



## Navigating School-Based Collaboration Challenges

Total time: 23min 56sec

**Kate Hildebrandt** 00:00

Thank you for listening to this short recording. This series on common prevention challenges is part of a larger audio series to help explore creative prevention ideas and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. In this recording, we're going to discuss some challenges specific to school settings, including both K through 12 and college campuses and brainstorm some strategies to navigate those challenges. Today, we're joined by Sexual Assault Task Force Staff.

**Meg Foster** 00:22

Hello, I'm Meg Foster. I'm the Prevention Program Coordinator.

**Carli Rohner** 00:25

Hi there, my name is Carli Rohner, and I'm the Campus Advocate Coordinator.

**Kate Hildebrandt** 00:28

And I'm Kate Hildebrandt; I'm the Campus Coordinator. So the challenges we're going to discuss were identified by participants in statewide comprehensive prevention training. So let's get started.

**Meg Foster** 00:38

So one of the biggest challenges that we hear a lot about is navigating fear about discussing trauma, sexual violence, and/or sex.

**Carli Rohner** 00:48

Yeah, this is hard depending on maybe what audience you have or the history of that community, or age. Age comes up a lot of times when we're talking to folks about this. And so one of the first things I want to know, if you're working with K to 12 students, especially those younger folks that are maybe in preschool, kindergarten, first grade, second grade, we can be helping folks learn the foundation of prevention in developmentally appropriate ways. And so I just want to encourage folks that even though the general topics that we're talking about are looking at anti-oppression work, and how do we prevent violence from happening in the first place, we don't have to jump into the higher echelons of that 301/401 level material with kindergarteners, we can start at the basics, and Oregon has some really great frameworks for this. And so I just want to encourage folks to be scaling down and thinking about how you can make material or curriculum or interventions appropriate based on the age of the folks that you're working with.

That being said, I also think it's important that we acknowledge, trauma impacts a lot of folks in our community; it impacts us as preventionists and sometimes we bring our own things, like we bring our own traumatic history or we bring our own hangups into this work. So it's really important as preventionists that we get a good handle and comfort on being able to talk about these topics before we

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go out and try and engage our community. It's really hard if you're in a, especially like a presentation setting, and then you're trying to wrestle with triggers or other things that you have in that setting. So really encourage folks to work on that ahead of time before you get out in front of folks.

And then the other part is, you can prepare participants or other people that you're working with around what kind of content you're going to be talking about. So if you are maybe talking with some older students around domestic violence, sexual violence, any of these topics that feel like they might be harder, you can emotionally prep folks for that by letting them know this is what we're gonna be talking about. Helping folks to reframe that we, yes, we're gonna talk about some difficult topics and as a whole violence can be difficult for communities and individuals to talk about, but we also have an amazing opportunity to have communities that are healthier, safer. So being able to help folks reframe to what the positive component is that you're going to be talking about, like "Today, we're going to be building really awesome skills to be able to help us reduce violence so that less people have to experience this." I think that is amazing and being able to get not only community buy-in, but keep folks engaged in the work longer as students.

The other thing that you can do is be really intentional and thoughtful ahead of time about how you are, when you're bringing up topics that are hard for folks, going to be compassionately connecting them to the services that can support them if they have experienced violence. So maybe you are going into elementary school, what does that look like to provide advocacy or connect somebody to resources? Who is a second grader? What does that look like when you're going into a high school setting? For colleges, you might have some built in resources on your campus, but if not, what community partner are you going to be able to not only refer folks to, but be able to have met, spoke with, know what those resources look like as a preventionist to prep folks and do that warm handoff. So that's a couple of areas that you can focus on because I get that this is a pretty common hang up or fear for folks and we've got some pretty great workarounds for that.

### **Meg Foster** 04:24

I also just want to acknowledge that this work takes practice. Knowing myself, I am a lot less comfortable talking about things that I haven't practiced talking about. And so building in time to actually practice talking about these things, and navigating interesting questions you might get or things that might throw you for a loop, and practicing those particularly maybe with your colleagues in hopefully consensual ways. But looking for those opportunities to practice, we recognize that that is a really important thing to do and so if you are want additional resources on that some of the sections in the sexual health promotion piece of the comprehensive prevention toolkit have some good questions to help you start thinking about how you can respond to those things, how you can talk about those things, and then building in opportunities for you to practice.

