

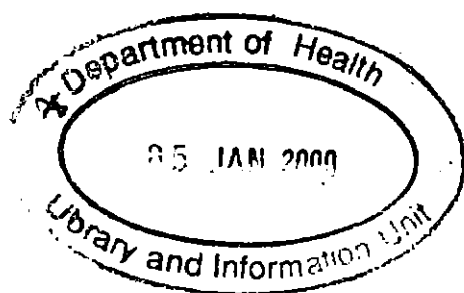
REPORT ON THE SURVEY
OF
THE CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION
PROGRAMME
(STAY SAFE)



A. N. ROINN DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS EDUCATION

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS 1995

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Section 1

The Child Abuse Prevention Programme

1.1 Introduction

A programme aimed at the prevention of child sexual abuse was introduced into primary schools in the Eastern Health Board area in 1991. It was extended to the whole country the following year. The programme is jointly supported by the Regional Health Boards and the Department of Education. A committee was established at national level to oversee the implementation of the programme. Teams which included teachers and social workers were set up in each Regional Health Board area to promote the programme in schools and to give information and training to teachers, parents and members of Boards of Management of schools. As the programme had been available to all schools in the country from 1992 the Department of Education decided to conduct a survey in May 1994, through its inspectorate, to ascertain:

- (i) the extent to which the programme is being implemented in schools;
- (ii) the opinions of chairpersons, principal teachers, parents of children participating in the lessons and members of the Stay Safe team, on the suitability of the programme and on its effectiveness in meeting its stated objectives.

1.2 Origin of the Programme

Health professionals of the Eastern Health Board, having noted a significant rise in the numbers of official reports of child abuse between 1981 and 1987, felt that a positive preventative approach was necessary to deal with the problem. Having reviewed programmes in operation in other countries and having consulted widely, it was decided to design a completely new programme i.e. the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (C.A.P.P), which would be suitable to the Irish context. This programme, usually called "Stay Safe", would involve teachers, parents and health professionals in its delivery and would target children at primary school level, as it was felt that those between the ages of 8 and 11 years were most at risk from abuse.

1.3 Aims of the Stay Safe Programme

The programme, which was first introduced on a pilot basis in twelve schools in the Dublin area, consists of separate curricula for junior and senior classes, a video for children, a training course for teachers and an educational component for parents.

Its stated aims are:

- (a) to prevent physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children by equipping parents and teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect children under their care,
- (b) to encourage parents to reinforce, at home, skills taught in school,
- (c) to increase community awareness and make children less vulnerable to abuse.

1.4 Preliminary Research

Before the Stay Safe lessons were written, researchers from the Eastern Health Board examined materials used in other countries to combat child abuse. None of these were found to be suited to the Irish situation because they

- were culturally inappropriate;
- were too general;
- did not include a training component for teachers or parents;
- were constructed for conditions dissimilar to those prevailing in Irish classrooms.

1.5 Design of the Programme

In designing a programme to fit the needs of Irish primary schools certain criteria were laid down for its suitability. It would

- be culturally suitable;
- be easily implemented;
- be developmentally staged;
- have a multi-media approach;
- involve teachers and parents;
- take into account the ages and levels of understanding of the pupils targeted;
- be respectful in tone;
- not rely on children having advanced literary skills.

The lessons would aim at preventing (primary outcome) and at encouraging the reporting (secondary outcome) of abuse of all kinds.



1.6 Content of the Programme

The teaching element comprises twelve lessons aimed at pupils from Senior Infants to Second Class and a further ten lessons for pupils from Third to Sixth Class. The lessons deal with bullying, inappropriate touches, good and bad secrets, coping with strangers and basic rules to follow if a child feels threatened or unsafe. Initially the children are introduced to the language they will be using throughout the lessons. They learn about “Yes” feelings and “No” feelings. “Yes” feelings are happy, secure, comfortable and safe feelings; like when a child is being tucked up in bed, warm and snug. Children learn that “No” feelings are those feelings that make them feel uncomfortable, distressed, unsafe or threatened. A “No” feeling might be experienced when a child is being pushed too high on a swing. Teachers emphasise that “No” feelings are unsafe feelings.

