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Project Evaluation: Feelings & Your Body  
A Preschool Curriculum for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Sandra L. Kleven

In July of 1983, the Coalition for Child Advocacy received a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This grant provided for the field test of a curriculum designed for preventing the sexual abuse of preschool-age children.

This paper is a review of the field test. The introductory sections provide general information about sexual abuse and show why preschool age children are even more vulnerable to sexual abuse than older children.

The curriculum section which follows will describe the field test and provide critical examination of the original curriculum plan.

This paper concludes with a description of recommended changes and additions to the curriculum based on the field test. A plan for the re-testing of the revised curriculum conclude the paper.

An addendum will provide copies of most materials discussed.

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The Flight of the Silent Children

Victims of sexual abuse are silent children. Silent first, because they are keeping a secret. Silent again, when they tell but are not believed. And silent finally, when they are denied access to justice in the courts.

Prevention programs give voice to these children. Prevention programs teach kids to tell the abuser, "No". Children are taught how to tell that abuse has occurred and they are taught that such abuse is not the fault of the children themselves.

According to figures provided by Seattle's Harborview Sexual Assault Center, sexual abuse is a problem which will affect 30-40% of all children by age 18. These abuses range from being shown the exposed genitals of an adult, to being fondled, to oral/genital contact, to anal intercourse and sometimes forcible rape.

Most of the time the offender is not a stranger to the child but someone the child knows and cares about.

Most experts, Nicholas Groth<sup>1</sup> and Susan Sgroi, M.D.<sup>2</sup> among them, believe that the offender who molests children suffer from a sexual fixation on children. For this person a child is the sexual object of choice although adult relationships and even marriage may be possible.

The offender molests children through means aimed at gaining the child's cooperation. As Dr Sgroi stated in Seattle, May 9th, 1984, "The sex offender is not about to stick his penis into the mouth of a protesting child". Cooperation from the child is necessary both to allow the sexual behavior and to insure that the child will not tell about the abuse.

The offender uses many methods to engage the child's cooperation. Bribery, threats, an exchange of affection, mis-information about the sexual abuse are among the techniques used.

In one scenario to which preschool children are particularly vulnerable, the offender tells the child that the abuse is "education about being grown up." The abuser might say "All dads (grandpas, grown-ups, whatever fits) do this with little girls (boys) and you're supposed to keep it a secret." The offender is often warm and endearing and has no difficulty gaining the needed response from the child.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Flight of the Silent Children	1
Preschool Age Kids: High Risk-- Great Hope for Prevention	3
The Project	4
Critique	4
The Revised Curriculum	6
The Re-test of the Curriculum	8
Addendum	

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ACQUISITION

Some offenders resort to force or violence but these are rare. The offender who hopes to gain continued access to a child will seek a child's confidence and will avoid causing physical injury.

Children sometimes keep the secret for many years and sometimes never tell. Sometimes children try to tell but are not believed. Professionals, including Detective Ola Sinnes of the Whatcom County Sheriff's Department, believe that children rarely lie when they report sexual abuse. Detective Sinnes has said that having interviewed several hundred children claiming sexual abuse he discovered only one to be lying. He said it was clear right away that the victim was lying because of the difference between her story, and the stories of the other children he'd interviewed.

From 1969-1974 the Detroit Police Department decided to give polygraph examinations to the children claiming abuse when they suspected the child was lying. After testing 137 children they discontinued the process because only one lying child had been discovered. They concluded that this error rate would be acceptably low if they applied a general policy of believing all children who report sexual abuse.

#### Preschool Age Kids: High Risk--Great Hope for Prevention

The factors surrounding sexual abuse that include trickery, betrayal, use of authority and secrecy place all children at extreme risk and threaten preschool children to an even greater degree.

To protect children several kinds of information are needed. Kids need to know for example that sexual abuse happens. They need to know that it's okay to say no to the offenders secret games. They need to know it's okay to tell this secret and they need to know they will be believed and protected. All children need this information.

