What is Primary Prevention?

A brief overview, prepared by Alexis V. Marbach, MPH
Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator
California Coalition Against Sexual Assault
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A systematic process that promotes healthy environments and behaviors and reduces the likelihood or frequency of sexual violence before occurring.

How is it different than awareness building and risk reduction?

- With awareness building and risk reduction work alone, the potential victim has the responsibility of protecting themselves.
- The likelihood that a sexual assault will occur does not change.

Awareness building and risk reduction, continued...

- Can contribute to victim-blaming language and mentality.
- Do not fully address the root causes of sexual violence.
- Don’t always provide an action step unless audience members identify as a potential perpetrator or a potential victim.
### How is primary prevention different?

**Primary Prevention**
- Approaches that take place BEFORE sexual violence has occurred to prevent initial perpetration or victimization

**Secondary Prevention**
- Immediate responses AFTER sexual violence has occurred to deal with the short-term consequences of violence

**Tertiary Prevention**
- Long-term responses AFTER sexual violence has occurred to deal with the lasting consequences of violence and sex offender treatment interventions

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### Through primary prevention, we want to...

- improve our understanding of the underlying conditions in our society that perpetuate sexual violence; AND
- develop and enhance our ability to change those conditions; ultimately, eliminating sexual violence.
• **Change social norms** by changing knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behavior, and skills that support sexual violence

• **Promoting behaviors** that define and support gender equity, healthy relationships, and conflict resolution (inc. safe and effective bystander intervention)

• The influence of these factors beyond the individual [i.e. the pre-existing cultural norms] can be so powerful that, as the Institute of Medicine concluded in its study on health promotion,

• “It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change.”
Public Health

“Identifying violence as a public health issue is a relatively new idea. Traditionally, when confronted by the circumstances of violence, the health professions have deferred to the criminal justice system. . . . [Today] the professions of medicine, nursing, and the health related social services must come forward and recognize violence as their issue.”

- C. Everett Koop, 1985

Social-Ecological Model

- Guiding model when designing and implementing public health programs.
Primary prevention addresses each level of the social ecological model.

- **Spectrums of Prevention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Spectrum</th>
<th>Definition of Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills</td>
<td>Enhancing an individual’s capability of preventing violence and promoting safety</td>
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<td>2. Promoting Community Education</td>
<td>Reaching groups of people with information and resources to prevent violence and promote safety</td>
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<td>3. Educating Providers</td>
<td>Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others and model positive norms</td>
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<td>4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks</td>
<td>Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact</td>
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<td>5. Changing Organizational Practices</td>
<td>Adopting regulations and shaping norms to prevent violence and improve safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Influencing Policies and Legislation</td>
<td>Enacting laws and policies that support healthy community norms and a violence-free society</td>
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Spectrum of Prevention Framework

• The six different levels of the Spectrum of Prevention are interrelated and work in synergy to maximize the impact of any one activity occurring on any given level.
• To effectively create a cultural paradigm shift supportive primary prevention efforts, change must occur on both the macro and micro levels of the Spectrum.
• Traditional sexual assault prevention efforts have focused on the micro levels (levels 1 through 3), targeting individuals, communities, and direct service providers.
• While direct service work is crucial to educating and empowering individuals to prevent sexual assault and support survivors, macro level efforts (levels 4 through 6) institutionalize and sustain social norms change.

What primary prevention is...

• Health promotion based.
• Based on skill and knowledge building.
• An on-going process, which requires leadership & commitment.
• Community owned and integrated into the fabric of the community.
• http://www.fcadv.org/projects-programs/primary-prevention-toolkit
• Emphasizes developing skills and changing behaviors, social norms, and/or systems in ways that prevent sexual violence and change rape culture.


What primary prevention is not...

• A one-time educational program or event.
• One skill-building session.
• Community education
  • Raising awareness about sexual violence and available services and decreasing the acceptance of rape myths and victim blaming.

Organizations with thriving primary prevention programs...

• “... recognized the necessity of education and outreach as it contributes to survivors accessing services and the reduction of victimization. However, they were clear that education and outreach are not a replacement for prevention”


Principles of Effective Prevention Programs

• Comprehensive
  • Multi-component interventions that address critical domains (e.g., family, peers, community) that influence the development and perpetuation of the behaviors to be prevented

• Varied Teaching Methods
  • Programs involve diverse teaching methods that focus on increasing awareness and understanding of the problem behaviors and on acquiring or enhancing skills

• Sufficient Dosage
  • Programs provide enough intervention to produce the desired effects and provide follow-up as necessary to maintain effects.

Principles of Effective Prevention Programs

- **Theory Driven**
  - Programs have a theoretical justification, are based on accurate information, and are supported by empirical research

- **Positive Relationships**
  - Programs provide exposure to adults and peers in a way that promotes strong relationships and supports positive outcomes

- ** Appropriately Timed**
  - Programs are initiated early enough to have an impact on the development of the problem behavior and are sensitive to the developmental needs of participants

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Principles of Effective Prevention Programs

- **Socio-Culturally Relevant**
  - Programs are tailored to the community and cultural norms of the participants and make efforts to include the target group in program planning and implementation

- **Outcome Evaluation**
  - Programs have clear goals and objectives and make an effort to systematically document their results relative to the goals

- **Well-Trained Staff**
  - Program staff support the program and are provided with training regarding the implementation of the intervention

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