

A SEXUAL VIOLENCE TOOLKIT FOR THE CHILD WELFARE SECTOR IN ONTARIO

THE TOOLKIT COVERS THREE MAIN 'LEAP' AREAS:

1. Our understanding of sexual violence:

- It's not about sex or intimacy. Sexual violence has everything to do with **gender, power and control**. Everyone needs to learn about how power and privilege works in relationships.
- Sexual violence is **never caused by the victim**.
- Sexual violence happens every time there is no **consent**.
- A young person **can never consent** to sexual activity with an adult in a position of authority such as a caregiver, teacher, counsellor or doctor.
- Sexual violence causes **trauma** – trauma can have big and small impacts on a life.
- Being **'trauma and violence informed'** means approaching every person with an expectation that they have experienced some form of trauma.
- Educating on the **risks to commit sexual violence** and how to **reduce those risks** is important new prevention work.
- Examining **"rape culture"** helps us to explore the relationship between individual actions and societal beliefs and values that create the conditions for sexual violence to take place. Sexual violence is **not just an individual issue**.

2. Our understanding of resiliency and risk.¹

- **Resiliency** is the ability to 'bounce back' or recover from a traumatic event.
- **Young people need support to develop resiliency**. When we describe someone as resilient, it doesn't mean they don't need support.
- **Support** from a caring adult **acts like a buffer** for youth to develop resilience skills and resources to meet their individual life challenges.
- If we only focus on, and talk about young people as being 'at risk', we are more likely to see danger and bad outcomes, not the **unique strengths** of the young person.
- For youth to reduce their risk of sexual violence, they need adults who pay attention to them, are willing to **listen and talk** openly about sex, and **affirm and support** their developing sexuality.

3. Our ability to allow differences to co-exist and to respect diversity

- Young people and the adults in their lives may have very different values about sex and sexuality. Staying focused on **maintaining relationships** and **mutual respect for differences** can help keep vital relationships going.
- Using **rejection** as a tactic to make a young person comply with an adult's beliefs, increases the risk to the relationship and risk of negative outcomes such as sexual violence.
- It is possible for supportive adults to **remain true to their values and still support young people** who may be doing things they don't agree with or can't accept.
- **Diversity is what makes a society strong and resilient**. Every human being has within them the capacity to be kind, loving, generous and respectful. We need to focus on understanding and creating those conditions that allow us to be our best selves.

¹ Fergus, S., Zimmerman, M. (2005) Adolescent Resilience: A Framework for Understanding Healthy Development in the Face of Risk. Department of Behaviour Health and Health Education, University of Michigan.