



Foundational State Plan for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in Virginia

A Preliminary Framework for Collaboration

February 2025

About the Family and Children's Trust Fund

The Family and Children's Trust Fund of Virginia (FACT) is a statewide public-private partnership focused on the prevention of family violence across the lifespan. FACT brings together state and local partners on issues related to child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse and neglect to increase coordination and effectiveness of efforts to strengthen families and protect children. FACT also supports community programs and initiatives through funding, awareness, and the promotion of evidence-informed and promising practices.

As part of that charge, FACT oversees Virginia's Child Abuse and Neglect Advisory Committee, which serves as one of the Citizen Review Panels required under the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. Comprised of a diverse group of health and human service representatives, the committee closely examines child abuse and neglect policies and processes and makes recommendations to improve prevention and response efforts.

For more information, visit www.fact.virginia.gov.

Acknowledgements

Supported by Virginia's Child Abuse and Neglect Advisory Committee, FACT's Foundational State Plan for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse represents the collaborative recommendations of multiple experts across Virginia. Thank you to the workgroup members and local providers who shared their insights and experiences. When used in conjunction with [The National Plan to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation](#), Virginia's Plan is intended to be used as a preliminary, informative guide for policy makers and advocates to address child safety and well-being challenges through a state-based framework – representing the first step in a unified position on child sexual abuse prevention efforts across state partners. While there are citations provided in some portions of the Plan, this is not an exhaustive resource on child sexual abuse prevention.

Why It Matters

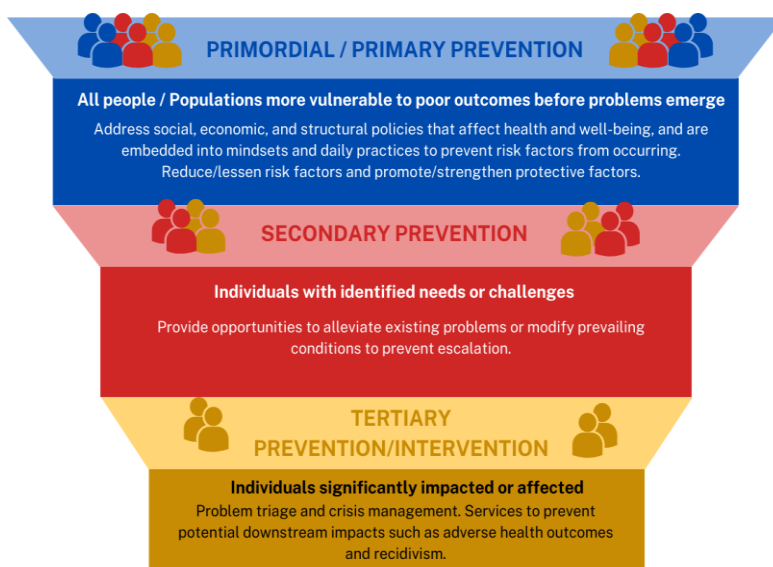
All children have the right to grow and thrive in a safe, secure and caring environment. For many reasons, however, not all children and youth experience their homes, schools and communities as safe places. Child abuse, neglect and exploitation impacts thousands of children in every community in Virginia – with sexual violence against children, in particular, occurring at a rate that many people find difficult to acknowledge and discuss.

Child sexual abuse is a serious and complicated issue that cannot be ignored. All children are at risk of sexual abuse, with marginalized populations experiencing an even higher risk. Misinformation, disinformation, shame, and stigma oftentimes impede even the most comprehensive prevention efforts. To end the sexual abuse and exploitation of children requires a hard look at power and oppression and necessitates a shift in deep-seated social norms.

Child sexual abuse is any situation where an adult, adolescent or older child forces or coerces a child or adolescent into physical or non-physical sexual acts or behaviors.

Sexual violence against children cuts across various disciplines and sectors, requiring a deliberate, multidisciplinary response to prevention. Effective, coordinated state-level prevention guidance and supports are critical, particularly as responsibilities and demands are increasingly placed on local communities. Current state child abuse prevention plans lack details on sexual violence, leaving local communities with little guidance. Focusing on a broad spectrum of prevention strategies can be extraordinarily difficult, with local providers oftentimes picking and choosing specific initiatives of focus.

