



POLICY Rx: Implement Comprehensive Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Policies 2019

The Issue

According to the [Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#), “child sexual abuse occurs when a child is exploited sexually by another person.” Child sexual abuse may take many forms, but is most often perpetrated by someone the child knows and trusts.

Child sexual abuse is an unfortunately prevalent problem in communities across the nation, and Wisconsin is no exception. The actual prevalence of child sexual abuse is [difficult to determine](#) because it is often [not reported](#) to law enforcement or human service agencies. There is general agreement by experts that the incidence of child sexual abuse is higher than what is reported to authorities, as sexual assault is widely recognized to be the most [underreported](#) violent crime.

Many states have recognized the serious consequences child sexual abuse has on both victims and their communities at large and have passed legislation aimed to prevent child sexual abuse. At least [26 states](#) have passed laws to either study child sexual abuse prevention programs or create child sexual abuse identification and prevention curriculum.

While the increased attention states have paid to addressing child sexual abuse is certainly welcome, many of the state legislative approaches to child sexual abuse prevention are [too narrowly tailored and based on unsuccessful prevention models](#). According to the [National Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#) (NAESV), many of these approaches “rely too heavily on children to prevent their own abuse and can promote a spirit of victim-blaming when children are unable to prevent abuse.” Such approaches fail to take into account the power and control imbalances between children and adults that help create the dynamics that contribute to abuse.

As a result, NAESV recommends that states adopt a more comprehensive policy approach to child sexual abuse prevention that focuses more attention on adult and societal responsibilities for preventing and responding to abuse.

Why is Addressing Child Sexual Abuse Important to Women and Girls?

- Research indicates that girls are [disproportionately](#) victimized by child sexual abuse. While estimates of the prevalence of child sexual abuse vary, [comprehensive](#) studies [indicate](#) that between 20-30% of girls and 5-15% of boys are a victim of child sexual abuse.
- Sexual abuse can have a [devastating](#) impact on a child's [wellbeing and sense of self](#). Child victims often experience severe anxiety, problems with school, difficulty forming or maintaining healthy relationships, and a whole host of other adverse effects.
- The relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—such as child sexual abuse—and [poor health](#) into adulthood are [well documented](#). Child sexual abuse is associated with higher levels of [long-term health problems](#), including many of the health problems listed in the point above, many of which can contribute to poor general health and chronic health conditions.

What Wisconsin Can Do

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault has created a detailed roadmap for policymakers who wish to take a comprehensive approach to child sexual abuse prevention. The report, entitled [10 Core Concepts for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention](#) includes:

- Sexual Health & Development
- Gender Socialization
- Intersections of Oppression
- Boundaries
- Empowerment & Body Ownership
- Pro-Social Behavior & Skills
- Understanding, Identifying & Responding to Trauma
- Bystander Intervention
- Information About Sexual Abuse
- Safety & Risk Reduction



Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health

While legislation that would require [child sexual abuse prevention curriculum be taught to children in Kindergarten through 6th grade](#) was introduced during the 2015-2016 legislative session, the bill did not incorporate the comprehensive approach advocated for by WCASA, NAESV, and other experts on child sexual abuse prevention.

At the current time, no comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention legislation has been introduced in Wisconsin. However, any such future legislation should be assessed on the basis of whether it takes a truly comprehensive approach to the issue and is grounded in evidence-based policies, such as those included in WCASA's "10 Core Concepts" model.

How Can I Help Ensure Wisconsin Adopts Comprehensive Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Policies?

There are lots of ways you can help promote comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention policies in Wisconsin.

- Call or email your [state legislators](#) to urge them to support evidence-based, comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention legislation.
- Connect with organizations in Wisconsin already working to address child sexual abuse prevention:
 - [The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#)
 - [Stop it Now!](#)
 - [Awareness to Action](#)

Resources:

- [WCASA Information Sheet: Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Resources](#)
- [WCASA: 10 Core Concepts for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention](#)
- [National Alliance to End Sexual Violence Policy Statement: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention](#)