

## Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Sexual Violence, Abuse, and Exploitation

Experiencing intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or sexual abuse can have a wide range of negative impacts. These may include concerns related to physical health, sexually transmitted infections, substance use, academic engagement and work satisfaction, social support and relationships, suicide attempts, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, stigmatization, feelings of shame and self-blame, and other mental health symptoms (Basile & Smith, 2011; Banyard et al., 2001; Campbell, 2002; Collin-Vézina et al., 2013; Hall & Hall, 2011; Smith & Breiding, 2011; Stockman et al., 2023). For the most current local data on dating violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, please visit MDH's interactive [Adverse Childhood Experiences Data \(www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html\)](http://www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

Research indicates there are many ways that communities can prevent intimate partner violence and sexual violence and abuse, mitigate their impacts, and support survivors/victims.

### Effective strategies

Strategies for addressing youth sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation and supporting victims/survivors include:

- **Education programs** about sexual violence to increase understanding and change social norms, including promoting healthy and safe sexual behavior; improving communication, social, and problem-solving skills; and developing an understanding of gender dynamics, gender norms, and masculinity (Basile et al., 2016; Youth.gov, n.d.).
- **Bystander intervention initiatives and corresponding best practices**, such as hiring and training dedicated staff; ensuring initiatives are continuous, interactive, and include opportunities to practice skills; addressing attitudes and norms that contribute to sexual violence; and tailoring content to specific subgroups as appropriate, particularly groups that may be at higher risk of exhibiting concerning behavior (Jouriles et al., 2018; Public Health England, 2020; Sulley et al., 2020).
- **Clinical and other intensive interventions** for youth who exhibit concerning behavior and youth who have experienced sexual violence, abuse, and/or exploitation (Hall & Hall, 2011; Basile et al., 2016). Interventions are most effective when they are trauma-informed and tailored specifically to sexual violence, abuse, and/or exploitation. Youth who are victims/survivors may also benefit from support groups. For youth who exhibit concerning behavior, incorporating caregivers into the treatment process can help strengthen relationships improve parenting practices.

#### Relevant indicator(s):

- Dating violence
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual abuse by non-relative

Strategies for promoting positive peer relationships and addressing peer violence; promoting positive parenting practices and addressing family abuse; and promoting relationships with caring adults can also help address youth sexual violence and exploitation and support youth victims/survivors.

- **Training for professionals who work with youth** regarding identifying warning signs, understanding healthy sexual development, best practices for preventing and addressing sexual violence and abuse, and how to respond to disclosures of these experiences by youth (Basile et al., 2016; Letourneau et al., 2020).
- **Clear policies and consistent supervision and monitoring** should be established in youth programs to identify and address concerning behavior as quickly as possible (Basile et al., 2016; Letourneau et al., 2020). This should include specific steps, such as risk assessment of the program’s setting or hiring practices, speaking with the youth’s parent or guardian about behavior concerns, and referring youth with behavior concerns to additional services. Similarly, it is important to ensure youth programs are led by caring, trustworthy adults to foster a safe environment, encourage youth to disclose incidents when they occur, and model healthy relationships and communication.

## Examples of Minnesota initiatives

### Safe Harbor

Safe Harbor is a statewide program that provides a wide range of services to youth who have experienced sex and/or labor exploitation or trafficking. It uses a cross-sector “no wrong door” approach to ensure agencies, providers, and organizations across the state are able to identify youth who are at risk of or have experienced exploitation and connect youth with resources. Regional Navigators serve as contacts for youth in different regions of the state and provide service navigation assistance and social support to youth and professionals who serve youth.

More information about [Safe Harbor Minnesota \(www.health.state.mn.us/communities/safeharbor/index.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/safeharbor/index.html)

### Annex Teen Clinic

Annex Teen Clinic provides sexual health services and education. Clinical services include birth control prescriptions, STI testing, and pregnancy testing. Educational services include presentations for youth on a wide range of topics including birth control methods, consent, gender identity, sexual orientation, healthy relationships, communication, and sexual exploitation. They also provide culturally specific programming for African American youth in North Minneapolis.

More information about [Annex Teen Clinic \(annexteenclinic.org/\)](http://annexteenclinic.org/)

## Examples of national initiatives

### The Healthy Relationships Project

The Healthy Relationships Project is a trauma-informed program for schools and youth organizations that aims to prevent child sexual abuse. It involves engaging caregivers, training educators and youth professionals, and a curricula for youth to improve understanding of healthy sexual behavior and related topics, including communication, empathy, and boundaries.

More information about [Prevention School-Based Curricula \(preventchildabuse.org/resources/prevention-school-based-curricula/\)](https://preventchildabuse.org/resources/prevention-school-based-curricula/)

### Bringing in the Bystander

Bringing in the Bystander is an evidence-based prevention program for high schools, colleges, and workplaces. The program provides training, information, and guidance to participants about how to safely intervene as a bystander in situations that involve risk of harm, and it includes a mix of lectures, discussions, interactive activities, small groups, role-playing, and opportunities to practice skills.

More information about [Bringing in the Bystander \(www.unh.edu/research/prevention-innovations-research-center/evidence-based-initiatives/bringing-bystander\)](http://www.unh.edu/research/prevention-innovations-research-center/evidence-based-initiatives/bringing-bystander)

Or visit [Bringing in the Bystander for a better & safer college community \(www.soteriasolutions.org/bringing-in-the-bystander\)](http://www.soteriasolutions.org/bringing-in-the-bystander)

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