

Contextual Prevention

Going beyond individual prevention

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Going beyond individual prevention to contextual prevention



A comprehensive approach to the prevention of child sexual abuse needs strategies that are focused on both individuals and contexts.

Contextual prevention targets societal contexts (macro) and immediate situations (micro) in which abuse might occur.

What is contextual prevention?

"Contextual prevention of child sexual abuse comprises prevention efforts that target factors external to the individual, addressing macro-level and micro-level structures, to create safer environments for children and young people."

Example prevention strategies	
'Individual' prevention	**'Contextual' prevention**
Developmental prevention	Address social determinants of abuse
Punishment/Deterrence	Enhance formal regulatory controls
Treatment programmes for victims and perpetrators	Crime prevention through environmental design
Protective behaviours programmes	Situational crime prevention

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Macro-level and micro-level focus

Macro-level strategies

Addressing social determinants of child sexual abuse

For example:

- Address gender inequality
- Address socioeconomic disadvantage
- Develop housing programs to reduce overcrowding
- Reduce exposure to concerning sexual behaviour
- Challenge cultural norms conducive to child sexual abuse

Legislation and policy reform

For example:

- Legislation reform
- Policy reform about child-safe organisations
- Enhance protective services, including police, justice system, child protection systems

Micro-level strategies

Crime prevention through environmental design

For example:

- Control access to children
- Enhance natural surveillance in physical settings both architecturally and in nature
- Appoint guardians at specific hot spots to control access to children

Situational crime prevention

For example:

- Introduce controls that increase effort to engage in harm (e.g. internet filters)
- Increase the risk of detection by enhancing active guardianship by staff, bystanders and family members, or by addressing barriers to disclosure, or by activities such as placing home computers in shared spaces
- Reduce provocations (e.g. drugs and alcohol, that can reduce inhibitions), develop safety plans with high- risk offenders
- Remove excuses with clear policies (e.g. a code of conduct for all adults) that explain what is expected, and what happens if behaviour falls outside of the policy
- Remove excuses through automatic pop-up warning messages when entering potentially problematic search terms online

The process: How to approach contextual prevention of child sexual abuse

Contextual prevention needs to begin with an investigation of risks within a specified setting or for a particular activity. This helps to build an understanding of the factors in that setting that might contribute to abuse. This knowledge can then inform how to tailor prevention plans to the specified context.

1. Select target context

This could be a physical location or an activity that poses risks, or even a small community setting

2. Assess contextual risks within that setting

Assessments should consider risks at both macro and micro levels

3. Match prevention strategies to risks

Once contextual risks and targets are identified, prevention strategies can be selected that match and address contextual risks

4. Implement selected prevention strategies

Use evidence-based strategies, adequately train staff responsible for implementation and share information to inform stakeholders of the rationale for the strategy: young people, parents, staff, boards and community leaders

5. Plan for how to observe and measure change

Set observable and measurable goals and outcomes

Context matters!

The choice of contextual prevention strategies, and how we implement them, is dependent on context - this reflects differences in contextual risks across different settings. The table below showcases a range of examples to showcase the scope and diversity of approaches.

Putting contextual prevention into practice

Setting	Identify the context/setting	Assess the risks	Match and implement strategies
Domestic	• Home • Apartment • Bedroom • Bathroom • Shed/garage	• Children are more likely to be abused by a family member or someone known to the child • Grooming or abuse is more likely during routine activities that involve close physical contact • Some activities provide opportunity for protracted grooming (e.g. repeated interactions that build trust and desensitise the child) • Are there unsupervised routine caregiving activities; is there access to children?	• Ensure 'line of sight' when other children visit • Develop family rules (e.g. knocking before entering bathrooms; or about who touches my body) • Have open conversations within the family about sex and sexuality so that children know that their parents or carers are comfortable with hearing any concerns
Online	• Computer • Smart devices	• Lack of supervision • Lack of knowledge about privacy • No 'parental controls' on settings	• Move home computers/smart devices out of bedrooms and into shared spaces • Encourage parental engagement and supervision of children while online • Have clear rules about expected standards of behaviour and adult codes of conduct • Design pop-up warning messages connected to child sexual abuse material websites to remind users that online child sexual abuse material is harmful or that online behaviour might be being tracked

Putting contextual prevention into practice

Setting	Identify the context/setting	Assess the risks	Match and implement strategies
Organisational	• Playground • Nappy change area • Change room • Counselling room • Storage locker or shed • Sports field	• Physical structures without a clear 'line of sight' not only provide opportunities for grooming but also for abuse itself • Lack of child-safe policies and codes of conduct • Club 'vibe' that encourages or allows jokes, disrespectful behaviour or comments • Lack of clarity on child-safe policies and expectations of acceptable behaviours • Lack of staff training in safeguarding	• Install doors with window panels to give others 'line of sight' • Install motion-sensitive lights • Add glass panels to rooms • Develop child safety policies and procedures, and ensure that they are visible and accessible to all • Display signs that promote the rights of children to speak up about concerns • Offer training and supervision to staff to enhance guardianship capacity • Ensure recruiting strategies screen employees • Sign-in processes and monitoring visitors
Public	• Shopping centre • Public toilet • Change rooms • Playground • Park	• Barriers to surveillance, such as unclear lines of sight • Poor lighting • Unsupervised child or groups of children	• Enhance surveillance by pruning bushes or adding lighting • Install CCTV • Display clear guidelines for all adults and children • Offer guardianship training for potential bystanders