# Situational crime prevention

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# Understanding Situational Crime Prevention for Child Sexual Abuse: What services need to know

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The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted the risks experienced by children and young people in a variety of settings, and that organisations have responsibilities to not only screen out potential perpetrators of abuse but also to understand and change the conditions that enable abuse to occur.

Situational Crime Prevention is one theoretical approach that can be used by organisations to develop whole-of-organisation responses that focus on the policies, practices and strategies that can reduce children and young people's vulnerability and empower all adults to play an active part in their protection.

This guide provides a summary of the core components of Situational Crime Prevention theory and a series of suggested strategies that could be used by organisations to improve their safeguarding efforts.

## KEY MESSAGES

- For child abuse to occur there must be an adult or young person who has the potential to offend, a vulnerable child or young person, an environment that enables abuse to occur and an opportunity for the adult or young person to offend.
- Situational Crime Prevention focuses on the factors that enable child sexual abuse to occur in organisations rather than just 'weeding out' potential offenders.
- Situational Crime Prevention approaches aim to remove excuses for the harm of children, increase the level of difficulty for someone to offend, reduce the appeal of the crime and the vulnerability of the child, while fostering organisational cultures where all adults take an active role in identifying and responding to risks to children's safety.

## SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse in institutions is a major global public health problem, and has mental health consequences, including lifetime diagnosis of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, externalising symptoms, eating disorders, relationship problems, sleep disorders and suicidal and self-harm ideation and behaviours (World Health Organization, 2017). There are various preventative approaches to child sexual abuse in institutions, including protective behaviours education, therapeutic interventions (with children, offenders, and victims) and criminal justice approaches (Quadara et al., 2015). One

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approach that is particularly suitable for youth-serving organisations is the **Situational Crime Prevention model.** It seeks to enable an organisation to identify and address the specific risks for child sexual abuse within its own work environment.

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE RISKS IN ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Children and young people can spend significant amounts of time in the care of adults outside of their family, in organisations such as schools, sporting clubs, health care centres, and faith-based groups. Some children and young people also spend time in out-of-home care or youth detention centres. While children's participation with youth-serving organisations can be positive, there are instances where child sexual abuse occurs while children are in the care of these organisations. Specific factors for why these organisations may pose risks for child sexual abuse, include:

- the amount of time children spend at the organisation and how central it may be to their sense of identity;
- the absence of well-developed organisational safety procedures, organisational culture, and the condition of the facility;
- the lack of staff training and role confusion towards child safety; and,
- uneven organisational power dynamics and top-down cultures where questioning authority is discouraged and may make it easier for supervisors to perpetrate abuse.

These risks show why organisations working with children and young people need preventative strategies for child sexual abuse (Kaufman et al., in press).

## SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION

The Situational Crime Prevention model (SCP) is an established criminological approach to understanding, analysing and preventing crimes within specific locations. SCP is a different way to think about crime prevention, as it focuses on the crime event (i.e. child sexual abuse) and its precursors (i.e. grooming behaviour), rather than the offender. Through examining the specific factors enabling a crime, such as the facts about the specific environment, location, victim(s) and offender, rather than the

**TO THINK ABOUT**

What are some of the characteristics of your organisation that might pose risks for children and young people and how might you address them?

historical causes of crime, such as the behavioural history of the offender, the aim of SCP is to change the physical or organisational environment to reduce crime. In this sense, SCP is about creating safer environments to make crime more risky and difficult, less rewarding and/or less appealing (see Brown and Saied-Tessier, (2015, p. 23) for the proposed use of SCP in the United Kingdom's public health system).

## USING THE SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION MODEL TO DEAL WITH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN YOUTH SERVING ORGANISATIONS

Situational Crime Prevention can be used by organisations working with children to prevent child sexual abuse by removing risks that can lead to abuse. Kaufman et al. (2006) and Smallbone et al. (2008) provide frameworks that help practitioners to develop their own context-specific prevention responses. The interventions based on a model of SCP are usually designed to make child sexual abuse more risky and difficult to enact, less rewarding, less permissible or excusable, and less tempting for offenders.

