Red Flags and Warning Signs – Trainer’s version

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 concerns, file an incident report, report to the Justice Center if you believe you have reasonable cause to suspect a reportable incident, and take any actions necessary to ensure youth safety.

A Warning Sign is a type of behavior that may indicate that a youth is being sexually abused or may be at risk for sexual abuse. 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 and write the letter associated with the behavior in the appropriate column.

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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 | B | D | E | H | J | L | N |
| Warning Signs | A | C | F | G | I | K | M |

PART TWO

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

[Before conducting this exercise, please determine what the appropriate steps are for your facility.]

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Red Flag (\_\_\_\_): |  | Warning Sign (\_\_\_\_): |
| (a) document the concern |  | (a) document the concern |
| (b) report it to [FILL IN appropriate staff |  | (b) raise the concern with [FILL IN the appropriate |
| member at your facility] |  | staff member or supervisor] |
| (c) if necessary, separate the youth from |  |  |
| the potential abuser |  |  |
| (d) if necessary, make a report to outside agencies |  |  |

PART THREE

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

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Exercise developed by Just Detention International