### **Kate Hildebrandt** 05:17

Another thing that I sometimes remind myself -- and this has also been helpful sometimes when working with supporting our partners in approaching communities that are hesitant to talk about this, for example in the college context, sometimes at religious colleges where they might be hesitant to talk

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about sex or they're getting pushed back from communities, from families, from staff, faculty -- we know that these things are happening regardless of whether we talk about them or not. We know statistically that sex is happening. We know statistically that sexual violence is happening. Building that base and using the data that we know we have not just nationally but for the state of Oregon, we have the Oregon Healthy Teen survey we have a lot of data about campus, high school, even really [unclear] K through 12 experiences of different kinds of violence, different knowledge about sex; we know that people are talking about it. Establishing that that is a baseline and providing those healthy ways to talk about it is really beneficial and really important. So I always try to ground myself and remind myself of that whenever I'm nervous about talking about a specific topic that I know they're getting information about it anyways, so there's no point avoiding it.

### **Meg Foster** 06:33

One of the conversations we were just having before we started recording as well is like being attuned to the different things, information people are sharing and the different resources people are accessing. And so our ongoing education and learning is a really valuable part of this as well. Sometimes we don't know the language people use, sometimes we don't know what people are talking about these days, or depending on our audiences and so being an ongoing learner and building that into our practice can be really helpful and dispelling some of that fear as well.

### **Carli Rohner** 07:08

To the point about saying that students particularly are already talking about these issues, talking about topics like trauma, talking about topics like sexual violence or sex, there's some really great research out there that shows when we provide folks with accurate, medically accurate information, what the health outcomes are for students, and those are really positive. And so bringing some of those resources in to be able to talk to communities about Yes, talking about oppression and talking about trauma and talking about sexual violence feels scary, we can acknowledge that. At the end of the day, we all want for our students to have healthy, safe, happy lives where they're able to live and be their full selves. And this is the health outcome that we can achieve by sharing this information. Being able to dial it down to that level can also be a helpful talking point for folks.

So off of that, a lot of times we go to talk about lesson content and what might come up for that and oftentimes, there might be fear around how parents or other caregivers would react to that lesson content.

### **Meg Foster** 08:23

Yeah, that is a common fear that we have, especially building off of the last piece that we just mentioned. Being proactive and transparent is really, really important. Before, during, and after, how transparent can we be -- a lot of that fear or that reaction from parents stems from this peace of not knowing what that means or what that entails or what that looks like. So if we can be proactive, if we can communicate, if we can support people getting access to the information, just sometimes saying

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like, sex education can feel really, really scary to a lot of people because they don't know what that looks like when you're working with a five year old versus working with an 18 year old versus working with a 35 year old, right? Like what that looks like. And so being proactive and transparent about that, communicating before, during, and after, making yourself available for questions that people might be having, sharing your contact information or sharing contact information that is useful for folks to get answers to their questions can be really helpful. But that being proactive piece is going to be really beneficial.

Additionally, something to consider that can be really challenging is that considering what is age appropriate here and a colleague at the Department of Education here in Oregon once shared with me that if young people, if adults are asking the questions, answering those questions is age appropriate because they're already hearing things, they're already talking about things, and making sure that they have appropriate and accurate information is really valuable.

### **Carli Rohner** 10:09

One of the things that you can do to really help create that transparency is also communicating what your intent is. So your intent is not to take the place of caregivers by offering this information. Your intent is to educate and that is what folks in our school settings are supposed to do. And so communicating parents' or caregivers' roles in this content and how they can either best support it or how they can frame these conversations at home to communicate their values can be a really helpful way to gain partnership in your curriculum.

One of the things that we also see, particularly around lesson content, but in general is around pushback from either schools or communities around the inclusion of LGBTQ content or information or education. And so what are some ways that we could address that?

### **Kate Hildebrandt** 11:04

Yeah, this directly relates to what we were just talking about because sometimes the pushback that we see in communities can be not necessarily from students or from staff/faculty, although it definitely can come from those places as well, but often pushback from parents in the K through 12 system. One thing that is great about being an Oregon is that we have a lot of support here for K through 12 inclusion with regards to LGBT students, and specifically to trans students and their access to education. So we're going to give some additional resources at the end of this recording that people can access, but two that come to mind for me right off the bat are that ODE [Oregon Department of Education] collaborated with a bunch of organizations to create some guidance for schools around inclusion of trans students and how to support them. So you have that; there's also an organization called Basic Rights Oregon, that does a lot work around this.

So one thing is to know that there is a lot of support on the policy and on the structural level for, that we in Oregon believe that that is valuable and that it is worth it. However, that doesn't always necessarily translate to the community being proactive in supporting that. So going back to this capacity building conversation that we've been weaving throughout these various recordings, taking some time to build the groundwork with administrators, with other community organizations, to kind of gauge what

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level of support there is and to make sure that you do have a firm level of support and that you are prepared to stand your ground or for what that looks like.

