

**Sibling Aggression and Abuse Research and Advocacy Initiative (SAARA)**

**SIBLING AGGRESSION AND ABUSE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS**

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Parenting education programs and clinical screening tools generally do not address sibling aggression and abuse. This is surprising given that it is the most common form of family violence and is linked to worse mental and physical health for both aggressors and victims across the lifespan.

The goal of this bulletin is to provide guidance for parents and professionals on preventing and responding to sibling aggression and abuse. The significant impacts of sibling aggression make such guidance a wise investment in children’s safety and healthy development.

**EDUCATION, PREVENTION & INTERVENTION EFFORTS TO STOP CHILD AGGRESSION**

Sibling aggression varies by age, context, and contributing risk factors. Research shows, however, that parents play a key role in preventing and stopping it. Several established parenting programs that are cost effective and culturally sensitive do exist that can help parents address child aggression (although they generally do not address sibling dynamics directly). Such programs may help parents recognize harmful behaviors between siblings and encourage them to intervene immediately, while also improving their children’s interpersonal skills and sibling relationship quality.

Examples of existing relevant evidenced-based parenting education programs:

<a href="#">Triple P – Positive Parenting Program</a>	<a href="#">Families and Schools Together</a>
<a href="#">The Incredible Years</a>	<a href="#">Parents as Teachers</a>
<a href="#">Nurturing Parenting</a>	<a href="#">Parenting Through Change</a>
<a href="#">Parenting Wisely</a>	<a href="#">Strengthening Families</a>
<a href="#">Fast Track</a>	<a href="#">Positive Action</a>

In addition to these parenting education programs, any kind of program to address peer bullying should be adapted to include significant content on sibling bullying in its lessons and activities. Research shows that sibling aggression can lead to peer bullying. Thus, for some children neither home nor school is a place free of bullying experiences.

Examples of existing evidence-based anti-bullying and social-emotional learning programs:

<a href="#">Olweus Bullying Prevention Program</a>	<a href="#">KiVa Antibullying Program</a>
<a href="#">Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports</a>	<a href="#">Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers</a>
<a href="#">Second Step</a>	<a href="#">Fast Track</a>

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS TO STOP SIBLING AGGRESSION AND ABUSE**

An important first step to stop sibling aggression and abuse is for educators and practitioners to educate themselves (see [SAARA Bulletin #1](#), Disentangling Sibling Rivalry from Aggression and Abuse). With education, recognition of such behaviors will increase, likely followed by steps to prevent and stop their occurrence.

**NATIONAL AND WEB-BASED RESOURCES FOR SEEKING HELP REGARDING SIBLING ABUSE**

<p><b>Child Abuse Content</b>  <a href="#">Prevent Child Abuse America</a>  <a href="#">National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence</a> (NCCAFV)  <a href="#">Childhelp</a></p>	<p><b>Sibling Abuse Content</b>  <a href="#">SiblingSexualTrauma.com</a></p>	<p><b>Child and Sibling Abuse Content</b>  <a href="#">Rape, Abuse &amp; Incest National Network</a> (RAINN)  <a href="#">American Academy of Pediatrics</a>  <a href="#">Stop It Now!</a>  <a href="#">National Children’s Alliance</a></p>
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Professionals working with parents and children should routinely inquire about the nature of sibling relationships. Screening tools for family violence, bullying, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) should be amended to include the presence of sibling aggression and abuse. Like ACEs, sibling aggression and abuse have short- and long-term connections with mental and physical health.

Teaching parents to use mediation techniques may be helpful when dealing with sibling conflict and minor aggression (see [SAARA Bulletin #2](#), Recommendations for Parents on Managing Sibling Conflict and Aggression). Research shows that mediation benefits children’s relationship and thinking skills, lessens aggression, and shortens the time of children’s disputes.

A mediational approach, however, is not appropriate when sibling abuse is present. In cases of sibling abuse, such techniques may further victimize the targeted child due to the power imbalance among the siblings. Also, encouraging parents to have their children “work it out” on their own is not recommended for abuse. Some parents and children may not recognize that a sibling’s behavior is abusive, so routine screenings for violent, coercive, and harmful sibling behaviors are critical.

In some cases, victims may need trauma-informed care and to be referred to child welfare and mental health professionals. Children can talk with their pediatrician, school counselor or nurse. Parents can also reach out to these sources, as well as to a therapist or local family resource center for help. In-person and virtual appointments may be available at no or low-cost and/or covered by insurance.

Resources for finding a mental health professional:

- [American Psychological Association](#) (APA)
- [American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy](#) (AAMFT)
- [Psychology Today](#)

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Caffaro, J. V. (2014). *Sibling abuse trauma* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York, NY: Routledge.

Caspi, J. (2012). *Sibling aggression: Assessment and treatment*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.

Stutey, D. M. (2017). *Helping children and families address and prevent sibling abuse*. Counseling Today. <https://ct.counseling.org/2017/02/helping-children-families-address-prevent-sibling-abuse/>

<https://www.unh.edu/ccrc/saara/resources>

**NOTES**

Listing of resources does not imply endorsement.



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