An audio tape containing the Stay Safe song and a thirty minute video, reinforcing the basic message of the programme, have also been provided. The video, presented as a teaching aid, is supplementary to the class lessons and can be used in sections, or in its entirety, as directed by the User’s Handbook. The classroom component is aimed primarily at the children.

The adult education component focuses on health professionals, school chairpersons, principals, class teachers and parents. The worksheets, to be filled at home, forge a link between the parents and the pupils.

1.7 Introducing the Programme to a School

Before the programme is introduced into schools the permission of the Board of Management must be obtained. Chairpersons and Principals are invited to attend a meeting addressed by members of the Stay Safe team, which comprises primary teachers seconded by the Department of Education and social workers from the local Health Boards. The following topics are discussed at the meeting: information on child abuse, how to teach the programme in the classroom, the role of Health Board personnel, the Department of Education’s Procedures for Dealing with Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse, together with the Department of Health’s Child Abuse Checklist and Guidelines. Each participating school is presented with a copy of the programme.

Public meetings are then organised for the parents, the programme is explained to them and their written consent is obtained before their children are allowed to participate.

1.8 Present level of Implementation in Schools

The national survey statistics, for the school years 1991/92 and 1992/93, which were issued by the Child Abuse Prevention Programme in November 1993, give details regarding participation in inservice training by teachers, attendance at parent meetings and involvement by schools in the delivery of the programme. The latest (December 1994) figures indicate that information meetings for parents on the Programme have been held in 80% of schools. It is estimated that the programme is being implemented in 55% of schools. Almost all schools (99.7%) have now availed of teacher training on the programme.

The Minister for Education has issued Circular 19/93 urging management authorities to co-operate in the implementation of Stay Safe. This circular recommends the programme to primary schools and considers that it will be helpful in dealing with this very important area of children's lives.

1.9 Suitability of the Programme

While the Stay Safe programme seemed to be well received by the majority of parents and schools, its suitability in the Irish context was a matter of some controversy. The topic received considerable coverage in the media.

The following are some of the main criticisms of Stay Safe made by its opponents:

- (a) the "humanist" or non-morality based use of "Yes" and "No" feelings as a guide to conduct;
- (b) the use of programmes and teaching materials from abroad which were untested or flawed and which had been loosely adapted for use in Irish schools;
- (c) the teaching of lessons related to sexuality to innocent children;
- (d) the damage done by the programme to the trusting relationships between children and their parents and other close relatives and friends;
- (e) the imparting of an anti-male bias to impressionable minds;
- (f) the teaching of lessons which would interfere with basic family values and the primary rights of parents in the education and guidance of their children;
- (g) the focus of such a programme, which should be directed towards adults rather than children.

Section 2

Responses to the Survey

2.1 Distribution of Questionnaires

The chairperson and principal teacher of each school chosen by random sample were invited to complete a questionnaire, which each received *by post*.

The principal of each selected school was asked to choose, by random sample, a teacher and class group involved in the programme. The class teacher, and the parents of five pupils chosen by random sample from the teacher's class, were each given a questionnaire, which they were invited to complete. (The selection of the random sample of schools and the procedure for selection of the teacher and parents are described in Appendix A.)

Each respondent i.e. chairperson/principal/teacher/parents, was asked to return the completed questionnaire, *by post*, to the Department of Education. The Stay Safe teams in all health board areas were interviewed by the Inspectorate.

2.2 Total Responses to the Survey

The total number of schools included in the survey was 269.

The chairperson and the principal of *each school included in the survey* received a questionnaire by post, but only in those schools in the survey which had taught or had begun to teach the programme were teachers and parents given a questionnaire. Hence, the percentage responses(*) from parents and teachers, as illustrated in the table following, are lower than their true potential, due to the fact that questionnaires were not given to a teacher and five parents in any school in which the programme had not yet been taught.

	Totals in survey	Totals of respondents	Percentage responses
Chairpersons	269	139	52
Principals	269	207	77
Teachers	269	172	64*
Parents	1345	564	42*

2.3 Meetings and Inservice Provision

Responses indicated that of the 139 chairpersons who returned completed questionnaires 89% were aware of an information seminar for school authorities on the “Stay Safe” programme and 52% of them attended a seminar. The seminars were attended by 98% of responding principals.