Because they are only 3, 4, and 5 years old, preschool kids are more likely not to have been abused than groups of older kids. This is one age where prevention information can be highly effective in preventing the onset of sexual abuse.

At the same time some special age related factors cause these children to be more at risk, I will list these reasons here:

1. They trust adults. It is easy to befriend them. The abuser can exploit this.
2. Their information about the world comes from adults. The offender can tell them a behavior is okay and the child has no reason to doubt it.
3. They are taught to be obedient, to be good. They are often eager to please adults. These qualities can be exploited by the offender.
4. They are not considered reliable witnesses. Their reports are often passed off as imaginary. lls and often have no words to use to describe a sexual activity.
6. They are very often in the care of others.
7. Sexual offenders put themselves in situations where they have access to young children.

To counter-act these risk factors children need information provided through age appropriate materials and activities. This information should come from parents primarily, but it is useful for it to also be provided in the child's preschool or day care program. In order to provide skills to children in a consistent way a preschool or day care based presentation is a must as many parents will not teach their children these things because they are embarrassed, unwilling or they don't know how.

## The Project

The grant which funded the field test of "Feelings & Your Body" contained several requirements. We agreed to present the curriculum in 25 preschool or day care programs during school year '83-'84. We agreed to design a method for pre- and post-testing so we could evaluate the project. We further agreed to offer presentations about the curriculum to the parents and teachers connected with each day care or preschool.

By May of 1984, these objectives were accomplished. At this time we asked the granting organization Northwest Area Foundation to extend the project allowing time for evaluation, revision and a re-test during the fall of 1984. This was given to us.

"Feelings & Your Body" is a sexual abuse prevention curriculum developed by Shelly McFaddin, while a student at Western Washington University. It contains outlines for 5, 30 minute lessons to be provided, ideally during 5 consecutive days. The days of the curriculum are labeled "Monday" through "Friday".

The curriculum contains a strong emphasis on feelings and makes use of a variety of materials including story books, filmstrips, a film, and prevention materials.

During the first several presentations the program was presented essentially as written. Since that time, a process of modification has occurred that has now reached what may be the final point. The major changes include a condensation of the material to three days, an elimination of many of the media elements, elimination of the story books that are not directly related to the prevention of sexual abuse and the inclusion of anatomically correct dolls, both to demonstrate good and bad touch and to teach private parts. A song has also been added to the program.

## Critique

The purpose of a field test is to find out whether or not something works in the real world. Although "Feelings & Your Body" is a nicely organized curriculum it became clear during the first presentation to children that somethings just wouldn't work.

4

It was clear for example that on "Wednesday" of the curriculum the "Push Game" had to go. The "Push Game" is played by first marking a circle on the floor. Two children are instructed to kneel on hands and knees.

Using only their bodies, each tries to push the other out of the circle. Not a good idea for preschoolers who often cry when they are pushed around, who push too hard and who feel badly when they "lose". Though it's designed to teach assertiveness, we eliminated it as inappropriate for preschool age children.

When presenting "Feelings & Your Body" as originally written, three 30 minute sessions were used to discuss feelings, problems and the community support system. Sexual abuse was not the topic directly until day 4. For awhile, I justified this as necessary to develop rapport but in time it began to seem that I should spend all the time with the child, teaching the skills needed to protect against sexual abuse. The rapport development time is still needed and I use the 1st session to talk about feelings and use Lori Freeman's book "Its My Body" as a non-threatening beginning. Ms. Freeman's book talks about a child's right to say no to any kind of uncomfortable touching and makes no direct reference to the private parts of the body.

A filmstrip called "What Faces Say", is recommended for use on the 2nd day of the program. Another called "Twist and Turn" is suggested for the 3rd day.

These filmstrips are nice and are age appropriate. They hold the children's attention without any problem. But they have little to do with sexual abuse and they are expensive to purchase so I eliminated them.

