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Child Sexual Abuse Preventative Education Toolkit

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Education plays an important role in preventing online child sexual abuse (CSA) as it equips children and young people, caregivers and communities with the knowledge, tools and confidence to recognise abusive behaviours, seek help and report concerns. While preventative interventions can occur at three levels* (primary, secondary and tertiary), this Toolkit is intended to support prevention at the primary level through effective education initiatives.

How should this Toolkit be used?

The Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT) has developed this Toolkit to demonstrate the different ways Law Enforcement (LE) can contribute to preventative education initiatives with a view to strengthening global law enforcement efforts to prevent online CSA. Drawing on consultation with LE and VGT Affiliate partners, including ECPAT International (specifically drawing on ECPAT's *'The Role of Law Enforcement in the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children'* report)¹, this Toolkit provides a structured set of fundamental considerations and principles to support those wishing to design, implement, and/or evaluate their own initiatives that are aligned with their organisation or country's individual context and needs.

The Toolkit acknowledges that LE may not always be best placed to deliver preventative education initiatives, and not all considerations below will be feasible or applicable in all contexts. Therefore, this Toolkit is intended to provide support and guidance based on effective approaches taken by VGT members in developing preventative education initiatives to help address online CSA. While this Toolkit has primarily been developed with LE as the primary audience, much of the content may be useful and applicable to other sectors. Therefore, use outside of LE is welcomed where deemed relevant.

The toolkit consists of two sections:

1. An outline of the fundamental considerations and principles to support those wishing to develop, implement and/or evaluate a preventative education initiative.
2. Case study examples of prevention initiatives undertaken by VGT members, illustrating best practice and/or innovative approaches in line with key principles of effective education**.

*Preventative education seeks to address the underlying causes of online child sexual abuse, in which interventions can occur at three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention aims to stop harm before it occurs; secondary prevention supports individuals whose specific circumstances increase their vulnerability to experiencing or contributing to harmful behaviours, and tertiary prevention works to reduce the recurrence of harm by strengthening protective factors for both victims and offenders, reducing the likelihood of future incidents.

**These principles may not be relevant to all country contexts and are intended as reference only, drawn from relevant UK research², NCA CEOP Education³ and AFP ThinkUKnow education⁴ programs. Organisations are encouraged to develop principles and values based on individual situational contexts.

Category	Key considerations	Description
Planning and development		
1. Scoping and insights Key considerations when planning and developing a preventative initiative	Threat picture and needs assessment	Use intelligence and operational insights to assess the current online CSA threat picture (for example, from law enforcement intelligence and case studies, academic papers or through non-profit organisation reports). Seek to understand the specific sub-threats/key trends/offender MOs that may be addressed within prevention education.
	Context analysis	What current prevention initiatives exist that address this area? Are there gaps based on the current threat picture?
		What relevant legislation or policies are in place that could support any preventative initiative?
		What cultural sensitivities, norms, attitudes or beliefs are there that could impact decision-making? To help identify and address any harmful assumptions on child sexual exploitation and abuse, see ECPAT International's practical 'myth-busting' Toolkit ⁵
		What relevant stakeholders could support or collaborate? (for example, government, non-profit organisations, education settings, parents and caregivers, youth advisory groups, industry)
	Define the target audience	Consider identifying which audience(s) faces the most pressing needs or offers the greatest opportunity for impact. Use available evidence, data, or feedback to help pinpoint the most significant gaps.
		Parents and caregivers
		Children and young people – (identify age ranges and/or specific factors that may increase vulnerability, for example, special educational needs)
		Professionals working with children and young people (for example, teachers)
		General public
		National/local government
	Define target behaviour(s)	What are the behaviours that the initiative will look to address, encourage or stop? (for example, to encourage reporting, to increase awareness of grooming behaviours, to encourage parents to have regular online safety conversations with their child)

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2. Content creation To be effective, content must be age and developmentally appropriate, evidence-based and culturally sensitive, dependant on the target audience.	Format (An initiative may include a combination of formats)	Public awareness campaign (for example, media campaign, public resources, posters, leaflets, documentary, infographics)
		School resources (for example, lesson plans, safeguarding guides, student resources, teacher resources)
		Community prevention program (for example, workshops, guides, training for adults working with children and young people, resources for parents/caregivers, picture books for children)
		Online resources (for example, website, interactive games, social media channel, videos)
	Key features (These features should be present in all safe and effective preventative initiatives)	Key message – what is the core message you want to communicate?
		Call to action – what are you asking the target audience to do? (for example, to report CSA)
		Reporting routes – effective prevention should be supported by messaging on where and how to report CSA. Initiatives may include different reporting routes to ensure accessibility for all (for example, the police, community safeguarding services, relevant non-profit organisations and directing children to speak to trusted known adults)
		Mapped to the national education curriculum (for school-based initiatives) – where possible, preventative resources should be linked and embedded within the national education curriculum to ensure learning is age-appropriate and progressive.
3. Key principles of effective prevention education²	Localised	Adaptation and contextualisation are crucial for the successful implementation of preventative education that is culturally sensitive, relevant and appropriate. A localised approach allows initiatives to address specific vulnerabilities and protective factors relevant to a particular community. This should also be considered when utilising resources developed in other countries/contexts.

