

# Examining The Efficacy Of A Universal Child Abuse Prevention Curriculum For K-12 Students



Marisol Diaz, JD; Wendy Wolfersteig, PhD; Diane Moreland, MS  
Arizona State University, Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center



## Introduction



With the onset of COVID-19, concerns about child abuse prevention during school closures and distance learning have increased greatly. As students return to the classroom virtually and in-person, schools need an evidence-based resource to help students of all ages learn skills and strategies that enhance personal safety and well-being.

The **Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe (SUBS) Prevention Education Curriculum** is the only universal child abuse and neglect prevention program in the U.S. which has been tested with students in grades K-12 on effectiveness of child abuse prevention strategies to protect children from all types of child maltreatment.

## Methods



Two separate **cluster randomized trials** were conducted to test efficacy for grades K-8 and 9-12.

- **K-8:** There were 13 schools randomly assigned, and participants spanned from kindergarten through grade 8 (n=2,797).
- **9-12:** There were 3 high schools randomly assigned and the sample consisted of students in grades 9 to 12 (n=887).

Survey items to measure the efficacy of the curriculum were implemented at baseline, immediately after the intervention, and after 6-months for a follow-up. Analyses included exploratory factor analyses, paired samples t-tests, and analysis of covariance to help determine whether increases in child abuse knowledge and resistance skills were gained.

## Curriculum



The **Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe Prevention Education Curriculum** is a comprehensive PreK- 12<sup>th</sup> grade program grounded in theory and developed to:

- 1) provide students with the skills they need to prevent or interrupt child abuse, bullying, and neglect, and
- 2) increase student knowledge about safety related to abuse.

**Lessons** use a variety of methods to present materials:

- Lessons are for presentation over two 30-45 minute sessions for each grade.
- Lessons and facilitator training are available online.
- Lessons are aligned with the Common Core State Standards and U.S. national health and safety standards.

## Discussion



**Findings showed positive significant results** that child abuse knowledge and resistance skills were significantly different for the intervention group.

These results demonstrate that the **Speak Up Be Safe Prevention Education Curriculum can be effective** as a universal prevention program and is suited for a diverse student body. Thus, youth of all ages can learn skills and strategies to prevent, interrupt, and seek help from safe adults when faced with abuse and neglect.

These studies will be beneficial to child advocates including researchers, school staff, local centers, and child welfare agencies looking to keep children safe by implementing quality, age-appropriate evidence-based child abuse prevention education.

## Results



The K-8 study employed a pre-, post-, and six-month follow-up design for students in kindergarten to grade 8 (n=2,797). In an urban school district where most participants were minority students (90%) and qualified for free/reduced lunch (80%), 13 schools were randomly assigned to either the SUBS intervention or a control group. Trained social workers delivered the lessons and surveys. Analyses explored differences at follow-up between conditions for each index or scale and were analyzed separately for each grade using an analysis of covariance, which controlled for pre-survey scores.

K-8 Results

Grade	Safety Knowledge	Safety Rules	RESIST Strategies	Learned new safety rules k-2, Learned new way to keep safe 3-8
K	*	-	-	88.7%
1	*	-	-	85.5%
2	*	-	-	80.1%
3	-	*	-	84.5%
4	-	*	*	88.9%
5	-	*	*	80.0%
6	-	*	*	95.9%
7	-	-	-	74.7%
8	-	-	*	96.5%

\* p < .05

Note. Not all questions were asked in all grades.

The **K-8 Speak Up Be Safe** group had significantly higher scores at follow-up than students in the control group for 11 of the 14 measured outcomes, across the three sets of indexes/scales and nine grade levels.



The **Speak Up Be Safe high school** student group post-survey child maltreatment knowledge score and the RESIST scale score were significantly higher than the pre-survey scores for these measures.

The high school study employed a pre-, post-, and six-month follow-up design for grades 9-12 (n=887). In a suburban/rural school district, three high schools were randomly assigned to participate in the SUBS curriculum or the control group. Survey items measured the efficacy of the curriculum in grades 9 through 12. Lessons and surveys were implemented by trained teachers and social workers. Analyses included exploratory factor analyses and paired samples t-test to determine whether increases in child maltreatment knowledge and resistance skills were gained.

Results for Paired-Samples t-Tests of Overall Child Maltreatment Knowledge Scale Scores

	n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Implementation							
Pre-score	393	3.91	0.46				0.18
Post-score		4.00	0.61				
Pre-Post score				-3.47	392	0.001	

Results for Paired-Samples t-Tests of Overall RESIST Scale Scores

	n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Implementation							
Pre-score	365	.85	.23				0.42
Post-score		.95	.18				
Pre-Post score				-8.04	364	.000	