

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

# Embracing Prevention as Social Change

How to Build Organizational  
Capacity for Prevention

.....| M a r c h 2 0 1 2



217 Oscar Dr., Ste. A  
Jefferson City,  
Missouri 65101  
(573) 634-4161  
(573) 636-3728 Fax  
*For deaf and hard of hearing,  
dial 711 for Relay Missouri.*  
[www.mocadsv.org](http://www.mocadsv.org)  
[mocadsv@mocadsv.org](mailto:mocadsv@mocadsv.org)



# Embracing Prevention as Social Change: How to Build Organizational Capacity for Prevention

Individuals working in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence want to change the world. That's why we do this work. When the day-to-day realities of hotline calls, hospital visits and funding cuts set in, however, the belief that the world can be changed wanes. Rejuvenation and hope can return with prevention work and holding on to the belief that we can create a world where no one will be hurt.

Primary prevention is changing the social norms that allow and condone violence. Preventing violence means changing our society and its institutions—targeting attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, environments and policies to eliminate those that contribute to violence and to promote those that stop the violence. Primary prevention of domestic and sexual violence is defined as preventing violence before it occurs. This is social change work. This is the foundation of the movement working to end violence against women.

Primary prevention promotes healthy norms and behaviors and is one part of a comprehensive response to domestic and sexual violence. Other components include intervention and treatment services (e.g., crisis hotline, counseling, crisis intervention, and support groups); effective system response (e.g., coordinated community response, sexual assault response team, legal advocacy, medical advocacy); and awareness and outreach services (e.g., candlelight vigils, take back the night events, community poster campaigns). Primary prevention builds on the foundation of victim services and goes further to prevent perpetration of violence. Primary prevention best practices are generally thought of as strategies like bystander intervention programs, social norms media campaigns, school-based curricula, engaging men and boys, community mobilization and policy change.

Programs throughout Missouri are excelling in working with youth and developing partnerships with faith-based organizations, schools and their communities. But in order to build a comprehensive prevention program, knowledge and skills around primary prevention cannot be limited to one staff person or one prevention team. There should be buy-in and understanding throughout the organization. Primary prevention should be incorporated throughout the entire agency. By

This technical assistance publication was developed by **MCADSV staff.**

For more information, contact MCADSV.

**Organizational capacity for primary prevention is the agency's ability to support and implement domestic and sexual violence prevention efforts.**

building organizational capacity for primary prevention, an organization's primary prevention work is more likely to be sustainable and effective.

---

### **WHY BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY?**

Programs succeed at promoting healing from violence, and they work to try to prevent further violence from occurring. Expanding organizational capacity is a way for programs to begin to create the social change necessary to stop the violence before it starts—among their staff and throughout their communities. Organizational capacity for primary prevention is the agency's ability to support and implement domestic and sexual violence prevention efforts. Capacity building is not just about expanding a curriculum, developing a program or finding new resources to do prevention work. Capacity building is incorporating prevention into all aspects of an agency's work. This includes strategies that are both internal to the organization (e.g., structures, processes, staff and leadership) and external (e.g., partnerships and resources). This makes it more likely for primary prevention work to be effective and sustainable which fulfills an organization's mission and better serves its community.

When organizations designate prevention efforts as the responsibility of only one staff person, the work cannot easily become institutionalized or integrated into all aspects of the organization. If that staff person leaves, the knowledge and practices leave too. When prevention is the mission of the organization as well as the responsibility of every staff person—from the Executive Director to an intern—prevention work becomes part of the organizational culture.

Building the capacity of an organization to fully incorporate the social change of primary prevention includes organizational assessment and evaluation, strategic planning, resource development, communication strategies, succession planning, and Board and staff development. This is a process of strengthening the management and governance of systems within organizations to fully engage in prevention of violence.

---

### **DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES\***

Several areas of an organization's work become a priority when building capacity around primary prevention. Structures and processes, leadership, staffing, partners and resources are areas into which primary prevention can be woven to increase capacity throughout the agency. Following are definitions of areas for an organization's incorporation of primary prevention approaches and examples of ways to do so.

---

\* Information was adapted from the DELTA PREP Project, which is funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, in cooperation with the CDC Foundation.

**Structures and Processes:** Incorporate primary prevention in the processes and procedures through which the organization formally organizes and operates.

- Discuss and evaluate the agency mission. If necessary revise the agency's mission/vision statement to include the goal of primary prevention;
- Add a section to the organization's website about primary prevention of domestic and sexual violence;
- Include specific prevention goals in the organization's strategic plan;
- Institute a regular section on prevention in the organization's newsletter;
- Identify data that is collected in your state or community on the nature and extent of domestic and sexual violence;
- Use data to inform prevention priority areas and strategic partnerships;
- Introduce achievable prevention goals to the organization's strategic planning committee; and
- Add or update employee values statements to include primary prevention.

**Leadership:** Support and prioritize primary prevention among the organization's Executive Director, senior management and Board members.