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Planning and development		
	Child-centred	Ensure the initiative prioritises children's needs and wellbeing, in an accessible and developmentally appropriate way, that seeks to prevent or reduce further harm and re-traumatisation. A child-centred approach focuses on empowering children, giving them the tools to understand their own behaviours and the behaviour of others, to understand boundaries and know how and where to seek help. Wherever possible, children and young people should be involved in the implementation and development of CSA prevention initiatives (for example, through surveys, focus groups or piloting resources).
	Inclusive and developmentally appropriate	The most effective prevention education considers the diverse range of needs, learning styles, backgrounds and contexts of the target audience. Tailoring the approach, resources and language to the needs of the audience (for example, based on age, demographic, behaviour or level of understanding/cognitive ability) is key. CSA prevention should be accessible to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability or location. Prevention efforts should start as early as possible to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors to prevent abuse before it happens. Building resilience and strengthening protective factors reduces vulnerability to CSA. At a minimum, resources used within initiatives should adhere the country's accessibility standards outlined in legislation and include additional formats such as closed captions, sign-language and audio-descriptions. Best practice would include additional and editable versions of resources to suit differing needs and abilities such as key words and use of symbols etc.
	Holistic/contextual safeguarding	Effective preventative education should encompass a 'whole-of-society' approach. Messaging should be reinforced across different settings in education, society, government and across schools, home environments, online spaces and entire communities. For example, ensuring consistent messaging through creating resources for children and young people in addition to parents and caregivers.

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Planning and development		
	Non-victim blaming	Using victim-blaming language shifts responsibility from the offender to the victim, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and attitudes. Child sexual abuse is never a child's fault, and using language that blames the child can further traumatised victims and discourage them from seeking help or reporting the abuse.⁶ Instead, language should focus on empowering victim-survivors while focusing on the behaviour of the offender rather than on the behaviour of the victim. For more information on language and terminology and suggested use, read ECPAT International's Terminology guidelines for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse⁷
	Non-scaremongering	Some evidence⁸ suggests that educational approaches designed to shock or scare may not always be effective in supporting safer online behaviours or encouraging help-seeking, whether among children and young people or the adults that support them. One perspective within preventative education highlights the importance of balancing messages about the benefits and potential risks of technology. Using positive, supportive strategies, rather than scare tactics or confrontational methods, can create a safe space for open communication and support early intervention. This can assist law enforcement in both safeguarding and operational activity.
	Collaborative	Law enforcement should work in partnership and collaboration with teams within their organisation (for example, intelligence and operational teams) and external agencies such as education settings, relevant non-profit organisations, community groups and government agencies. Collaboration with multi-sector stakeholders is key to ensuring initiatives are embedded across settings and are sustainable, drawing on different perspectives and expertise. The feedback and views of the target audience should also be sought before implementation to ensure the content is relevant, applicable and effective.
	Enabling and empowering	Enabling and empowering education seeks to equip children and young people, caregivers and communities with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent CSA and to act should it occur. Children and young people should be empowered to understand their rights, build resilience and feel confident in how to seek help should they need it, making them less vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

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Category	Key considerations	Description
Implementation		
Launch A well-thought-out launch plan will maximise the success and impact of the initiative.	Identify partners to support or stakeholders who may be impacted	Identify which individuals or organisations are best placed to deliver the intervention if not LE, and who is best placed to publicise and share information about the initiative. Assess any intended/unintended consequences or impact on individuals or groups that may be useful to discuss with them before launch/delivery of the initiative. For example, if an intervention is likely to increase reporting, are any helplines that are signposted aware of the initiative and prepared for any potential impact?
	Communications	What communications regarding the initiative will be shared and with whom? How will these communications be shared? (for example, through social media, email, or press release). Communicating with internal and external stakeholders can be beneficial to align messaging and ensure the key aims are understood to maximise impact.