Kaufman et al. (2010) described a comprehensive model for youth-serving organisations to assess their own setting for all of the broader risks for child sexual abuse and to develop strategies for preventing abuse. Below is an abbreviated version of Kaufman's model, and a diagram of the complete model is available **here (p.39)**.

### 1. Initial assessment of youth-serving organisations' risks for child sexual abuse

The assessment is conducted by all staff and is intended as the first step in applying situational crime prevention within a youth serving organisation (see Text box 1 for a summary of the key considerations).

### 2. Confirming key safety risks with other stakeholders

Once staff have identified the above risks, they confirm the importance of each risk within the organisation and ensure other risks have not been missed.

### 3. Linking risks to risk-reduction and prevention strategies

This step involves staff determining what types of strategies are available within the organisation to address the child abuse risks identified (e.g. improving policies to prevent abuse, controlling access to facilities).

### 4. Prioritising risks

This requires decision makers to review the identified risks, the potential risk reduction and prevention strategies, and the costs associated, in order to prioritise those for action.

### 5. Implementing proposed risk-reduction and prevention strategies

The organisation should implement strategies with the expectation that modifications will be necessary after initial testing to get the best effect.

### 6. Ongoing monitoring

A plan for evaluation and monitoring is developed by the organisation that outlines when evaluation will take place and how evaluation feedback will be integrated into ongoing decision making.

*Adapted from Kaufman et al. (2010)*

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**SOME STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN YOUTH-SERVING ORGANISATIONS**

Smallbone et al. (2008) describes specific SCP strategies to decrease risks of child sexual abuse in organisations, grouping these actions according to whether they "increase the effort" or "increase the risk" for an offender, and those that "reduce permissibility or excuses" for organisational inaction to prevent child sexual abuse. These actions within institutional settings also need to complement broader preventative strategies in public (e.g. communal spaces, public toilets, isolated places, shopping malls, swimming pools, parks and playgrounds) and domestic settings (e.g. the home or residential care unit).

Some of the strategies that organisations can implement include:

**Increasing effort for offenders:**

- Teaching children self-protective and assertive behaviours that make them a 'harder' target for offenders
- Controlling offender 'grooming' tools (e.g. the internet - using filtering software, limiting social media contact with children)
- Controlling access to facilities and who attends the institution (however, relying on suitability screening, such as 'working with children' checks alone isn't enough)
- Risk assessments for organisational/ location design and workplace practices and eliminating 'hot spots'
- Supporting primary caregivers in their duty to protect children, for example, through public education about how to protect children
- Ensuring staff and carers are adequately trained to deal with child sexual abuse issues
- In sporting clubs and schools, conducting more group activities and training to minimise or prevent one-on-one activities. However, this needs to be balanced and monitored so children don't miss out on learning opportunities that do require one-on-one adult/child interactions.

**Increasing risks for offenders:**

- Minimise opportunities for staff to be alone with children and situational triggers (e.g. intimate activities with children)

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**TEXT BOX 1 – KEY RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUTH SERVING ORGANISATIONS**

Organisations should assess the following key factors to determine their 'risk-level' for child sexual abuse include:

### Characteristics of the children you serve

Does your organisation serve children that have characteristics that may mean they are more vulnerable to child sexual abuse? Factors to think about include:

- Whether there are children that are socially isolated, shy, non-assertive, lonely or needy
- Children that are female and/or young
- Children that come from families that may make them vulnerable (e.g. parents both work two jobs; overcrowded households; homelessness; experiencing family violence or abuse at home)
- Children that live in communities that may make them vulnerable (e.g. exposure to community violence, poverty, high crime areas)

### Organisation's physical environment

Are there elements of the layout, building design, or other features of your organisation that would make it easier for grooming behaviour to go undetected, or for abuse to occur? Factors to think about include:

- The physical characteristics of your organisation such as the organisation's buildings, surrounds and other areas that may increase risk
- Are there any locations within your organisation that are isolated, poorly supervised, or obstructed from surveillance?
- Are there any other facilities used by your organisation that may increase the risk of abuse (e.g. local pool, parks, and shopping centres)?