The film "Who Do You Tell?" is recommended for "Wednesday", the 3rd day of the program. This film contains description of various problems children might face and suggests that there are community people who can help children. It discusses fires, being lost, child abuse, spouse battering, child molesters, and "the touching problem". Suggested helpers are doctors, nurses, police, child protection workers, clergy plus others. I stopped using it when a parent said "That film is a waste of time. They stopped watching it after the first 3 minutes". Now, I tell the kids they can get help from parents or a teacher. Considering the perimeters of a preschoolers world those are about the only "helpers" to whom a child would have access.

I also limit the problem we discuss to "the touching problem".

5

When the decision was made to modify the curriculum, we asked parents and the participating teachers for ideas. They suggested the following:

1. More interaction with the child is needed.
2. More one on one participation is needed.
3. Repetition of the key points would be useful.
4. Use of puppets and dolls should be increased.
5. Several suggested eliminating the film "Who Do You Tell?" as being over the children's heads.

A high priority of this project is to eventually enable preschool and child care staff to present the program. Toward this end we want to minimize the use of multiple outside materials and expensive audio-visual resources. This consideration is important as we consider new materials.

#### The Revised Curriculum

The teacher who presents the revised version of "Feeling & Your Body" to children will need the following materials.

"Feeling" faces      pictures of faces expressing the feelings happy, sad, silly, mad, scared, confused.

Tape of song      "When I Like the Way You Touch Me"

Family of anatomically correct dolls (male & female adults, and male & female children)

Story book, It's My Body, Lori Freeman

Trust Your Feelings, C.A.R.E. Productions Association

Story, "Jimmy's Bedtime Story" (see addendum)

Puppet Play, "It's Hard to Say No to Somebody Big" (see addendum)

The following is an outline of each days presentation. The final version of the curriculum will provide "scripts" to the teacher, that is, a word for word example of the presentation.

#### PROGRAM OUTLINE

Day 1 - 20 minutes      Discussion based on "Feeling", Faces Story, It's Your Body Song, "When I Like the Way You Touch Me"

Day 2 - 30 minutes      Discussion of good touch and bad touch. Jimmy's Bedtime Story, Private body parts named. Practice saying No. Puppet Play, "It's Hard to Say No to Somebody Big", and Trust Your Feelings.

Day 3 - 20 minutes      Discussion - review Puppet Play, "Jimmy's Bedtime Story" Song, "When I Like the Way You Touch Me"

This curriculum is designed so that different elements can be re-used during the year. The song can become one of the groups regular songs. The story and the plays can be used independently, too.

The choice is based on the observation made by Jon Conte,<sup>3</sup> a researcher at the University of Chicago. Dr. Conte noted that the quality of prevention programs remains the most constant when teachers are given scripts to follow. He said that without scripts teachers are inclined to invent their own horror stories, that do not best serve the interests of the children.

A "scripted" curriculum tends to thwart spontaneity and can become rigid. I hope teachers will experiment with it expanding discussion when the children seem engaged and shortening sections that run too long for restless children. I take such liberties with it all the time.

All of the materials needed to present the curriculum are available from the Coalition for Child Advocacy.

New material I have written or adapted to fit the lesson plan are two plays to be used with dolls as puppets titled "Jimmy's Bedtime Story" and "It's Hard to Say No to Somebody Big". (See Addendum.)

### The Re-Test of the Curriculum

In April of 1984, a request was sent to the Northwest Area Foundation asking to extend the one year field test grant. During the summer months of 1984 the project would be reviewed, revised and the necessary new material would be developed. The Foundation approved the request in May. In the fall the revised curriculum will be re-tested.

At this time the first field test has been completed. The data gathered from pre- and post-testing has been coded under the supervision of Dr. Martha Nelson of Western Washington University, and a computer program has been developed to process the information. The results will be available by July, 1984.

The curriculum will be ready for re-testing in September of 1984. Ten groups of preschool children will participate in the re-testing.

The revisions discussed in this paper have been made without the benefit of information that will surface as the pre- and post-tests are analyzed. However, as the primary tester, I am confident with the degree of learning I observed in the child participants.

The process of revision that has occurred throughout the testing has been aimed at perfecting and fine tuning a program that seems to have worked effectively even in its early form. A comparison of the early data with the information to be gathered in the fall may show that the changes in the curriculum change the test results. I suspect they will remain the same.