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Category	Key considerations	Description
Implementation		
Evaluation and impact Robust evaluation helps determine whether the initiative is achieving its aims. It helps measure the impact, improve effectiveness and supports relevance, transparency and sustainability.	Objective setting and key indicators	Clearly outline what the initiative aims to achieve (for example, awareness raising, behaviour change, improving knowledge, increasing reporting) and identify measurable indicators to evaluate impact (for example, increase in number of reports, engagement rate, number of downloads).
	Baseline assessment, outcome evaluation and feedback collection	Develop robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of the initiative(s). Establish baseline measurements (the starting point of something you are trying to improve or evaluate) so you can compare with later outcomes to see what has changed. Evaluation could include gathering numerical data that suggest changes in help-seeking behaviours, such as increased local reporting rates to police or helplines, or increased engagement in community programmes. Website visits and resource downloads could also be analysed as potential impact metrics that indicate reach. Consider working with an academic institution or external partner to run a randomised controlled trial (RCT) if resources to do this are not available internally. Whilst RCTs are one of the most rigorous methods to measure impact, smaller-scale studies and methods are also beneficial. Piloting resources with target audiences, pre and post-launch feedback surveys, focus groups, case studies , and analysis of social media engagement can be helpful.
	Continuous review and improvement	Use evaluation findings to update, refine content and/or delivery methods to improve the initiative. Establish regular feedback sessions or surveys with key stakeholders to assess relevance, cultural sensitivity, and accessibility of the initiative.

Case study

National Crime Agency CEOP Education programme (UK)³

The National Crime Agency's CEOP Education programme develops preventative education resources using threat intelligence, current research, and direct input from children, young people, and expert partners.

The programme provides resources that professionals can use with groups of children and young people aged 4 to 17, training and guidance for the professionals that work with them and information for parents and carers to help increase protective factors and reduce their vulnerability to online sexual abuse.

Principle of effective education prevention	Evidence in the case study
✓ Child centred	The programme focuses on preventing harm and emotional impact on children and young people; it avoids activities and language that could discourage help-seeking behaviours. The content of the programme is relevant to the experiences of children and young people and provides a balanced view of the benefits as well as the potential risks of technology.
✓ Collaborative	All education resources are developed in response to NCA threat intelligence and expertise, and the latest research evidence. Resources are piloted with children and young people before launch, and feedback from them, professionals and parents and carers, as well as numerical data such as resource downloads, is gathered and used for evaluation purposes.
✓ Non-victim blaming	The programme avoids language/behaviours that could imply children and young people are at fault for harm they experience, recognising the importance of supporting and reassuring victims. For example, when delivering the education resources to children and young people, professionals are encouraged to focus on the behaviour of the perpetrators of abuse (in lesson films, case studies, etc) rather than the actions of the victim.
✓ Non-scaremongering	Rather than using fear-based or confrontational messaging, the programme takes strengths-based and empowering approaches. For example, it avoids language like "if you share a nude image, it will be online forever" which can feel overwhelming or discouraging. Instead, it focuses on helping young people understand and respond to nude image-based abuse and to know when and how to seek help.

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Principle of effective education prevention	Evidence in the case study
✓ Enabling and empowering	The programme provides tools, knowledge and support required for children and young people, professionals, and parents and carers to recognise negative behaviours online, and builds confidence to take action through help-seeking and reporting. Clear signposts to further support and reporting routes are available in every resource.
✓ Inclusive and developmentally appropriate	The programme ensures all content is age-appropriate and considers the diverse needs of children and young people. It aims to reduce barriers to learning by designing resources that are inclusive from the start. This includes offering alternative and accessible formats, such as captioned videos and simplified language.

Case study

Australian Federal Police/Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) ThinkUKnow programme⁴

Embedded within the ACCCE, the ThinkUKnow program leverages seven intelligence-driven sources to inform child protection education.

Their integrated, evidence-based model enhances law enforcement's ability to proactively address online child abuse and exploitation through informed prevention strategies.

The programme provides resources, advice and presentations for children and young people, parents, carers and educators.

Principle of effective education prevention	Evidence in the case study
✓ Localised	The programme uses Australian-based intelligence and state and territory police feedback to identify trends and issues, and utilises strong working relationships with education across Australia to help ensure resource content is appropriate and relevant.
✓ Child-centred	All resources are 'message tested' with children and young people to ensure that the content relates to the real and current issues they are experiencing, and the mode of delivery is suitable for them.
✓ Inclusive and developmentally appropriate	The programme benefits from strong collaboration with education departments and testing with a broad range of children and young people.
✓ Holistic/ contextual safeguarding	Integration of multiple intelligence, evidence and feedback sources, including law enforcement, education, research and the community, are evident within the programme. Strong cross-sector links ensure messaging is filtered to parents and carers and the wider community.
✓ Collaborative	Collaboration through partnerships with intelligence teams within ACCCE, Five Eyes, State and Territory Police, researchers and education departments helps to identify emerging offender tactics and inform resource content.
✓ Enabling and empowering	The evidence-based model aims to prevent online CSA through equipping children and young people, professionals and parents and carers with knowledge, skills and confidence to recognise and report abuse.
✓ Impact evaluation	Evaluation through a randomised controlled trial (RCT) ⁹ provides strong experimental evidence that the programme increases children and young people's understanding of cyber abuse. It also provides evidence that those exposed to the programme are more likely to report incidents to the police.

