Designing Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs: Current Approaches and a Proposal for the Prevention, Reduction and Identification of Sexual Misuse.
by James J. Krivacska
Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1990
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Krivacska’s topic centers on current efforts to prevent child sexual abuse. Recent attempts to stem the problem focus on training children to be the primary protectors of their own body space and their right to live free of abuse. These child sexual abuse prevention (CSAP) programs have wide public appeal and can be found in thousands of schools across the country. Yet having studied the implementation of CSAP programs, Krivacska has joined in the reasoned effort to examine the child sexual abuse prevention movement in a new light. His book is a contribution to an expanding literature which has begun to question the premise as well as the promise of sexual abuse prevention for young children.

The book is divided into three sections. First is an overview of the history of sexual abuse and a literature review which documents the incidence of the current problem. Krivacska also delves into the theory of prevention as a whole. Here, and again later in the book, we find his intention to be thorough, but the execution somewhat too broad. In Krivacska’s efforts to discuss CSAP programs from as many angles as possible, the reader may lose his/her focus on the specific problem he is trying to address.

The second section of the book provides a further indictment of the programs as Krivacska reviews child development theory in some detail and applies the theory to the practice of prevention programming for children. Here the author’s arguments are well-founded and are supported
by a growing body of research. His chapter on sexual development in young children is especially interesting. A number of researchers have recently expressed concern that children who are only exposed to sexuality education in the form of negative messages (i.e., sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, and AIDS) may develop an inappropriate understanding of their own natural sexual development. The significance of this prospect could be far reaching for this generation of developing children and for the society that they will create, yet the answer of CSAP promoters is a simple, "the means justify the ends" equation. Krivacska's concern about the healthy sexual development of young children does not allow him to accept such a response. Instead, he argues that the "eradication of child sexual abuse in the generation of adults who are now our children means attending to and nurturing the normal development of sexuality in our children" (p. ix). His argument is compelling and is, perhaps, the greatest strength of the book.

The final section of the book describes Krivacska's own model for prevention. The PRISM program (Prevention, Reduction, and Identification of Sexual Misuse) offers separate activities and concepts to children of different developmental abilities. Starting in the preschool and early elementary years, children are provided with "sexuality enhancement" education and "social competency enhancement" skills. The later elementary curriculum builds on skills learned in the earlier years with the continuing development of social competency. At this time, children are provided with a limited role in first identifying and then reporting sexually misusive behavior. In early and late adolescence, sexuality education is expanded to a discussion of the importance of mutual respect and responsibility in sexual relations. The concept of body rights is not proposed until this stage.

At each developmental stage a different form of teaching method is also described, including modeling, behavioral training, and group discussion. Krivacska suggests that the implementation of the program can not be done in one or two lessons such as traditional CSAP programs. He contends that the model might require 45 - 50 lessons, including two or three lessons per week.

One of the most attractive elements of the newly designed PRISM program is its inclusion of sexuality education in any discussion of child sexual abuse prevention. The author makes a convincing argument that the development of a healthful understanding of childhood sexuality and the bounds of appropriate sexual activity will give children a context for understanding the misuse of sexuality.

Krivacska's model is theory-based and child-centered; two qualities that are lacking in most traditional CSAP programs. It is therefore worth investigating further and testing for its adequacy in preventing child sexual
abuse. Although the book suffers from an occasional lack of focus, it is a welcome addition to the field. Parents, teachers, and professionals will value the author’s insight into the prevention of this most disturbing problem.

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