The relatively low response from chairpersons may indicate that some considered that the attendance of the principal teacher was sufficient to represent the Board of Management.

An inservice day dealing with the programme was attended by 96% of principals and teachers.

In 94% of the schools the programme was discussed by the teachers at a staff meeting.

Parents were invited to a meeting to discuss the programme in 86% of responding schools. A small but significant number (13%) indicated that this advance consultation did not take place.

2.4 Delivery of the Programme

A high percentage of Boards of Management (89%) in the responding schools sanctioned the implementation of the programme, while a sizeable minority (12%) were in favour of a modified version.

The classes in which the programme was implemented included all grades and a small number of special classes. The levels most favoured for its presentation however, were at First/Second and Fifth/Sixth.

In most schools no particular teacher was given responsibility for the overall implementation of the programme.

The vast majority of parents were aware of the fact that the Stay Safe programme was being implemented in their child's school and three out of every four involved themselves to some extent in helping their children with the worksheets which form part of the programme.

2.5 Support and Effectiveness

As described in 2.3 above, most Boards of Management gave their consent to the introduction of the programme in their schools. Three out of four Boards of Management favoured its introduction without modification, one in eight favoured a modified version and one in twenty deferred its introduction.

The members of the Stay Safe team recorded a 100% co-operation from teachers and parents and 94% from Boards of Management.

The implementation of the Stay Safe programme in their schools was favoured by 86% of teachers.

When the different parties were asked if they approved of the programme, very positive responses were made as indicated in the following graph:-

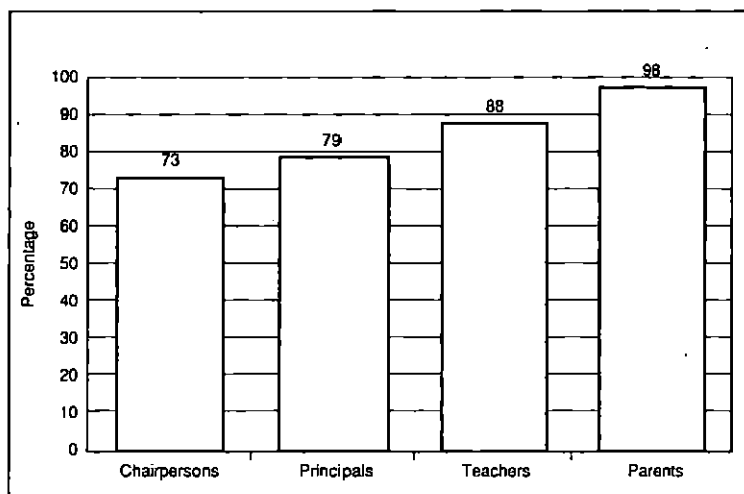


Fig. 1. Approval of the programme

Practically all responding parents (98%) supported the programme and gave permission to have their child participate. They considered it appropriate that the school should concern itself with the prevention of child abuse and 87% were of the opinion that the programme was having a beneficial effect on their child.

The fact that 84% of parents had already advised their children on how to deal with a situation of potential abuse, before the introduction of the programme, indicates that there was a certain readiness among parents for a child abuse prevention programme.

In the case of principals (78%) and teachers (88%) there was a strong consensus in favour of continuing to teach the Stay Safe lessons.

When the different parties were questioned as to whether the programme was achieving its purpose in

- (a) educating school personnel about prevention of child abuse;
- (b) educating parents about prevention of child abuse;
- (c) giving children personal safety skills,

responses were made as indicated in the following graph:

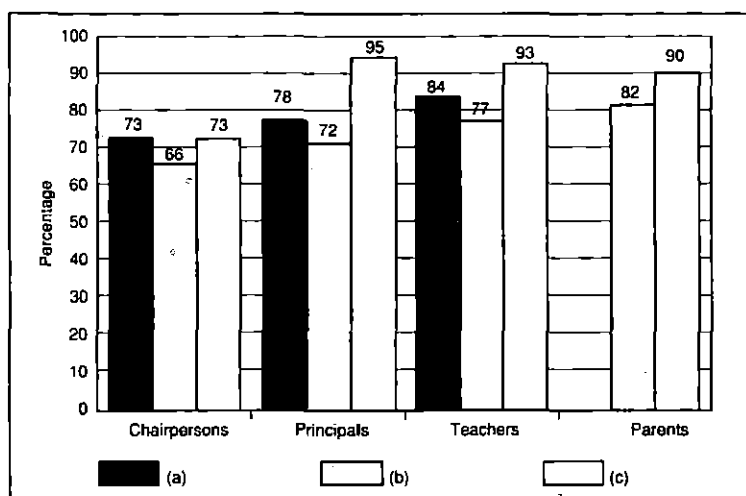


Fig. 2. Is the programme achieving its purpose in (a), (b) and (c)?

