Shared Core Prevention Values of Child Abuse and Domestic/Sexual Violence Prevention

We all play a role in preventing violence and abuse – we can all have an impact. Primary prevention envisions and works toward a world where individuals and communities thrive in equitable, empowered and safe interaction with each other and with society. Preventing violence and abuse across the lifespan, requires collaboration, coordination, and cross-sector support. In order to better do that, it is valuable that we understand the shared values we bring to our respective prevention work. This resource highlights eight core values across all forms of violence and abuse prevention - from child abuse and neglect prevention to sexual violence prevention to suicide prevention. These eight core values can help guide all of our work and better support effective comprehensive prevention in our communities. Learn more about each of these core values in the following pages.

These shared values were compiled by the Child Abuse and Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention Work Group of SATF's statewide Prevention and Education Committee (PEC).

Prevention efforts offer us, and ask us to provide, opportunities for individuals and communities to redefine power.

Different forms of oppression create social norms that reinforce violence and abuse. For this reason, we must include anti-oppression in our prevention efforts.

Effective prevention efforts focus on preventing perpetration.

Health promotion efforts, particularly healthy relationships and sexual health promotion, are critical components of violence and abuse prevention.

This work needs to come from communities.

Evaluating our prevention efforts is a critical component of a successful and ethical program.

Prevention takes time.

Equity is critical to a world free of violence and abuse, and an important component of effective prevention programming.

Successful primary prevention strategies are ongoing, collaborative, comprehensive, and include strategies that simultaneously address individuals, relationships, communities, institutions, and society in general. Challenging attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that allow for violence and abuse at the individual level cannot create sustainable change alone. These efforts must be reinforced and reflected by the community in which individuals live, and by the society and institutions that create the policies and laws that shape and control their environment. For example, teaching students about healthy relationships is more likely to result in the changed behaviors we intend, if the school adopts and systemically enforces policies that require safety and respect in all school-based relationships. This model is based on the recognition that no one group or institution can end violence and abuse alone, and that change needs to take place on the individual, relationship, community, institutional, and societal levels to truly impact the problem. This approach is summarized by saying, "Violence and abuse are preventable, and everyone has a role in preventing them."

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Ageism and adultism are particularly relevant examples when we are looking at prevention efforts with young people and with adults trying to prevent violence towards young people. Ageism and adultism allow for minimization and de-valuing of the voices of some based on their age. This can create and reinforce various norms, like power imbalances and control dynamics (such as control over young folks) that contribute to a culture of violence and abuse. Healthy relationships between adults and young people, healthy boundaries and empathy for child development are all tools that can help shift the power dynamic and create spaces where the voices of young people are heard, respected and welcome. It is important that we address ageism and adultism in our programming, as well as in how we as practitioners approach and implement our work. It is also important in our work to address the root causes of violence and abuse, that we consider intersections of multiple forms of oppression, for example: racism and ageism, or: sexism, racism, and ageism. In order to address oppression in our work, we want to intentionally implement policies and practices for hiring, training, supervision, and coordination that are responsive to the populations we serve. How can we build in opportunities in our work for youth of color, for example, to lead, define, and create prevention and response programming?

Effective prevention efforts focus on preventing perpetration.

We focus on risk factors for perpetration, not for victimization. AGSATF believes that, while it can be useful to give individuals and communities information to help keep vulnerable members safer, the only person who can truly prevent violence/abuse is the potential perpetrator, by choosing NOT to offend.[1]

This work needs to come from communities.

Community members are most knowledgeable about the unique needs, values, traditions, and practices in their communities that promote health and safety, and those that support and reinforce violence and abuse. These can best be addressed by working with and within communities on efforts that reflect those needs, values, traditions, and practices. Further, different populations have differing definitions of violence and abuse. Working with and within communities will increase the effectiveness of messaging and prevention efforts.

Equity is critical to a world free of violence and abuse, and an important component of effective prevention programming.

This means we recognize, respect, and center all aspects of multicultural communities in the creation, leadership, implementation, development, and evaluation of prevention efforts. This also means that we are considering equity in other forms, like digital access (access to technology, increasing access to programming/connecting using digital means including translation services, etc.). Prevention efforts which do not center equity are ineffective as they miss addressing the root causes of violence/abuse by overlooking the oppressions that may be impacting individuals and communities.

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[1] Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence Position Paper: AGSATF Prevention & Education Subcommittee Position Paper

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It is not enough to tell people what not to do, we have to replace this with what is healthy. Healthy relationships and sexuality are an integral part of the human experience with physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensions. Helping people to identify and create opportunities to explore their own sexuality in a positive and healthy manner is crucial to achieving a culture in which sexuality is regarded as a normal and healthy component of each of our lives.[2] Having access to information on healthy sexuality, supports young people in setting and respecting boundaries, recognizing and understanding consent, and fostering bodily agency and autonomy. These skills help young people to stay safe and also reduce their risk of offending as they age. A useful framework to support healthier and safer communities for all people is understanding the Social Determinants of Health, which help us understand how this work is connected to so many other efforts.

Prevention efforts offer us, and ask us to provide, opportunities for individuals and communities to redefine power.

Knowing that we must include anti-oppression and health promotion in our prevention work, we must also think about how we can redefine power structures that support this violence and abuse. As practitioners we can facilitate conversations, and model strategies to explore how we individually and collectively experience and/or enact power. This includes considering what people can do/are already doing in their lives that can replace the model of having power over others.

Evaluating our prevention efforts is a critical component of a successful and ethical program.

In order to understand the impact of our prevention efforts, and whether we may be causing harm, it is important to develop and implement good evaluation strategies. This means we are thinking about our goals, and ensuring that the work we do is tied to these goals. Designing and implementing ethical evaluation is a critical part of comprehensive prevention programming. This includes ensuring transparency around the process and the measuring tools we're using, collecting input from stakeholders and participants throughout prevention programming and evaluation design, and being mindful of cultural and linguistic impacts and adaptations. Ethical evaluation also means that we are not collecting data that we aren't or won't be using.

Prevention takes time.

Effectively reducing and eliminating violence and abuse takes time. We are likely to see some changes in the short-term, but the changes we're really working towards are longer term and they take time to achieve. This, and because our work overlaps, reinforces the need for us to work together. If we do not invest the time and energy in these longer-term changes now, it will only take us, collectively, that much longer to truly prevent future violence and abuse.

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[2] Promoting Healthy Sexuality as Sexual Violence Prevention: AGSATF Prevention & Education Subcommittee Position Paper