- Add a member to the Board of Directors who has prevention experience/expertise;
- Integrate primary prevention agenda items into Board meetings;
- Integrate primary prevention into Executive Director and senior management orientation trainings;
- Provide prevention training by staff to Board members;
- Use an annual Board retreat to review and/or set organization's priorities related to prevention;
- Schedule regular Board and staff leadership discussions and reviews of the root causes of violence;
- Hold Board and staff leadership reviews to discuss the public health approach to prevention and how it can be applied to domestic and sexual violence prevention in the organization; and
- Have Board members formally vote to adapt the organization's guiding documents (e.g., mission statement, strategic plan, etc.) to include primary prevention.

**Staffing:** Incorporate primary prevention into the process through which staff members are trained, are organized and operate within the organization.

- Add a staff position that focuses on primary prevention;

**Discuss and evaluate the agency mission. If necessary revise the agency mission/vision statement to include the goal of primary prevention.**

**Prevention is defined as “a systematic process that promotes healthy environments and behaviors and reduces the likelihood or frequency of violence against women occurring.” Primary prevention is taking action before violence occurs.**

- Revise standard staff training and orientation materials to include primary prevention;
- Require all full-time and/or part-time staff to receive primary prevention training;
- Add or update employee values statements to include primary prevention;
- Revise job descriptions to include prevention activities and responsibilities for all staff members;
- Review and discuss primary prevention priorities during staff meetings or a staff retreat;
- Form a staff team or workgroup to work on primary prevention;
- Include primary prevention goals within staff individual development plans;
- Use a staff retreat to review and/or discuss organizational priorities related to primary prevention;
- Add a primary prevention focus to an existing staff work group or planning group within the organization;
- Ensure staff access to current research on incidence and prevalence of domestic and sexual violence;
- Incorporate primary prevention into existing training curricula for new advocates and volunteers;
- Ensure staff access to current research about the effectiveness of a variety of interventions, strategies and programs to prevent domestic and sexual violence; and
- Provide training for all staff on program evaluation to ensure effective programming.

**Partners:** Engage new partners or develop existing partnerships to build and/or support primary prevention work.

- Form a new partnership with an organization interested in, or currently conducting, primary prevention work;
- Serve as a primary prevention representative/expert on task forces, committees, etc.;
- Identify new partnerships or enhance an existing partnership with organizations working with men and boys, a healthy relationship program, a mentoring program, etc. ;
- Add a prevention representative on the Board of Directors;
- Meet with potential prevention partners in the community to learn about their work;
- Train local service providers on primary prevention;
- Distribute written materials specific to primary prevention to your community partners;

- Provide resources that are focused on promoting healthy relationships to community agencies and universities; and
- Hold community forums or events on prevention for Domestic or Sexual Violence Awareness Month.

**Resources:** Pursue and acquire funding or in-kind support for primary prevention work.

- Apply for and receive funding for primary prevention efforts;
- Create a specific line-item in the organization's budget that supports primary prevention initiatives;
- Obtain in-kind staff support or volunteers for primary prevention efforts;
- Review training and outreach materials annually to assess the extent to which the organization has incorporated primary prevention into its materials; and
- Initiate an advocacy campaign to secure more resources or influence policies to promote prevention.

## BARRIERS TO ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Building organizational capacity for primary prevention does not happen overnight. When hotlines are ringing, shelters are full, dollars are stretched and staff is overworked, taking time out of the day to create an action plan for prevention can easily be set aside to do later. But increasing organizational capacity for prevention will make the work easier to accomplish. Below are some common barriers to building organization capacity for primary prevention and ways to address them. This is not an exhaustive list, nor are there solutions to all barriers.

**Defining prevention:** A major barrier is gaining a clear understanding of primary prevention. It is often confused with awareness activities. Raising awareness of domestic and sexual violence will not change behavior and prevent violence. Awareness of the issues is foundational, but prevention goes beyond raising awareness—prevention is changing attitudes, beliefs, skills and behaviors. Primary prevention may also be confused with secondary and tertiary prevention, which refer to activities that diminish the impact of violence and prevent future violence. Prioritize discussing the differences between primary prevention and awareness activities as a staff. Participate in an online training like Veto Violence ([www.vetoviolenace.org](http://www.vetoviolenace.org)). Have staff report at a staff meeting about what they learned.

**Board and leadership buy-in:** If the Board of Directors or those in the organization's management remain intervention-focused, try and identify

**Building organizational capacity for primary prevention does not happen overnight. But increasing organizational capacity for prevention will make the work easier to accomplish.**

**By including people with different roles and perspectives, prevention is more likely to be fully integrated into the agency.**

a champion for prevention among senior management or on the Board. If there is no easily identified leader for this, see who has potential to become a champion for social change. Everyone wants violence to end, and someone already in leadership can lead the way.