I also think especially for those of us who might be doing this work, who might be straight or heterosexual, it really is our role to stand up for those communities and make sure that we are advocating for that and using our privilege effectively in those ways. Obviously important for all of us to be doing that, but we have to recognize the dynamics of privilege and oppression and that in some communities, it's not safe for trans or queer folks to be speaking out on behalf of rights of others or of themselves. So we need to use our privilege where available.

### **Carli Rohner** 13:11

Having support resources available and in place before you go into these conversations is really important, both for you as a preventionist, but also be thinking along those guidelines of, if we're going to be connecting folks and doing a warm handoff, when we're talking about trauma, maybe to an advocate or community agency, we also need to be thinking about culturally specific resources for folks that we can pair if these conversations are happening in their community and [if] I identify as LGBTQ or identify as a person of color, how am I going to get support when my community is doing pushback about this very publicly. So being able to connect folks with support resources in their community is also something you're gonna want to build into your overall education plan.

### **Kate Hildebrandt** 13:54

There's also you know, sometimes when I think about this, you may not be able to get the level of inclusion and support that you want right off the bat, but are there certain steps that you can take to be inclusive of that in this in your curriculum or in your presentations or in other curriculums? Like does that include the inclusion of gender neutral pronouns and normalizing that? Could you maybe start there with that community? For some communities, for some schools, that in and of itself can feel like a really big step, but anytime you're doing anything like that, like Carli said, really important to be mindful that if you're working with, for example, a classroom of students, you can never know the identities of students in the room -- some students in the room may be out and open it some students in the room, maybe not -- and so you need to be offering support resources for all students to access regardless of whether they're comfortable coming forward about that or not.

Alright, the next question that we got was around teachers or maybe others who feel like issues shouldn't be addressed with their kids. So being maybe protective of them or not wanting certain content to be talked about by you or others.

### **Meg Foster** 15:04

Yeah, there are a lot of assumptions about what kids currently know, what they think they know, what we think they know, and what they want to know. There's a lot of assumptions tied to this and this piece, a lot of times this piece of this shouldn't be taught in my classroom or this shouldn't be taught with this population, or this population doesn't need this, is also tied to a lot of fear about whether or not sexual

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violence is occurring. We know data shows us time and time again that it is extremely likely that there are survivors in every room that we are in regardless of who's in that room.

This fear is often tied to this piece of where sexuality, education, sexual violence, trauma, where those topics should be discussed and a lot of times people will say, or come from the space of like, this should be taught in the home. The truth is, is that families, parents, caregivers play a role in teaching this information, but so do schools because it's the school's job, whether it is a campus or a K-12 school, to prepare young people or adults, if they're non-traditional students (not to exclude folks), it's their role to prepare people for existing in the world with all the skills, all the tools, that they need to have to be healthy and live healthy, safe lives in our society. And so they do play a role, schools absolutely play a role in promoting healthy people.

And so what those roles look like, again, a colleague at the Department of Education once talked about a school's role being more focused on teaching information, whereas a parent or caregiver role might be more aligned with teaching values tied to that information. So thinking about those things, I also encourage everyone to work with parents, work with teachers. I also think this problem is indicative of how we have historically done a lot of prevention work, which is to partner with one classroom or in one space and not do the additional work of institutional level change or educator level change or administrator level change; which, that infrastructure is really, really critical in order to actually sustain some of this change. So although maybe a teacher, maybe one classroom is an intro to a certain community, geographic community, school district, institution, but if we aren't willing to have those conversations with the administrators and the other folks, we're going to continue to see this tension.

### **Kate Hildebrandt** 18:09

Somewhere that on college campuses we sometimes see this is actually with graduate students or with graduate communities, that it's framed a little bit differently. But I hear very similar messages of, my students don't need this, or this is so specialized, this doesn't relate at all to what we're talking about. So with that, being prepared to talk about how it does relate because violence prevention, all of these different skills, I mean, the skills related to violence prevention, communication, boundaries, bystander intervention, anything like that, of course relates to any profession, any life skills in the world. But being able to talk about how and why can be really helpful because sometimes it's that once we get to the college level it flips from, I don't want you communicating values, to well, they already know those values, they don't need those values communicated because they supposedly had it when they were in K-12 or when they were at home with parents. So it's not an opposite way of explaining it, but being prepared to look at it from those different perspectives and connect it in different ways.

