sexual attitudes.

By equipping parents with the knowledge and tools to discuss sensitive topics with their children, the partnership aims to build parental confidence. As parents become more adept at addressing these issues, they can create an open and supportive environment at home, where their children feel comfortable sharing their experiences and seeking guidance. This open communication strengthens the parent-child bond and allows for early intervention should any concerning situations arise.

Moreover, when parents feel supported and informed, they become advocates for sexual health education and child protection within their broader community. This ripple effect extends beyond the immediate family and into the lives of other children and parents, fostering a culture of awareness and safety.

In conclusion, the partnership between CERSH and BSA, delivering the "Super Stars - Child Sexual Abuse Prevention" program to early learning centres in Bendigo, has the potential to leave a lasting impact on the sexual health behaviours of the children we reach. By empowering children with knowledge about body safety, consent, and appropriate boundaries from an early age, we lay the groundwork for responsible decision-making in adolescence and adulthood. Furthermore, by involving parents and caregivers in the learning process, we build their confidence to support and guide their young ones, creating a safer and more nurturing community for every child in Bendigo.

Methods

Two parent sessions (offered as in-person or Zoom attendance), two educators professional development sessions and six in-centre sessions were delivered across the second week of July, 2023. The following organisations were represented:

- Bendigo Community Health Services
- Jenny's Early Learning Centre – Bendigo Hospital
- Jenny's Early Learning Centre – Epsom
- Jenny's Early Learning Centre – Heathcote
- Jenny's Early Learning Centre – Maiden Gully
- Jenny's Early Learning Centre – Strathfieldsaye
- Journey Early Learning Centre – Epsom

Note: Bendigo Community Health Services were invited to participate as they are the local health promotion agency and will provide the ongoing sustainability, support and engagement.

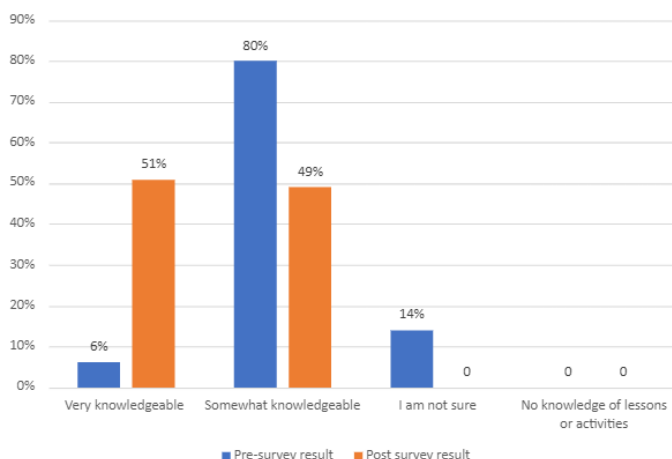
To evaluate the educator session participants were asked to complete a pre and post questionnaire which explored the following:

- i. Knowledge of age-appropriate child safe lessons and strategies
- ii. Victorian Child Safe Standards & National Child Safe Standards
- iii. Confidence of handling and hearing disclosures of sexual abuse
- iv. Knowledge of age-appropriate behaviour

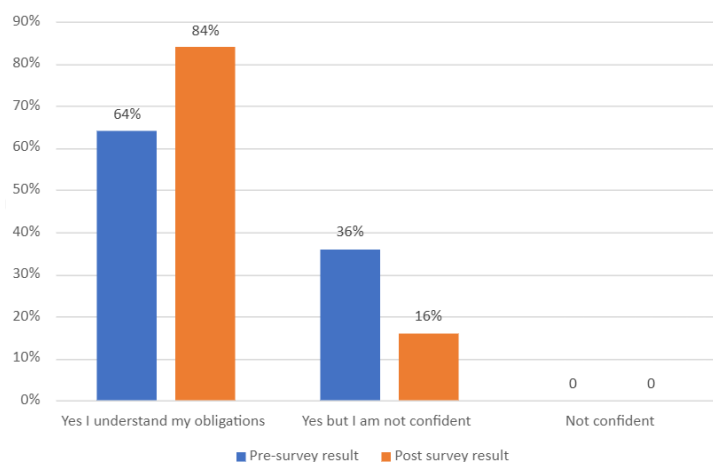
Two surveys were administered, the first survey was completed prior to the educators' session and the second survey was completed after the session was completed.