The graph indicates that a substantial majority of respondents involved with the delivery of the programme believed it was achieving its purpose, ranging from 73% among chairpersons to 84% among teachers. Parents (82%) thought they too were being educated while their children were acquiring personal safety skills. A clear majority of respondents thought that the programme was achieving its purpose in giving children personal safety skills.

Principals, teachers and parents were asked if they thought the alertness of children to potential abuse had been heightened as a result of exposure to the programme. Their responses ranged from a 75% affirmative from principals to 89% from class teachers; the affirmative response from parents was 86%.

One in ten teachers (including principals) reported that there was an increase in the number of allegations of child abuse since the programme was introduced.

The members of the Stay Safe team commented that they had not foreseen the "organised opposition" to the programme that emerged following its introduction. They were impressed by the high level of commitment from the teachers, the success of the lessons on bullying, the impact of the programme on parents and the increased co-operation between teachers and community care personnel.

Thirty principals gave details of discernible change in support for the programme. They were of the opinion that staffroom discussions heightened awareness of the issues involved, resulting in greater support. A similar proportion of teachers felt that negative attitudes generally changed to support, but that in a minority of cases a change was noted from a supportive attitude to a negative one. The vast majority of the Stay Safe team, however, thought that there had been discernible change i.e. a heightened awareness of the programme in general. They also felt that, whereas some teachers and parents became more cautious than hitherto regarding its implementation, others became even more supportive than they had previously been.

2.6 Suggested Modifications and Additions

Some of the respondents were in favour of modifications and additions to the programme, although parents did not advocate substantial change. There was a more general response to the need for further measures to help in dealing with child abuse, but parents gave little support to this suggestion.

The main modifications, additions and other measures suggested are grouped under the following headings:

(i) The Video:

A number of the respondents (9%) recommended revision of the video presentation, which was described as out of date and unsuited in tone and characterisation to more mature children. An anti-male bias was noted by a small minority of respondents (.01%).

(ii) Philosophy:

There was a certain dissatisfaction (6%) with the use of "Yes" and "No" feelings as a guide to conduct, and the absence of the concepts of "Right" and "Wrong" and of moral values was criticised. Some respondents (4%) recommended integration with a more broadly based programme of sexuality and/or religion.

(iii) Remodelling the Programme:

Two main changes were emphasised:

- (a) the inclusion of training in self-esteem and confidence building, particularly as a response to peer-pressure and bullying;
- (b) development of a broad life-skills and sexuality education section in the programme.

Other specific changes suggested were:

- an Irish language version of the programme;
- adaptations to suit pupils with special learning needs;
- the use of role-play in the lessons.

(iv) Implementation of the Programme:

There was agreement, among those from each category who commented, on the need for inclusion of such a programme in the ordinary primary curriculum. This would facilitate regular treatment of the topic, as well as its inclusion in the school plan. The necessity for pre-service and in-career training for teachers, in the presentation of the programme, was emphasised.

(v) Parents' Needs:

Many of the respondents laid particular emphasis on the necessity for a more active role for parents in the implementation of the programme. This was closely linked to a general call for strong support for parents, when dealing with a child abuse problem, from clergy, Gardaí, Health Board personnel and from the general community.

Specific attention was paid to the need for a parent booklet and explanatory leaflets, particularly for parents of very young children who might have difficulty in describing lessons taught in school. The use of television advertising and radio discussions was advocated as a means of reinforcing parent attitudes to this topic. Parenting courses were requested and the importance of general parental vigilance was stressed.