As a statewide leader and convener, the Family and Children's Trust Fund (FACT) led the development of the Foundational State Plan for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse (Plan) to reflect a shared vision among collaborative partners, elevate best practice strategies and information, and guide funding decisions, not just for FACT, but for all state funders who support prevention efforts. The Plan serves as a catalyst to strengthen state and local interagency partnerships in order to provide prevention services to children, families and communities more effectively, while also setting the stage to expand this work through the implementation of strategies in the years to come.



*adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services "Advancing Primary Prevention in Human Services: Convening Findings" (2023)

Child sexual abuse is preventable, and it requires ongoing and intentional leadership, discourse, planning and action. The Plan serves as a shared vision and common framework with clear priorities and a commitment to work together. With bold intentions and a shared vision for change, the Plan sets the stage for a unified approach to building a safer, healthier and more resilient Virginia.

Current Landscape

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies childhood sexual abuse as a significant public health problem, impacting at least one in four girls and one in twenty boys in the United States. Approximately 90% of the time, child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known by the child or the child's family.¹

According to the Virginia Department of Social Services, there were 33,847 reports of child abuse and neglect by local departments of social services in Virginia in State Fiscal Year 2024. Of those, 3,042 were accepted reports of child sexual abuse, resulting in 2,527 investigations and 649 founded investigations.² Due to the numerous challenges of reporting and investigating child sexual abuse, this number is a gross underrepresentation of incidences statewide.

Despite the limitations in available prevalence data, FACT distributed a statewide survey in October 2024 to local partners who conduct child sexual abuse prevention and/or intervention work in order to better understand the complexities of prevention efforts across Virginia communities. The survey gathered a snapshot of information about specific activities, funding, staffing, partners, and resources. Respondents included numerous local non-profit organizations and local departments of social services, representing all regions of the state.

Key survey findings include:

- Only 42% of survey respondents reported offering any child sexual abuse prevention activities, many of which were one-time trainings, workshops or awareness events.
- Respondents highlighted a variety of prevention activities, but most consistently reported using Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children training, Virginia Department of Social Services trainings, and home visiting resources.
- Many respondents reported that they are under resourced and have limited staff to devote to ongoing child sexual abuse prevention work. Some have no dedicated staff and partner with other organizations to conduct trainings or events.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Child Sexual Abuse. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/about/about-child-sexual-abuse.html>.

² [Virginia Department of Social Services' Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia SFY 2024 Report](#)

- Local partnerships were reported among Child Advocacy Centers, health departments, courts, behavioral health organizations, schools and home school cohorts, Family Assessment and Planning Teams, Trauma Informed Community Networks, local area non-profits and private vendors and donors.
- Some respondents reported funding support through state contracts and grants from the Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance. However, 80% of survey respondents reported no state partnership support and rely on free publication materials and local partnerships to provide prevention activities in their communities.
- Although some respondents reported strong relationships with local school districts in providing evidence-based family life curricula, many respondents noted a disconnect from education partners.
- Many programs and available prevention materials are not available in different languages and cannot be adapted to meet the different cultural and linguistic needs of various communities.
- Respondents noted the critical need for a comprehensive approach to violence prevention that goes beyond specific activities, promotes community resilience, and addresses social determinants of health at a community level.
- The survey highlighted a lack of community interest, prioritization, awareness and understanding as major barriers to child sexual abuse prevention efforts.

Core Components

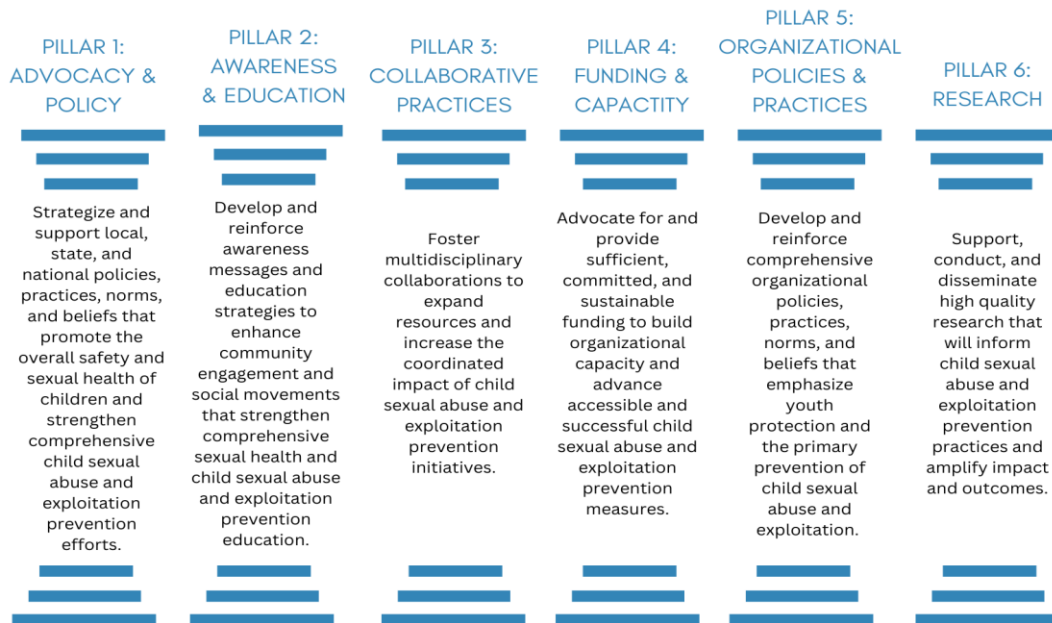
In 2012, The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, also known as Prevent Together, developed a National Plan to promote education and advocacy efforts. Updated in 2021, Six Pillars of Prevention were identified to ground and guide experts, organizations and communities in a unified approach to keeping kids safe from sexual abuse and exploitation.³

