



Stop It Now![®]

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

Briefing Sheet: Stop It Now!'s Role in Child Sex Abuse Prevention

Stop It Now! is a national non-profit organization based on the knowledge and belief that child sexual abuse is a preventable social problem. Our mission is to prevent the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed. Our goal is ultimately to eliminate child sexual abuse (CSA). Our vision is that all adults engage in respectful, caring behavior with children and other adults to create safe, stable and nurturing relationships for all children.

Stop It Now! helps adults, families and communities speak up and have difficult conversations with one another to recognize, respond and prevent the sexual abuse of children. Through engagement and honest, clear dialog, the difficult topic of sex abuse is brought out into the open. By eliminating the stigma around talking about children's sexual safety, caring adults can institute safety planning into their families and communities' day-to-day activities.

We help caregivers create environments that are healthy and protective. We provide guidance to adults who are seeking to take responsibility and get help for their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors before a child is harmed. We encourage healthy sexuality development education, and develop and offer tools and resources to help create safe environments. We also provide support to those who are survivors; providing adults, children and their families with resources for reporting, as well as healing and recovery.

Stop It Now! was founded in 1992 by Fran Henry, a child sex abuse (CSA) survivor who recognized that standard prevention approaches weren't working. At that time, CSA was not seen as a preventable public health problem. Any sex abuse prevention activities focused on children protecting themselves. Henry's understanding of complex relationships where most sex abuse occurs – in the intimate spheres of family and community - led her to create a forum in which CSA survivors, recovering sex offenders, and the families of both, could step forward, speak up, and work together to break cycles of abuse. From this emerged a comprehensive, community-based, pilot program in Vermont that included a cross-sectorial advisory group, community events, prevention materials, a social marketing/advertising campaign, and a free helpline. Stop It Now! Vermont succeeded in getting potential perpetrators to stop, seek help and face accountability.

Since our Vermont pilot, Stop It Now! has moved into national and international prevention leadership. Now!'s unique Helpline services have been replicated successfully in the US, the UK and Ireland and is currently being developed in Grenada. Now! assisted other local programs in their prevention programming development, including use of Now! educational materials,

training, Helpline and social marketing and media advocacy approaches to do community-based, CSA prevention outreach to bystanders. Now! programs demonstrate that communities will respond to a public framing that moves away from “stranger danger” and instead recognizes complexities of abuse closer to home, and that adults will act to prevent CSA, if they have accurate and balanced information, practical resources and access to support.

Our approach to prevention engages adults in planning for safety **before** there are warning signs of abuse. We teach adults how to intervene safely and effectively when a child or an adult is showing warning signs. Our efforts are guided by the premise that to truly prevent harm to children all adults must accept responsibility for recognizing, acknowledging and confronting behaviors that lead to abuse. We believe that society at all levels must recognize and address the need to offer help and hope to *everyone* directly affected by CSA. **The Now! policy strategy and program model emphasizes adult and community responsibility for CSA prevention.**

Countering stereotypes of those directly impacted by CSA is a key communication strategy. Stereotypes are key barriers to effective prevention at the individual, community and societal levels. Stereotypes label and portray perpetrators as “monstrous male strangers,” survivors as “damaged female victims,” and family bystanders as “bad neglectful parents” or “oblivious relatives”. We counter these stereotypes by putting a human face on CSA’s complexities, offering balanced information, and putting forth research-based messages and materials. For example, we counter gender stereotypes through conscious use of gender-neutral language, providing accurate information about women as potential offenders, portraying men as nurturing and protective with children, and collaborating actively with allied movements of male CSA survivors and violence prevention advocates. Our messages and methods have been adapted in collaboration with diverse cultural communities around the globe.

Our primary goals are to change the fundamental norms needed to make a lasting cultural shift by embedding prevention concepts and practices into caregiving relationships, families and communities. To reach these objectives, we focus on these key activities:

- **Training and Technical Assistance**
- **Help Services**
- **Public Education**
- **Advocacy and Policy**

Fundamental to the Stop It Now! prevention approach is confident, comfortable and calm conversations. Bringing our earlier research, dialog projects and localized community engagement, we continue to adapt the Stop It Now! model of prevention for new audiences and new communication methods. Continuing to speak about sexual abuse allows us to speak up and prevent sexual abuse.

By sharing and building on our successes with policy makers, professionals and community leaders, Now! has made significant and permanent contributions to the CSA movement and allied fields. Most significantly, the concept of “adult responsibility” for preventing CSA is now widely accepted, and adult-focused, community-based approaches to preventing CSA are

recognized as promising practices. Early Now! policy work focused successfully on working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), our nation's public health agency, to get CSA recognized as a preventable public health problem.

Our Programs

- **Training and Technical Assistance** - Our [Circles of Safety](#) trainings have been developed through our experience guiding thousands of adults through action steps to keep children safe. Circles of Safety (COS) is available to help child-serving agencies prevent child sex abuse in their programs and institutions, as well as to train professionals to promote sexually healthy families. We offer a training menu tailored to meet the specialized needs of diverse professional youth-serving programming, including short webinars, full day trainings and ongoing shared learning activities. COS is available to institutions of higher education to promote safe communities; for community mental health providers to teach prevention concepts in their communities; for early childhood care and education professionals to create safe living and learning environments; and for many other populations. It includes education on the scope of child sexual abuse and information on what is normal and what concerning in child and adult sexual behaviors. Participants practice implementing prevention tools, and agencies and organizations are provided skills to develop prevention plans for their organizations and campuses.
- **Help Services** - Provides a toll-free, confidential [helpline](#) for any individual with questions or concerns about child sexual abuse. In addition to contacting the Helpline via phone and email, [Ask Now!](#) is an advice column with our responses to letters from real people seeking help and guidance to respond to concerns of sex abuse in their families or communities.
- **Prevention Education** - Develops, assesses and distributes educational materials. Our [website](#) includes a library of sex abuse prevention tools. Our Online Help Center provides self-help online guidance on steps to take to respond to concerns. We offer a large selection of tip sheets and materials on topics such as [Safety Planning for Parents of Children with Disabilities](#), [Warning Signs](#), and [Safety Planning](#).
- **Prevention Advocacy and Policy**- We promote addressing child sexual abuse as a national and international public health priority by sharing our experience-based information with the media, legislators, other policymakers and advocacy groups.

For more information, visit www.stopitnow.org or contact:

Jenny Coleman, Director at 413-587-3501 or jcoleman@stopitnow.org.