In the fall of 1984, the information gained from the field test of "Feelings & Your Body" will be presented at the National Conference on Family Relations in San Francisco and at the Los Angeles Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Groth, Ph.D., is an associate of Forensic Mental Health Associates of Newton Center Massachusetts. He is author of many books and articles, including Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Sgroi, M.D., is the author of the Handbook of Clinical Intervention in Child Sexual Abuse.

<sup>3</sup> "An Evaluation of A Program to Prevent The Sexual Victimization of Young Children", Jon R. Conte, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago.

ADDENDUM

Song - "When I Like the Way You Touch Me"

"It's Hard to Say No to Somebody Big"

"Jimmy's Bedtime Story"\*

- Feelings & Your Body  
A Prevention Curriculum for Preschoolers (original version)

\* Jimmy's Bedtime Story will be published by January, 1985 as an illustrated story book retitled Touching.

"WHEN I LIKE THE WAY YOU TOUCH ME"

By  
Geoff Morgan

as performed by  
Sandra L. Kleven & the SOAP Box Players

When I like the way you touch me I say "yes".  
When I like the way you touch me I say "yes".  
When I like the way you touch me I say "yes".  
When I don't like it I say "no".

I like it when you tickle me.  
I like it when you tickle me.  
I like it when you tickle me.  
But not when you tickle too much.

I like it when you throw me up in the air.  
I like it when you throw me up in the air.  
I like it when you throw me up in the air.  
But not when you don't catch me.

I like it when you rub my shoulders and back.  
I like it when you rub my shoulders and back.  
I like it when you rub my shoulders and back.  
But not when I've got sunburn.

I like it in the morning when we wrestle and roll.  
I like it in the morning when we wrestle and roll.  
I like it in the morning when we wrestle and roll.  
but not when you won't let go.

If you're gonna say I better not tell.  
If you're gonna say I better not tell.  
If you're gonna say I better not tell.  
Then I say you better not touch.

This is my body. It belongs to me.  
This is my body. It belongs to me.  
This is my body. It belongs to me.  
What happens to it is up to me.

"IT'S HARD TO SAY NO TO SOMEONE BIG"

Lenny: What's the matter Benny?  
Benny: Oh, I'm feeling kind of bad.  
Lenny: How come?  
Benny: Well see, I went to the zoo.  
Lenny: Yeah.  
Benny: And I was practicing saying no.  
Lenny: That's great.  
Benny: Yeah, it was pretty neat. First I went over to a little ground hog and I said no.  
Lenny: Good for you.  
Benny: That was easy, so I went over to the deer and I said no, and then I went over to an alligator and I said NO!  
Lenny: All right! What happened then?  
Benny: Then I went over to the lion's den and there was big old lion standin' there all orange and bushy. With big eyes and big teeth. I was getting kind of scared, but I was gonna say no. Then it opened it's giant lion's mouth.  
Lenny: Yeah....  
Benny: And it let out a huge lion roar.  
Lenny: Oh no.

Benny: And I.....I.....I said yes.  
Lenny: Oh no.  
Benny: Oh yes. I'm a failure. I can't do anything right.  
Lenny: No you're not.  
Benny: I'm not?  
Lenny: No. It's hard to say no to somebody big. It's not your fault.

If you can't say no and you can't get away, and you do have a touching problem--it's still not your fault and you should tell someone.



JIMMY'S BEDTIME STORY  
(A Story About Touching Problems)

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Sandra L. Kleven

"Jimmy," said his mother, "one of my favorite things to do is tickle your tummy." She tickled Jimmy's tummy to show him what she meant. "I also like to give you hugs," she said, squeezing him tight. Jimmy smiled. "But especially," she teased, "I like to bite your ear."

"Stop it! Stop it!" laughed Jimmy.

"Okay," said his mother, "when you say stop, I always stop, right?"

"Yeah, but I'm just kidding, Mom. Do it again!" Jimmy said.

"Not now, Jimmy," she said, "because I want to talk to you about touching problems."