### Routine activities of the organisation

Is there anything in the day-to-day activities your organisation conducts that influences the risk of abuse to children? Examples to think about include:

- High volumes of children using a change room or facility requiring privacy (e.g. pool, gym change room, hall)
- Excursions to public venues where risk assessments haven't been conducted
- Regular activities that require children to have unsupervised time with adults (e.g. medical procedures, music lessons, counselling sessions)

### Organisation's policies and overall culture

Does your organisation have effective established policies and a workplace culture that makes the protection of children a priority? Questions include:

- Are there rules and policies enforcing standards of staff conduct and consequences (e.g. relating to limiting physical contact or unsupervised children)?
- Do staff feel adequately trained to deal with child sexual abuse issues?
- Are there processes for responding to allegations of child abuse?
- Are staff clear on their roles and responsibilities when it comes to protecting children from abuse?
- Does the organisation adequately control mechanisms for staff "grooming" of children (e.g. the internet, social media)?

*Adapted from Kaufman et al. (2010)*

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- Redesign rooms to assist natural surveillance and eliminate blind spots (e.g. doors with viewing windows)
- Children and staff are given opportunities to raise concerns or suspicions about abuse or behaviour of an adult that worries them
- Improving processes for responding to allegations of child abuse
- Staff provided with processes to report suspected child sexual abuse
- Increasing capable guardianship by staff training
- Decreasing the vulnerabilities of potential victims
- Encouraging managers responsible for particular locations (e.g. pool attendants, librarians, gym attendants) to be vigilant of opportunities to engage in offending behaviour

**Removing excuses/reducing permissibility of the organisation:**

- Set organisational rules and policies reinforcing acceptable standards of staff conduct and consequences (e.g. limit physical contact or unsupervised children)
- Limit the dehumanisation of children (e.g.in residential or detention centres) which may make it permissible to exploit power over them
- Increase staff awareness of conduct and improve regular communication (e.g. induction, posters, and directions)
- In health settings, provide chaperones for children during unsupervised periods with medical staff and enable parents' access to certain procedures to allow supervision.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Publicly accessible information about how the SCP model can be applied in different types of youth-serving organisations can be found here:

**Clergy and SCP strategies:**

Brown, J., & Saied-Tessier, A. (2015). Table A1 and A2, pp38-40. NSPCC – Preventing Child Sexual Abuse. *Toward a national strategy for England.*

**Public health approaches:**

Quadara, A., Nagy, V., Higgins, D., & Siegel, N. (2015) Section A6. *Conceptualising the prevention of child sexual abuse - Final report.* (Research Report No. 33). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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# ACU Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal

This resource was developed by the Institute of Child Protection Studies for the ACU Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal, which provides a central pathway to the range of ACU research projects, professional development opportunities, and capacity building tools that aim to support institutions to better safeguard children and young people from sexual abuse and other forms of harm.

The Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal is for organisational leaders, policy makers, practitioners, and professionals who work or volunteer in institutions that support children and young people. It includes:

- Research and Resources: Access to a range of research reports and resources, including ACU research for the Royal Commission into Institutional Reponses to Child Sexual Abuse

- Practice Tools: Resources to support organisations to keep children and young people safe

- Qualifications and Professional Learning: Information about the range of formal learning opportunities available for new students and professionals seeking to develop specific skills and knowledge related to safeguarding children and young people

- Self-Assessment: Surveys and other tools that organisations can use to self-assess their progress towards supporting conditions of safety in organisations for children and young people (subject to fees)

- Researcher Profiles: Explore the expertise of ACU staff relating to the safety and wellbeing of children

Visit the ACU Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal: **safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au**

# About the ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies

The Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) aims to enhance outcomes for children, young people and families through quality research, evaluation, training and community education. ICPS research strengths include promoting children's participation, strengthening service systems and informing practice, and supporting child-safe communities.

Through research, evaluation and community engagement activities, ICPS aims to influence policy and practice to achieve positive social change, enhancement of the Common Good, and improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

From 2013 to 2017, ICPS worked closely with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, to conduct several research projects, including young people's views and perceptions of safety in institutions, the safety of young people in residential care, and the help-seeking needs and gaps for preventing child sexual abuse.

For more information about ICPS visit **acu.edu.au/icps**

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