(vi) Support services for teachers:

There was a general call, from those who commented on this matter, for continued support for teachers implementing the programme and/or dealing with suspicions of child abuse. A multi-disciplinary approach, involving psychological services, the Gardaí and Health Board personnel, was strongly favoured. Some suggested that teachers would need particular in-career development in counselling skills and would also benefit from ready access to counselling, when dealing with suspicions of child abuse.

(vii) Legislation:

There was considerable support for a demand for proper implementation of the Acts of the Oireachtas dealing with child care, child health and school attendance. Some felt that the role of the social worker should be backed by stronger legislation. Others sought further clarification of the teacher's legal position when dealing with suspected abuse and stiffer penalties for offenders were advocated by some respondents.

2.7 Conclusion

It is evident from this report that there is strong support for the Stay Safe programme in schools from parents, teachers, principals and chairpersons. They have indicated clearly that they would like to see schools continue to teach it. Some have suggested that the programme become an integral part of the primary curriculum and be included in the school plan. Useful comments have been made with regard to modifications and amendments to the programme.

It is important to note that the Stay Safe team has recently revised and piloted a new video presentation and has prepared revised lessons suited to all categories of pupils in primary schools, particularly those in senior classes. A booklet, providing guidance for parents, has also been prepared.

However, with reference to the main criticisms made, some of which are listed in 1.9 of this report, it can be stated that:

- (a) despite the allegation that objective moral standards and clear explicit values are absent from the Stay Safe programme, there was almost unanimous acceptance of the programme by the responding parents and very strong support from the responding schools;
- (b) there has been a broad involvement of Irish professionals from health and education in the design, construction and development of the Stay Safe programme, according to the criteria described in 1.4 and 1.5 of this report. The C.A.P.P. team developed the programme in consultation with colleagues, with parents and teachers, with primary school management, diocesan advisers, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, the National Parents Council and the Departments of Health and Education;
- (c) the responding parents (98%), in giving consent for participation in the programme, obviously feel that their children are ready for lessons which touch on matters of sexuality;
- (d) there is no evidence in the responses which suggests that the programme damages child/parent and other relationships;
- (e) a very small number of respondents (.01%) commented on a possible anti-male bias in the video presentation;
- (f) there is no indication from the survey that the responding parents and other respondents perceive Stay Safe as a threat to basic family values or primary parental rights.

The programme is effective in educating school personnel, parents and children regarding prevention of child abuse and in heightening their awareness of the subject. Only time will tell whether it is effective in the long term in preventing child abuse. On the evidence of the survey there is reason to be optimistic that the Stay Safe programme will be effective in achieving its long term as well as its short term objectives.

Appendix A

Preparation for the Survey

Sample Frame

The Statistics Section of the Department of Education designed a sample frame in March, 1994. Since the school was the unit of analysis in the first stage of the survey, it was intended that each national school would have an equal chance of being included. For example, a small school in a rural area would have the same chance of being selected as a large urban school. Due to the predominance of small national schools in Ireland, the parents of pupils in small schools would have a greater probability of selection for inclusion in the sample than those in larger schools. However, as indicated below, an equal chance of inclusion for every school helped to ensure a countrywide distribution in the random sample.

Sample Size

The sample of ordinary national schools selected was drawn from a master list of names and addresses of primary schools participating in the programme in June, 1993. In all 1,795 *ordinary national schools* were identified as either operating the programme or having held a consultative parent-teacher meeting in preparation for the introduction of the programme in the school. In addition, there were 44 *special national schools* which were identified from the master list. The master list of ordinary national schools was ordered by county, and within county, in ascending total enrolment size (using enrolment in ordinary classes in 1992/93). Two hundred and sixty three ordinary national schools were selected for inclusion in the survey, by picking every seventh school on the ordered list of schools. The list of special national schools was ordered in a similar way and six schools were chosen for inclusion in the survey. The two criteria used for structuring the sample were therefore (i) location (county) and (ii) size of school (with large and small schools having equal probability of being selected).

The Questionnaires

Preparation of the survey involved the compilation of detailed questionnaires for completion by the chairperson, principal, class teacher and five parents of each selected school. At this stage a pilot survey to test the suitability of the

questionnaires was conducted in a small number of schools. Copies of the questionnaires were sent to the following for their information: The National Parents Council, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, the Church of Ireland Board of Education, the Catholic Primary School Managers Association and the Department of Health.

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Transition

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