Grounded in the social-ecological model of violence prevention developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention⁴, the National Plan serves a comprehensive framework to raise awareness and drive change. It also outlines various high-level strategies as a starting point for

³ Prevent Together: The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (2021). The National Plan to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. Retrieved from www.preventtogether.org.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). The social-ecological model: A framework for prevention. Retrieved from <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/main/prevention-information/violence-prevention-fundamentals/>.

Prevent Together's Six Pillars for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation



individuals, organizations, communities and systems. It is a robust resource for states and local communities, but it further underscores the need for Virginia to declare its own vision for change and ensure that cross-sector state collaborations are grounded in clarity of purpose.

Rather than duplicate the same information, Virginia's Plan was intentionally designed to complement the National Plan, specifically outlining core components that should be considered when implementing prevention strategies at individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. Well-rounded prevention efforts must incorporate different types of programs, strategies and outreach methods, but they can all be influenced by the same core components.

When combined with the Six Pillars outlined in the National Plan, a roadmap for child sexual abuse prevention begins to emerge for Virginia. The core components are listed alphabetically, rather than in order of importance, as each component is critical to effective prevention.

Virginia's Core Components of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention
Adult Accountability
Bystander Empowerment

Community Engagement
Cross Sector Collaboration
Culturally Sensitive
Developmentally Targeted
Equity
Evidence-Informed
Positive Health Promotion
Trauma-Informed
Victim and Perpetrator-Focused

Adult Accountability: Reinforce that all adults and organizations are responsible to provide safety for children in their care. Adults must prevent, recognize and react responsibly.

Bystander Empowerment: Promote the importance of confronting inappropriate behaviors and the violation of boundaries. Recognize the signs, minimize opportunity, and act on suspicions or disclosures.

Community Engagement: Recognize that communities are experts on themselves and encourage tailoring to the needs, values, traditions and practices of a community.

Cross Sector Collaboration: Promote the collective experience and perspectives of a comprehensive network of stakeholders.

Culturally Sensitive: Recognize how language and cultural barriers thwart prevention efforts and promote cultural and linguistic adaptations when needed.

Developmentally Targeted: Adjust to the developmental needs and learning styles of various audiences.

Equity: Support the needs of marginalized populations and acknowledge the root causes of oppression and current and historical inequities. Consider how issues concerning race, age, ethnicity, ability, gender and sexuality impact the distribution of power.

Evidence-Informed: Promote strategies and activities that are based on well-established research findings, whether it meets rigorous standards or is shaped by the knowledge from direct practice and professionals on the front lines.

Positive Health Promotion: Support strategies and activities that are positive and promote personal safety, healthy relationships, sexual health and community resilience.

Trauma-Informed: Consider the impact of trauma on community health and well-being and focus on ensuring that people feel safe and supported.

Victim and Perpetrator-Focused: Consider the risk factors for perpetration, not just victimization. True primary prevention goes beyond keeping children safe and addresses ways to prevent first-time perpetration.

Opportunities

Building upon nationally-recognized work, the Plan is intended to help facilitate and deepen relationships between Virginia funders in order to provide a more comprehensive continuum of prevention to children, families and communities, but it is only a reflection of preliminary collaborations among state partners. The challenges and considerations that come with state-level collaborations are often different than those at the local level, so it is important to create mechanisms for feedback and follow examples from other states.

