



Navigating Oppression in Educational Settings

Total time: 13min 21sec

Kate Hildebrandt 00:00

Thank you for listening to this short recording in this series on common prevention challenges as part of a larger audio series to help explore creative prevention ideas and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. In this recording, we discuss challenges and brainstorm some strategies to navigate challenges related to addressing oppression in our prevention work. Today we're joined by Sexual Assault Taskforce Staff.

Meg Foster 00:19

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

Carli Rohner 00:22

Hi, I'm Carli Rohner, I'm the Campus Advocacy Coordinator.

Kate Hildebrandt 00:25

And I'm Kate Hildebrandt, Campus Coordinator. The challenges we're going to talk about today were identified by participants in the 2018 and 2019 statewide comprehensive prevention trainings. So let's get started.

So our first question today is specific to education-based challenges. When you're facilitating trainings, navigating differences between how young folks and young people are actually experiencing life and the perceptions of adults about those experiences.

Meg Foster 00:52

Yeah, I've had this experience a lot working in K-12 settings in particular, but in any setting where there are adults and younger folks or younger adults, dynamics going on, where a lot of times people have assumptions about what is coming up for young people, what their experiences are, what's going on with them. And so they develop their programming, they create their implementation, etc, with their own biases around what young people, or their own perceptions about what young people might be experiencing. And so building opportunities for the people that you're working with voices to be a part of the whole process, from planning, implementation to evaluation and sustainability. Creating opportunities to elevate those voices... one example that comes to mind is, a lot of times people will utilize things like question boxes or other places like that and using that data to inform kind of like what's coming up for young folks, what questions they're having, but using those opportunities for input to really inform what we do and how we do it.

Carli Rohner 02:12



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 1, Episode 8 Transcript

It would be also really awesome for your organization if you are working with young folks to involve them on the front end of that process. Oftentimes, when we see folks stepping into college or K-12 classrooms, there is a particular curriculum or objective that they want to meet in that training. Oftentimes, just like with any community that you're going to be working with, it's helpful to be ahead of time, or ahead of the training session or program, whatever you're doing, and just talk about what life looks like for them, what are the dynamics around these topics that are coming up for them, because if anything that will inform how you show up in the classroom or in that program space.

Kate Hildebrandt 02:51

I've seen this in my own work a lot with rooms when I'm actually with adults, and we're talking about dynamics related to youth, I think about my previous work on college campuses. One of the things I was doing was training faculty and staff on their role as responsible employees and what it looks like to support students and dynamics of campus sexual harassment and violence. And I got a lot of comments in those sessions about adults really putting their experiences or putting their analysis of the "problems facing youth today." I say that in quotes about what's happening, and they were really just saying, you know, buying into a lot of cultural narratives about what it means to be a member of that generation or what often had a lot of prescriptive ideas of what their problem was or what needed to be changed. And the thing that I liked about being in those spaces was it was a responsibility to take up space where you had adults feeling comfortable enough to express those biases about youth and you could start to shift them and offer different alternatives.

For that space for me, it was really helpful to offer research and statistics and different things to help shift that perspective because as university faculty and staff, they responded to that well, but thinking about really taking advantage of spaces where you are with adults who are expressing those beliefs to help shift those.

Meg Foster 04:17

A colleague once shared with me one time, that a good measurement of age appropriateness is what questions people are asking. Because of the nature of the topics that we talk about intervention work, we get to hear from young people and other participants in ways that maybe other adults don't get to. And so thinking about how we can advocate for the voices and use their voices in those conversations with adults who are planning, programming, planning structures, etc. and really elevate those things, that is a role that we can take on.

Building off of that, there's also some tension between like young folks and their parents and just experiences and how those overlap. So another question is really around deconstructing youth and parents' experiences of education systems in particular, as they're inherently oppressive.

Kate Hildebrandt 05:20

This question for me brings up a couple of different ways to look at it. One is differences between youth and their parents and if they're having different experiences of oppression or the values of participating in an education system or in a certain component of that, as well as just the fact that we know that our



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 1, Episode 8 Transcript

education systems were not constructed with everyone in mind. Both parents and adults can experience that there's a lot of things about our education systems that forced people to do things or don't get a full spectrum of choices. They can just make it hard for people to then want to buy into those conversations.

