

TURN THE TALK

AN EVIDENCE-INSPIRED PROGRAM THAT SEEKS TO EQUIP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE TOOLS TO ADDRESS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



My work in schools began in 2015 when the National Network to End Domestic Violence reported that nearly 50% of women and 40% of men shared that their first experience with a violent relationship began at the age of 15. At the time, I was facilitating court-ordered psycho-educational sessions for individuals using abusive behaviors, and I vividly remember asking a group of clients what they believed the appropriate response to eliminating relational violence to be. One client stated, "Intervention services can be effective, but if you really want to work yourself out a job, start having the conversations that you have with us every week with those who have yet to experience abuse." And so I did the opposite; I started to work myself into a job by brainstorming how I might effectively engage in transparent conversations

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with adolescents about healthy relationships. Because it wasn't only "violent relationships" that needed to be addressed, but rather all relationships that started healthy and then gradually showed signs of risk. It was only after running into one of my former high school teachers that I was provided with the opportunity to do so in schools. Fast forward to May 2022, Turn the Talk was established.

The percentage of victims of child sexual abuse in Maryland is significantly higher than the national average of 9%. Rather than continuing to be a reactive society in our efforts to protect children, what if we sought to prevent child sexual abuse through a comprehensive approach at multiple levels of the social ecological model? This model considers the



complex interplay between individual, relational, community, and societal factors. It allows us to understand the range of factors that put people at risk for violence or protect them from experiencing or perpetrating violence. To have the greatest impact on child sexual abuse prevention, there is evidence by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that brief, one-session educational programs do not work to prevent perpetration, but rather ongoing strategies and

"We recognize the critical importance of connecting our educators, students, and families with community-based resources that will provide services that help educate, identify, or prevent child sexual abuse. Change the Conversation is a valuable resource to both our school system and our local community."

Carroll County Public Schools

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approaches intended to work in combination to reinforce preventative efforts.

Turn the Talk is our evidence-inspired program that seeks to equip young people with the tools to address child sexual abuse. The goal of the program is to define child sexual abuse and minor sex trafficking, as well as how to investigate community resources and advocate for those who have experienced abuse. Turn the Talk is also available to school-based staff and parents to identify best practices for engaging with adolescents on sensitive subjects while also receiving up-to-date information around trends in the field of child sexual abuse prevention and recovery. All content supports students with analyzing the influence of family, peers, culture, media, and technology, demonstrating

“The CAC has partnered with Change the Conversation on several occasions to educate adults on child sexual abuse prevention and know them to be a valuable resource to both our school system and our local community.”
Child Advocacy Center, Frederick County

the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks, and displaying the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors, which is in response to and in alignment with the Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework. In fact, our curriculum was created using the Framework as reference to ensure messaging remains compliant with COMAR 13A.04.18.

In its year of implementation,



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Turn the Talk served 4,149 students across 152 classroom presentations in ten Carroll County Public Schools' middle and high schools with four unique middle school teachers and fifteen unique high school teachers. Additionally, five students received intervention support after disclosing child sexual abuse. Furthermore, Turn the Talk provided 10 professional development trainings to teachers in Carroll County Public Schools, Harford County Public Schools, Baltimore City Public Schools, and Boys' Latin School of Maryland. Topics included Child Sexual Abuse 101, Internet and Tech Safety for School-based Staff, Prevention Strategies in School-based Settings, Responding to Sexual Trauma, and Best Practices for Engaging with Adolescents on Sensitive Topics. Ninety-percent



of teachers found Turn the Talk's materials, activities, and resources to be helpful while 100% found the speaker to be knowledgeable about child sexual abuse and effective in delivery. Finally, Turn the Talk broadened its reach for school year 2023-2024 by solidifying Memorandums of Understanding with Baltimore City Public Schools and Baltimore-based private schools as well as expanding its previous curriculum to include Internet and Tech Safety, Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, Child Sexual Abuse and the Law, and Bystander Prevention and Intervention.

In our current school year, Turn the Talk is scheduled to provide 245 classroom presentations, surpassing our reach to students enrolled in health education across the state by 62%. While we consider this a great success, we will not stop until we have engaged all communities in the prevention of and healing from child sexual abuse. Our ask

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to you is that you partner with us in our mission by offering Turn the Talk in your school district or community-based organization. Our team is prepared to provide you with a modeled presentation so that you are fully informed of all content, materials, and activities utilized during a classroom session. We would then provide classroom presentations to students over the course of a one-day or two-day presentation, which is dependent upon the unique needs of each school or organization and presenter availability. Finally, to ensure alignment with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention best practices, students would continue to engage empathetically with Turn the Talk each school year they are enrolled in health education to increase and further deepen their understanding of the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships every child has a fundamental right to. Thank you for your united community response to ending child sexual abuse.

Chelsea Dorsey McGonigle, Education and Prevention Specialist

Scan the QR code below to schedule a consultation, classroom presentation, or professional development training.



Scan the QR code below to download an electronic version of Turn the Talk's Information Sheet, which includes an agency and program overview along with session descriptions.



"I have been prosecuting online sexual exploitation of children for 10 years. It is imperative that we combat the rise of these crimes not just with proactive investigations, but through education and prevention."

State's Attorney's Office,
Frederick County