To expand this work, leaders and advocates should consider the following recommendations.

- Establish a statewide task force that serves as an ongoing, multi-agency collaboration to promote interagency communication and the creation of guidance and tools
- Seek national training and technical assistance support to build cross-sector partnerships
- Host a statewide training/speaker series for all public and private youth serving agencies and advocates
- Conduct regional input sessions to better understand local prevention practices and inform state funding in order to move beyond individual level strategies
- Conduct a local practice showcase series spotlighting community providers across Virginia doing innovative child sexual abuse prevention work
- Create local demonstration project opportunities statewide to specifically test community-level prevention strategies
- Provide mini-grants to promote capacity building and build upon existing evidence-informed practices and research

Examples of What Success Could Look Like

- ✓ Increase in the number of organizations investing in and working to prevent child sexual abuse
- ✓ Increase in the number of legislation, policies, and protocols that promote equity and to not support or reinforce oppression
- ✓ Increase in state, regional and local partnerships working collaboratively to implement comprehensive prevention strategies
- ✓ Increase in the number of people, community groups, institutions and organizations participating in child sexual abuse training
- ✓ Promote the implementation of comprehensive family life education curricula across all local school districts which includes components on protective factors against abuse
- ✓ Increase in culturally-specific and culturally-inclusive prevention activities
- ✓ Expand prevention efforts focused on individuals with disabilities
- ✓ Increase in language access to prevention resources for children who do not speak English as their first language or at all
- ✓ Cultural shift in the recognition of children's rights, including body autonomy and healthy sexuality
- ✓ Increase in public awareness and engagement campaigns that reduce inaccurate information, promote social norms that protect against sexual violence and support positive parenting
- ✓ Increase in statewide data about violence, oppression and inequity

What's Next

No one group can end child sexual abuse and exploitation, but having a plan is a first step in identifying where changes need to take place. In the months ahead, FACT will provide grant support to select Children's Advocacy Centers across Virginia to support evidence-informed and promising practices. Guided by the core components outlined in this Plan, grantees will be led by a unified state-level framework for the first time. As other state partners prepare for State Fiscal Year 2026, the Plan can inform additional programmatic and funding decisions.

Helpful Resources

[Al's Pals](https://teachingstrategies.com/product/als-pals-social-emotional-learning-curriculum/) (https://teachingstrategies.com/product/als-pals-social-emotional-learning-curriculum/)

[Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe](https://www.childhelp.org/speakupbesafe/) (https://www.childhelp.org/speakupbesafe/)

[Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children](https://www.d2l.org/education/stewards-of-children/) (https://www.d2l.org/education/stewards-of-children/)

[Enough Abuse Campaign](https://enoughabuse.org/) (https://enoughabuse.org/)

[Fight Child Abuse](https://fightchildabuse.org/) (https://fightchildabuse.org/)

[Healthy Relationships Project](https://www.pcavt.org/healthy-relationships-project) (https://www.pcavt.org/healthy-relationships-project)

[Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse](https://publichealth.jhu.edu/moore-center-for-the-prevention-of-child-sexual-abuse)
(https://publichealth.jhu.edu/moore-center-for-the-prevention-of-child-sexual-abuse)

[National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation/Prevent Together](https://preventtogether.org/)
(https://preventtogether.org/)

[National Sexual Violence Resource Center](https://rainn.org/) (https://rainn.org/)

[Pledge to Prevent](https://www.pledgetoprevent.org/) (https://www.pledgetoprevent.org/)

[Prevent Child Abuse America](https://preventchildabuse.org/what-we-do/child-sexual-abuse-prevention/) (https://preventchildabuse.org/what-we-do/child-sexual-abuse-prevention/)

[Prevent Connect](https://www.preventconnect.org/) (https://www.preventconnect.org/)

[Prevention Global](https://www.prevention.global/) (https://www.prevention.global/)

[Safe Kids Thrive](https://safekidsthive.org/) (https://safekidsthive.org/)

[Safe Touches](https://nyspcc.org/what-we-do/training-institute/professional-trainings-and-resources/safe-touches/) (https://nyspcc.org/what-we-do/training-institute/professional-trainings-and-resources/safe-touches/)

[The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children](https://apsac.org/) (https://apsac.org/)

[The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/sexual-abuse) (https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/sexual-abuse)

[Veto Violence](https://vetoviolenace.cdc.gov/apps/main/home/) (https://vetoviolenace.cdc.gov/apps/main/home/)