**Staffing:** Programs tend to hold the one person with an “outreach” or “prevention” title responsible for all of the primary prevention work of the organization. Create a prevention team to work on creating and implementing an action plan. A team can have multiple staff members with a shared passion for preventing violence. Perhaps this is the outreach coordinator, grant writer, volunteer coordinator, communications specialist, court advocate and executive director. By including people with different roles and perspectives, prevention is more likely to be fully integrated into the agency. In an ideal world, every program would have a Prevention Specialist on staff who is dedicated to the social change work needed in the community. However, when resources are hard to come by, money is lacking and hiring a full-time staff person is not possible, making small changes is still effective. Designate a staff person to focus on prevention efforts, even part time, to ensure prevention work keeps gaining momentum.

**Resources:** If it seems that the money just doesn’t exist for prevention work, think outside of the typical grants and identify new funding streams that could work for domestic and sexual violence prevention. These may be grants directed toward youth development, child abuse prevention, healthy communities, youth leadership, after-school programs, educational programming, anti-bullying, anti-violence and grants to promote safe schools. There might be opportunities to partner with schools or other community organizations to write these grants and receive funding.

---

### **ACTION PLANNING**

Creating an action plan for the organization is one way for staff to prioritize and to focus on what can actually be accomplished in primary prevention. This process is an efficient way to document details and assure accountability from staff members. Dedicating a staff meeting to developing a primary prevention action plan gets all staff involved and allows all staff to have input. Start by creating or using an existing inventory of possible changes in staffing, leadership, resources, structures and processes, and partnership development. Identify the level of importance, urgency and feasibility for each potential change. Once changes have been selected, create action steps to accomplish them.

On the next page is an example of a completed action plan.

**Goal: All staff will have ongoing training regarding primary prevention**

Action Steps (What will be done)	Person(s) Responsible (By whom: staff and leadership responsibilities)	Date Completed (By When)	Resources Required (At what costs)	Communication/ Collaborators (Who else should know about this)
1. Incorporate prevention topics into staff discussions	Prevention Educator, Program Manager	Will be ongoing	Staff time	All Staff
2. Form a staff team to work on primary prevention	Prevention Educator and Shelter Program Manager	Will be ongoing	Staff time	All staff, Board of Directors
3. Include primary prevention into staff/volunteer orientation materials	Executive Director/ Volunteer Coordinator	By December, 2012 (Completed October, 2012)	Staff time	All staff, Board of Directors
4. Add staff member whose primary work is primary prevention	Executive Director and Deputy Director	By June, 2013 (Completed April, 2012)	Annual salary plus benefits	All staff, Board of Directors, funders.

**If it seems that the money just doesn't exist for prevention work, think outside of the typical grants and identify new funding streams that could work for domestic and sexual violence prevention.**

## CASE EXAMPLES

Programs in Missouri are building organizational capacity for primary prevention in many innovative and creative ways. Here are a few examples happening in varied communities around the state:

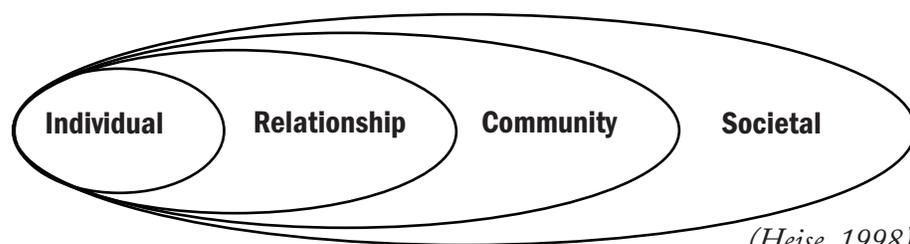
- Staff facilitated a training on intimate partner violence primary prevention at a Board of Directors' meeting;
- Organization formed a prevention advisory group made up of program staff and Board;
- Student intern did literature reviews every six months to identify emerging and promising practices in primary prevention;

**Primary prevention work can be an energizing social change endeavor that rekindles a spark of hope in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence.**

- Started “The Prevention Corner” to highlight prevention in the monthly newsletter;
- Formed a Prevention Team that meets monthly to discuss new research, curriculum, resources and to identify best practices;
- Dedicated a page on the organization’s website to prevention;
- Added primary prevention to new staff orientation training;
- Changed the organization’s mission to include primary prevention of domestic and sexual violence;
- Wrote a grant to do primary prevention work in middle schools and received full funding;
- Hired a Prevention Specialist to work with the local campus community;
- Created a social media campaign called, “What is a Healthy Relationship?”;
- Developed a prevention “elevator speech” that any staff member can provide in three minutes; and
- Worked with the local school district to draft a teen dating violence policy.

## CONCLUSION

This document is a resource to help organizations begin to integrate prevention throughout their structure and services. Primary prevention work can be an energizing social change endeavor that rekindles a spark of hope in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence. By incorporating prevention into all aspects of an organization’s work, the daunting task of changing the world will become more realistic and attainable. Doing primary prevention work requires working across the social ecological model (see diagram below) to use strategies at the individual, relationship, community and societal level to be comprehensive and to reinforce prevention messages at every level. So too must prevention be incorporated into every level of an organization dedicated to addressing and ending sexual and domestic violence—at the individual level, the relationship level between peers and colleagues, into the culture of the organization and into all of its policies and procedures. By doing so, prevention can be sustained and social change will occur.



*(Heise, 1998)*