Case study

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Know2Protect campaign (USA)¹⁰

Know2Protect is a national public awareness campaign from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and HSI to educate and empower children and young people, carers, professionals, and policymakers to help prevent online child sexual abuse.

Through strategic messaging and resource dissemination, the campaign delivers information and encourages reporting of online CSA.

Know2Protect's Objectives:

- **Education:** Raise awareness of online CSEA and encourage communities to educate themselves and others about this crime.
- **Prevention:** Provide resources and tools to help prevent children and teens from becoming victims of online CSEA.
- **Intervention:** Empower communities to act, report abuse, and support victims and survivors of online CSEA.

Principle of effective education prevention	Evidence in the case study
 Localised	The campaign utilises 'Social Listening', enabling the campaign to benefit from real-time/place insights into how the public is utilising and shares its information across social media platforms. The campaign also uses local and national HSI-led cases to inform its in-person training program, Project iGuardian, ensuring the content is relevant and appropriate for the local community. Project iGuardian content relies exclusively on HSI subject matter expertise and its law enforcement perspective and authorities that have led to successful investigations and criminal prosecutions. HSI has offices in 237 cities across the U.S. and 94 offices in 56 countries; HSI special agents and other subject matter experts from these HSI offices deliver iGuardian presentations in their local communities to schools, parent and community groups, corporations and nonprofit organizations that want to learn more and join the fight against online CSA.
 Non-victim blaming	The campaign works with its HSI Victim Assistance and Forensic Interview Specialists to ensure the campaign messaging is trauma-informed and victim centred. Their messaging makes it clear that online CSA is never the victim's fault.
 Holistic/contextual safeguarding	The campaign's messaging and resources target multiple audiences, indicative of a whole-society approach to prevention. Insights have been used to inform policy recommendations and legislative updates, ensuring that legislation remains responsive to emerging trends.

Principle of effective education prevention	Evidence in the case study
✓ Collaborative	Know2Protect actively engages with a broad network of stakeholders, including government, law enforcement, schools, community organisations, and non-profits, to deliver presentations, campaigns, and disseminate resources. These partnerships help tailor messaging to diverse audiences and ensure that prevention efforts are embedded across multiple community settings. The campaign's collaboration with education and community groups enables law enforcement to extend its reach, build trust, and reinforce consistent safeguarding messages. This multi-sector engagement supports a sustainable and inclusive approach to CSA prevention.
✓ Impact evaluation	Evaluation of Project iGuardian (the training program of Know2Protect) through the Fiscal Year 2024 and 2025 Annual Reports¹¹ tracks the impact of the training programs delivered since October 2023, with over 2400 presentations delivered and over 216,000 people reached in person and over 2.3 million reached virtually. Audiences are domestic and international. Project iGuardian has also led to more than 100 investigative leads and over 160 victim disclosures.
✓ Enabling and empowering	The campaign provides information and resources that aim to increase knowledge and encourage reporting, equipping target audiences with the tools to act.

Case study

Directorate of Criminal Investigations, Kenya – Anti-Human Trafficking & Child Protection Unit (DCI-AHTCPU)¹²

A local awareness campaign led by the DCI-AHTCPU, in collaboration with the MX4 Foundation and the Communications Authority of Kenya, was launched to promote online safety and empower children to report suspicious online activity.

By aligning with the global Safer Internet Day initiative and tailoring its messaging to the local context, the campaign raised awareness of online child sexual abuse (and wider online harms) and encouraged proactive reporting through child-focused engagement and strategic communication.

Principle of effective education prevention	Evidence in the case study
✓ Child-centred	Interactive sessions were conducted with over 1,200 pupils at Moi Education Center and Olympic Primary School in Nairobi, focusing on online safety, cyberbullying prevention, and empowering children to report suspicious online activity, including online CSA.
✓ Collaborative	The campaign highlighted that online CSA (and online safety in general) is a global crime and education priority. By drawing on 'Safer Internet Day' – a global event and tailoring to local context, the DCI-AHTCPU acknowledge the importance of collaborative and aligned messaging for children and young people. The initiative was implemented in partnership with MX4 Foundation and the Communications Authority of Kenya, combining resources and expertise to maximise outreach and impact.
✓ Localised	The campaign targeted local primary schools in Nairobi, engaging pupils, teachers, and caregivers in a familiar environment to address digital safety issues in a contextually relevant way.
✓ Enabling and empowering	Pupils, teachers, and caregivers were equipped with practical knowledge, reporting mechanisms, and educational materials to help them take informed action on online safety.
✓ Holistic/ contextual safeguarding	The initiative engaged multiple stakeholders: law enforcement, schools, caregivers, and civil society. Promoting a whole community approach to online child protection and creating stronger prevention and response networks.

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