One thing that's really on my mind lately because of a conference that I just went to; I went to a really great session that was talking about mitigating harm caused by sexual violence policies. One of the presenters was talking about her experiences as an indigenous woman in Canada and talking with students when she was in college, and then now here about consent and hearing from other indigenous folks of just how am I supposed to talk about what consent looks like, between people or bystander intervention, when I didn't consent to my land being stolen, when I didn't have any choice about where I live or where I was relocated to. Not acknowledging the inherent oppression and the way that systems impact our choices, is going to shut people down to being able to have conversations about individual behaviors or skills or all the things that we want to do with prevention work. That doesn't mean that we are going to be able to always shift them or always do much within them, but being open to acknowledging that, and talking about what that looks like and how that impacts our choices, and just holding space to have conversations and let people express what they're thinking and feeling about that. Because a really good way to lose people and to not be addressing what's really going on in the space is to ignore the feelings and experiences that people are having.

This can be hard when you are paid by that education system in order to give that education. So also being transparent and really open about your role and your relationship and being open and critical about those systems, but also being very open about your positionality within it is really important. I do think that we have to find a way to have space for those conversations within our prevention work.

Carli Rohner 07:53

And if we're going beyond conversations and asking specifically for feedback from either youth that we're working with, their families, their caregivers, that we model and are intentional about what we will do with that feedback and that we actually use it in a meaningful way. We often talk about in our trainings and programs how it's not helpful to solicit feedback from a group just for the sake of letting them talk. We also then need to say, here's what our next step is and be, like Kate said, really transparent about your power within that system. So I'm going to take this feedback, here's what I'm going to do with it and let folks know how much power you have to actually implement change or not.

Meg Foster 08:38

Additionally, something that comes up for me around this as well is that like access to information and our right to control privacy in these circumstances, when we're looking at in particular K-12 and some campus dynamics, a lot of times schools see parents as having all access to information and disregarding students or their children's power and agency and control over their own information and what that looks like. And so there are interesting dynamics that we have to navigate. It definitely can feel challenging at times when we're doing prevention work and talking about dismantling oppression and recognizing that we are doing that within structures and systems that have these power imbalances



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 1, Episode 8 Transcript

and have these power structures in them. That's something that is really valuable and makes space to talk about, but also holds those challenges in the work that we do.

Kate Hildebrandt 09:44

Another question we get around this topic is about adapting curriculum or different facilitation to specific groups. And that could be you know, a special education classroom, a specific population and different groups of students. What does that look like?

Meg Foster 10:01

In some of the other recordings, we talked about what meaningful community engagement looks like. The most ideal being best practice in the situation would be not to create something and then try and go back and re-tailor it for a certain population, but to work with those populations that you're trying to reach to create something in the first place, whether that be curriculum or evaluation tools, or whatever. As we've also acknowledged in a lot of the other recordings, a lot of times funding, grant funding, other things won't necessarily let us do that. And so how can we build in that piece of ensuring that our participants or intended participants voices are valued and contributing feedback to the process, what evaluation strategies do we have in place to collect feedback and continue to do any sort of adaptation that is valuable? As well as how can we satisfy that capacity to really do some intentional, like learning and development with different populations?

I also want to acknowledge that there are a lot of resources that are already created by and for specific communities. So there are some really cool curricula out there on sex education, violence and abuse prevention programming with special education communities, and so tapping into what's already there. A lot of times, we just decide to reinvent the wheel because we're not finding something in our immediate circles, but there are a lot of resources out there and we can help direct you to those if you're interested.

Carli Rohner 11:41

It's also really interesting when organizations take the approach of starting with those communities that we would think that we need to adapt curriculum for and using that curriculum, when appropriate, for the wider audience. And what's really helpful about that is for example, if you're thinking about folks with a particular accessibility challenge or something like that you're starting from a place of accessibility for the entire group, rather than saying, we're going to start pulling folks out based on what challenges they might experience or what different life circumstances they may have, and so just making that accessible up front for the entire group. So I also think that it's interesting and a creative approach. We see this a lot in our college classrooms where folks have a little bit more flexibility to come in with a curriculum that might have been originally designed for one population and make it applicable to the group as a whole as opposed to the inverse.

Meg Foster 12:35



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 1, Episode 8 Transcript

Yeah, thank you Carli, I think that's a really good point. What we've seen from a lot of studies out there is that those community-specific curricula are actually much more effective with broader audiences, than, you know, air quoting "broader audience curriculum" is with lots of different diverse populations.

Kate Hildebrandt 12:58

Awesome, all right. So this concludes this section of our recording. We have lots of other recordings that you can listen to on our website. And as always, we have some ideas, but that's definitely not the be all end all. So if you have other resources, thoughts, feedback, we would love to hear from you. And we hope you'll join us on recordings in the future. Thanks.

Carli Rohner 13:19

Thank you.

Contact Us

Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force
3625 River Road North, Suite 275
Keizer, Oregon 97303
taskforce@oregonsatf.org
Phone: 503.990.6541
Fax: 503.990.6547