Results

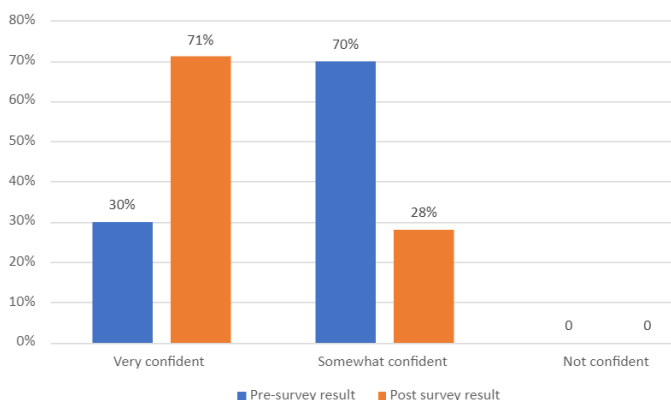
Question 1. Rate your knowledge of age-appropriate child safe lessons and activities to prevent child sexual abuse.



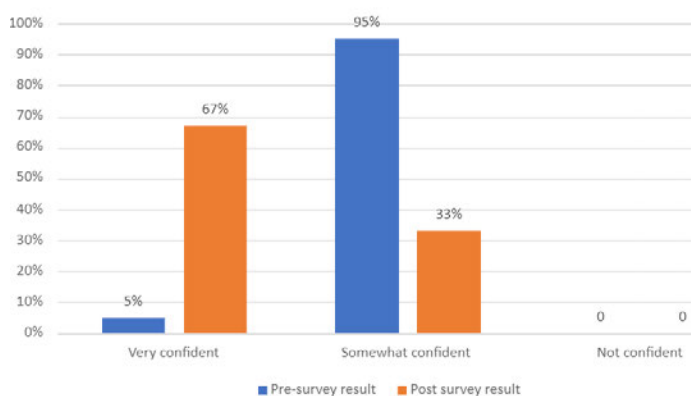
Question 2. Are you aware of your obligations under the Victorian Child Safe Standards & National Child Safe Standards?



Question 3. How confident are you at hearing and handling disclosures of sexual abuse?



Question 4. How confident are you in identifying age-appropriate behaviour including the signs of possible sexual abuse?



Question 1. Knowledge in Age-Appropriate Child Safe Lessons:

Prior to the workshop, 6% of participants stated that they were very knowledgeable about age-appropriate child safe lessons and activities to prevent child sexual abuse. However, after completing the Body Safety workshop, an impressive 51% of participants reported feeling highly knowledgeable, representing a 46% increase in awareness.

Question 2. Understanding of Obligations in Child Safe Standards:

The Body Safety workshop had a positive impact on participants' understanding of their obligations in Victorian Child Safe Standards & National Child Safe Standards. Before attending the workshop, only 64% of participants claimed to comprehend their obligations. Post-workshop, this figure increased to 84%, reflecting a substantial 20% increase in knowledge.

Question 3. Confidence in Handling Disclosures of Sexual Abuse:

At the outset of the workshop, 30% of participants stated they were very confident in hearing and handling disclosures of sexual abuse. Following the completion of the 2-day workshop, this percentage increased to 71%, showcasing a notable improvement in participants' confidence to address such delicate situations.

Question 4. Identification of Age-Appropriate Behaviour and Signs of Sexual Abuse:

One of the workshop's key objectives was to enhance participants' ability to identify age-appropriate behaviour and signs of possible sexual abuse. Prior to the workshop, only 5% of participants felt very confident in this area. However, after completing the training, 67% of participants reported feeling very confident, resulting in a 27% increase in educators' confidence levels.

Question 5. What did you enjoy most about the session?

Engaging Presentation Style: Multiple participants praised the presenter, for their engaging and knowledgeable delivery. The presenter's confidence, clarity, and relatable approach kept the audience engaged throughout the session. The interactive discussions and relatable presentation of relevant information contributed to the overall engagement.

- *"Lauren was very engaging and the stats."*
- *"Lauren spoke so confidently and clearly to engage me with this tricky topic."*

Informative Content: Another key theme that emerged was the appreciation for the abundance of information presented during the session. Participants enjoyed gaining extra knowledge on the subject, particularly on the topic of sexual abuse prevention and early identification of signs in the community. They found the session very informative and learned new information on the subject matter.

- *"Enjoyed learning about the sexual abuse and how to prevent, to identify the early signs in the community."*
- *"Presenter was great to listen to and very knowledgeable. Very informative."*

Empowerment and Openness: Participants noted a sense of empowerment from the session, possibly from discussing sensitive yet important topics in an open and normalised manner. The balance between important information and relatable presentation further enhanced the sense of empowerment, making the topic accessible and understandable for the audience.