### **Meg Foster** 19:16

One of my go to taglines is that we're asking generations of people who were taught to be uncomfortable talking about sex to all of a sudden be comfortable talking about it, and it's not going to happen overnight. But we have, our history is to not talk about sex and sexuality. Our history is also not to talk about violence, not to make space for people to tell their stories of experiences with violence and

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abuse. And part of what we're trying to do at our prevention work is shift those norms to contribute to a healthier and safer society for all people.

### **Carli Rohner** 19:50

All that goes back to, we've talked about in other audio recordings about setting meetings or laying that groundwork to talk with administrators, parents, whoever you need that buy in from upfront, trying to figure out what is that specific barrier that's holding them back -- if they're able to articulate that -- from allowing you to be able to do that prevention work. And so we have addressed a lot of different areas across kind of the lifespan from K-12 and then again, up through college level working with adults and into graduate programs, they're going to have different reasons why you might not be welcome in that space. And so trying to figure out how you can best address that at the beginning often will save you a lot of work and trouble down the road.

### **Meg Foster** 20:36

There are also a lot of additional resources in the state of Oregon and outside of the state of Oregon that can really support you all in navigating this. Some of the resources that are specific to K-12 are the Sexual Health and School Health team at the Department of Education. There are some really cool folks doing some really amazing work to really support comprehensive sexuality, education, and violence and abuse prevention and education in our K-12 schools. Similarly, the Oregon Youth Sexual Health Partnership is a statewide collaborative of government and public partnership to improve the work being done to promote the Oregon Youth Sexual Health Plan and sexual violence prevention in our state, as well as the adolescent health team at the Oregon Health Authority. Some other resources that exist that really support both campus and K-12 work: one is Oregon Student Voice, which is a student led organization in our state who's doing some really cool work, advocacy work, and policy work. Similarly, we at the task force have a lot of really great resources to support folks.

### **Kate Hildebrandt** 21:46

Yeah, when we think about campuses, too, there's a lot of great national organizations who are doing a lot of cool things. NASPA [National Association of Student Personnel Administrators] is one that we're probably all familiar with that offers support resources around sexual violence prevention and response. There are also a lot of great organizations that do policy or legal level work. The National Women's Law Center has a great project related to Title IX and to campus survivorship and support. When I think about specifically queer and trans issues, especially, I often look to the Women's Law Center, ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], and also Campus Pride for their resources and advocacy support.

### **Carli Rohner** 22:26

Yeah, and then [at the] student level we have the Oregon Student Association (OSA) and they also provide some advocacy and resources or that's a connection point where students will be able to provide leadership throughout the state. And so being able to connect with either representatives on



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your campus that are a part of OSA or the greater leadership body as a whole can be a good way to tap into what either values or barriers are coming up for students in relation to engaging with this work.

**Meg Foster** 22:53

There are so many other amazing resources to really support you all in ongoing learning, all of us in ongoing learning, and improving our practice and navigating some of these issues. There are a lot of really phenomenal culturally specific efforts happening around the state and nationally that can be really valuable for us to think about these pieces. And we could just keep listing things for hours and hours, but if you're looking for any specific resources on things always please feel free to reach out to us here at the task force and we are happy to be connectors and do warm handoffs for folks.

So thank you all so much for tuning into this. I'm sure there will be future recordings related to navigating challenges specific in school settings. But as always, if you have any questions, comments, additional amazing thoughts that you want to contribute, please feel free to reach out to us and we look forward to talking with you again. Thanks all.

### **Additional resources:**

Oregon Healthy Teen Survey:

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BirthDeathCertificates/Surveys/OregonHealthyTeens/Pages/index.aspx>

Basic Rights Oregon:

<http://www.basicrights.org/about/our-staff/>

Oregon Department of Education's page on sexuality education:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Pages/Sexuality-Education-Resources.aspx>

Oregon Youth Sexual Health Plan:

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/YOUTH/YOUTHSEXUALHEALTH/Pages/index.aspx#:~:text=The%20Oregon%20Youth%20Sexual%20Health%20Plan%2C%20coordinated%20by%20the%20statewide,aspects%20of%20youth%20sexual%20health.>

Oregon Student Voice:

<https://www.oregonstudentvoice.org/>

NASPA Sexual Violence Prevention, Education, and Response:

<https://www.naspa.org/division/sexual-and-relationship-violence-prevention-education-and-response>

National Women's Law Center – Education and Title IX:

<https://nwlc.org/issue/education-title-ix/>

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National Women's Law Center – LGBTQ+ Equality:

<https://nwlc.org/issue/lgbtq-equality/>

ACLU – LGBTQ+ Rights:

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/lgbt-rights>

Campus Pride:

<https://www.campuspride.org/>

Oregon Student Association:

<http://www.orstudents.org/>

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