"What's a touching problem, Mom?" asked Jimmy.

"Well, Jimmy," she said, "if I tickled your tummy until you were out of breath and I wouldn't stop no matter what you said,

that would be a touching problem."

"Oh Mom!" said Jimmy, "That would be a mean thing to do."

"Yes, it is mean to force people to do things and there are other kinds of touching problems too," said Jimmy's mother.

"Do you mean like when the dog licks me on the mouth?" asked Jimmy. "Yuck!" he said, making a funny face.

"Or when a bully gets you down and sits on you and won't let you go home," his mom said.

"That happened to me once," said Jimmy.

"Oh, really?" said his mom, "How did you feel about that?"

"Mad!" said Jimmy, "I was so mad and I couldn't get him back. Boy, was I mad."

"Have you ever been tricked?" asked his mother.

Jimmy thought really hard about that. Then he asked, "Like when someone says, 'Open your mouth and close your eyes, and you will get a big surprise,' and the surprise is a worm?"

"Yeah, that's what I mean," said Mom, "or, like this. Once

there was a little girl....

"Did I know her?" asked Jimmy.

"No," answered his mother, "but she is a real life person. This little girl was in her own neighborhood one day when a neighbor said, 'Come into my house to see my new kittens.' This person was a grownup so she went right in to see the new kittens but she didn't see any. Then the man said, 'If you sit on my lap I'll show you the kittens.' Then the girl felt funny. She didn't know why but she could tell that it was a trick. Then the man tried to put his hand down her panties."

"He did?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, he did. And she ran out of there as fast as she could," said Jimmy's mom.

"Did she get away?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, she got away and she told her mother about it." she said.

"What did they do to the man?" asked Jimmy.

"Well, he got into trouble for what he did," said his mother, "and now he's getting help for his touching problem." Later the little girl said that even before he tried to do it, she

got this warning feeling. This is exactly what she said, 'I just knew that something was wrong and besides that, there weren't any kittens.'

"I bet she was so mad," said Jimmy.

"She was," nodded his mother, "and you know, Jimmy, I think kids do get a warning feeling when something funny's going on and I think you need to learn to trust it. Some kids say it's an uncomfortable feeling in your stomach or just a funny feeling and when you get it -- you better try to get away."

"Is it like you're going to throw up?" asked Jimmy.

"Maybe," said his mother. "But, Jimmy, if anyone tries to touch private parts of your body like your bottom or your penis, you don't have to let them no matter what they say even if you don't get a warning feeling."

"Oh, Mom," said Jimmy, "I wouldn't let anyone do that."

"Well, if anyone tries," she said, "this is what you can say. 'That part of my body is private. Don't touch me there.' Now, I want you to practice that with me."

So together they said, "That part of my body is private. Don't touch me there."

"Good!" said his mom. "Nobody has a right to touch private parts of your body. It doesn't matter who it is, not even me."

"What if there's a sore on my bottom?" asked Jimmy.

"What do you think?" asked Jimmy's mom.

"Well, I'd want you to fix it," said Jimmy.

"Yes," said his mother. "that's the kind of thing you have to trust your feelings about. It is okay for me or for a doctor to take care of sores and things like that. It's okay to get help with washing. It's okay for someone big to change a baby's diapers. But it's never okay for a grownup to touch private parts of a child's body and tell them it's a secret. That's a secret you can tell someone, even if you promised not to tell."

"I will Mom," said Jimmy. "I won't let anyone do anything funny to me."

Then Jimmy's mother said, "If you ever get tricked or if a person says you'll get in trouble for telling, don't believe them, Jimmy. Come and tell me right away because I'd always believe you and it wouldn't be your fault."

"I'd always tell you," said Jimmy. "but you know what?"

"What, honey?" said Jimmy's mother.

"I really, really want some hot chocolate. Can I have some?"

"Okay," she said, "you can have some hot chocolate. But you will remember what we talked about, won't you?"

"Yeah, Mom," Jimmy smiled. "I'll remember."

Written by Sandra L. Kleven

**END**