Red Flags and Warning Signs

Preventing sexual abuse by intervening early

Many times, when a youth is being targeted by a staff member for abuse or being abused by a staff member, an alert person can notice behavior that is either a Red Flag or a Warning Sign for abuse. This exercise explores some common behaviors staff should look for, helps staff distinguish between Red Flags and Warning Signs, and identifies best practice for acting on a Red Flag or a Warning Sign.

A Red Flag is a strong indicator that a youth is being sexually abused or may be at risk for sexual abuse. A staff member should document the concern and act quickly to notify a supervisor of the potential issue.

A Warning Sign is a type of behavior that may indicate that a youth is being sexually abused, may be at risk for sexual abuse, or may be experiencing another kind of harm or distress. A staff member should consult with a supervisor about the most effective way to respond to the behavior.

PART ONE

Below, you will find fourteen behaviors. Federal research found that seven of them were frequently listed by youth who were abused by a staff member as behaviors that led to or were related to that abuse. These are Red Flags. The others behaviors are Warning Signs. Read the below behaviors and work with your team to identify which are Red Flags and which are Warning Signs (by writing the letter associated with the behavior in the appropriate row below the list).

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| 1. Staff member breaks off conversations with youth when other staff get close (WS) 2. Youth has photo of staff (RF) 3. A youth changes his or demeanor (WS) 4. Staff member writes youth letters (RF) 5. Youth knows about staff member’s private life (RF) 6. Youth begins to withdraw from other youth and/or staff (WS) 7. Youth is caring much more or much less about appearance (WS) 8. Staff member gives youth a gift (RF) 9. Staff member is consistently taking a particular youth’s side or excusing the youth’s behavior (WS) 10. Staff has photo of youth (RF) 11. Youth uses a staff member’s first name (WS) 12. Youth writes staff a personal letter (RF) 13. Staff member creates distance with other staff (WS) 14. Staff member treats youth as a favorite (RF) |
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| Red Flags |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Warning Signs |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

PART TWO

It is important that staff respond appropriately to Red Flags and Warning Signs. Pick one Red Flag and one Warning Sign from the previous exercise, write the corresponding letter inside the parenthesis, and write down the steps a staff member who notices this behavior should take in the below chart.

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| Red Flag (\_\_\_\_): |  | Warning Sign (\_\_\_\_): |
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PART THREE

Brainstorm additional Warning Signs and list them below (noting any that your group may think rise to the level of Red Flags):

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Exercise developed by Just Detention International