- *"Sensitive but honest - normalized the conversation."*
- *"Lovely talk host, very friendly. Enjoyed the learning. How much detail she provided us, she kept us engaged."*

Overall, participants appreciated the engaging and knowledgeable presentation style, the informative content, and the empowering atmosphere that encouraged open discussions and learning.

Question 6. Is there anything you would like further training and education on?

Based on the responses, the top themes that emerge are:

Teenager and Technology Grooming: Participants expressed an interest in obtaining more information on how to relate to teenagers regarding technology grooming.

Building Resources and Lesson Plans: Another key theme is the desire to build resources and lesson plans related to child protection and body safety. Participants seek to enhance their

knowledge and skills in designing educational materials and activities that promote child safety and awareness.

Implementation of Child Safety Programs: Participants show a keen interest in practical implementation strategies for child safety programs. They specifically seek guidance on incorporating games and activities that educate children about body safety and consent, as well as methods to help children self-regulate their behaviour in the digital realm.

Inclusivity and Male Participation: The topic of inclusivity and male involvement in child protection is also a notable theme. Participants are interested in exploring ways to engage more males in these discussions and initiatives to create a well-rounded approach to child safety.

Overall, these themes reflect the participants' dedication to child safety, education, and creating a safe and informed environment for children in the digital age.

Conclusion

The findings from the Body Safety workshop demonstrate its significant impact on participants' knowledge, understanding, and confidence in preventing child sexual abuse and promoting child safety. The workshop succeeded in substantially increasing participants' awareness of age-appropriate child safe lessons, with an impressive 46% increase in those who felt highly knowledgeable post-training.

Furthermore, the workshop positively influenced participants' comprehension of their obligations in Victorian Child Safe Standards & National Child Safe Standards, resulting in a substantial 20% rise in knowledge. Equally notable was the notable improvement in participants' confidence in handling disclosures of sexual abuse, as the percentage of those feeling very confident increased from 30% to 71%.

The workshop's key objective of enhancing participants' ability to identify age-appropriate behaviour and signs of sexual abuse was also met with resounding success. Participants' confidence in this area increased by 27%, demonstrating the efficacy of the training in equipping educators with crucial skills.

Moreover, the feedback from participants regarding the workshop content was overwhelmingly positive. The engaging presentation style and informative content received high praise, with the presenter's confidence, clarity, and relatable approach leaving a lasting impact on the audience.

Participants expressed a sense of empowerment from the open and normalized discussions on sensitive topics, creating an environment conducive to learning and personal growth.

Looking ahead, the feedback also highlighted on areas where further training and education are desired. Notably, participants expressed a need for more information on relating to teenagers regarding technology grooming, the development of resources and lesson plans, and practical implementation strategies for child safety programs. Additionally, the interest in promoting inclusivity and male participation in child protection discussions highlights a dedication to creating comprehensive approaches to child safety.

In conclusion, the Body Safety workshop not only proved effective in increasing participants' knowledge and confidence but also inspired a commitment to continuous learning and improvement in the realm of child protection and safety. By addressing the identified themes for further training, educators and professionals can continue their efforts in creating a safe and informed environment for children, making significant strides in preventing child sexual abuse and promoting child well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the Body Safety workshop and the expressed interests of the participants, the following recommendations are proposed:

Ongoing Training and Workshops: Provide regular and ongoing training sessions on child protection and body safety for educators, caregivers, and professionals. This will reinforce their knowledge, skills, and confidence in preventing child sexual abuse, promoting healthy behaviours and staying updated with the latest best practices.

Technology Grooming Awareness: Offer specialised workshops and training sessions to equip educators and caregivers with strategies to address technology grooming and online safety. This will empower them to engage teenagers effectively and protect them from potential online risks.

Promote Inclusivity and Male Participation: Recognising the importance of inclusivity in child safety efforts. Encouraging and engaging males as active participants in child safety discussions, initiatives, and educational programs. Foster a collaborative approach that brings diverse perspectives together to create a well-rounded and effective child safety framework.

Establish Support Networks: Create support networks for educators, caregivers, and participants who have undergone the Body Safety training. These networks can serve as platforms for continued learning, sharing best practices, and seeking guidance on challenging situations related to child safety.

By implementing these recommendations, educators, caregivers, and professionals can collectively create a safer environment for children, promoting their well-being and protecting them from potential harm.