



Stand Strong • Stay Safe- Early Childhood Curriculum Overview

Overview:

Stand Strong • Stay Safe offers a classroom-based early childhood curriculum that promotes antivictimization through assertiveness skill building. Four lessons use interactive presentations, skills practice, and role play (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995; NSVRC, 2011) to teach kids how assertiveness can keep them safe from bullying, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Follow-Up Activities, including content-

relevant literature recommendations, allow for ongoing practice and repetition to increase retention of the skills (Rispen, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997). Home Connections and a Parent Guide involve parents in ensuring their children’s personal safety, and support children’s retention of the material through repetition at home (Kenny, Wurtele, & Alonso, 2012).

Skills-Based Strategy

This curriculum is informed by research showing that children can learn skills to keep themselves safe when they are young (Rispen, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997). Stand Strong • Stay Safe focuses on building assertiveness skills, which are universally applicable to situations requiring self-protection. Assertiveness theory draws on the belief that every person has the right to be treated with respect. When children use assertiveness skills, they behave in a way that demands respect by asking for what they need, saying “no” when they are uncomfortable, getting help when they need it, and confidently standing up for their rights and the rights of others (Davies, 2007).

Consistent with research showing the effectiveness of school-based programs focusing on skills (e.g., NSVRC, 2011), Stand Strong • Stay Safe facilitates the development of assertiveness skills with the following intended outcomes:

- Students will have increased knowledge of how others should treat them, including being able to identify physically and emotionally unsafe situations.
- Students will develop personal safety skills and be able to use them in real-world situations to prevent victimization.
- Students will be more open to discussing physical and sexual abuse, thus improving disclosure rates.

- In cases where victimization occurs, the duration will be shortened due to students’ self-protection skills.
- Students will have higher levels of confidence and be able to assertively ask for what they need, both in everyday interpersonal situations and in potentially unsafe situations.

Assertiveness skills provide students with a foundation for building positive relationships with other students and adults. Confident, assertive children who have a strong social support network and know how to get help are undesirable victims (NCMEC, 1999). Sexual predators are more likely to target children who seem like they will not stand up for themselves and will not get help (Rispen, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997). Bullies also prefer passive victims to assertive victims (Dominguez, 2013).

In addition to building students’ assertiveness skills, Stand Strong • Stay Safe aims to change the social dynamics within schools and classrooms by increasing the value placed upon kindness and empathy. Thus, through the presentations in this program, students are exposed to the importance of empathy and practice the power of kind words to promote a positive sense of community and improve interpersonal relationships in the classroom. When a school emphasizes kindness, empathy, and community, that school becomes a place where students thrive and get help rather than a place where they feel threatened.