

Sexual violence – not with me!

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

Sexuality is not only about pleasurable and creative energy. It also has a dark side to it. Women and men, girls and boys also sometimes experience physical and mental injury caused when permissible limits are exceeded. For a long time, society and consequently prevention work greatly minimized the possibility of boy's being sexually abused. One of the reasons, among others, was the gender-based idea and misperception that boys could defend themselves against any sexual abuse and that nothing happened to them. On the one hand, boys did not disclose their experiences as victims of sexual violence, because, for one, they presumed that no one would believe them and on the other hand, they did not speak about their boyhood victim experience because of the immense shame and disgrace connected with it and as they did not want to be regarded as unmanly (or equated with a failure), for not being able to defend themselves. This 'secret' environment is what enabled the offender to violently inflict their power and lead the victim to feel hopeless and powerless.

Educational programs designed specifically for this group are needed to break this chain of abuse and to carry out effective prevention against sexual violence. Even still today boys learn different values and norms than girls in the educational process. Boys, therefore need a broad range of other social-emotional skills in order to appropriately cope when they face threatening situations. Training in raising awareness and self-reflection are at the heart of violence prevention measures for boys.

The medium used for this module is a comic book. This didactic choice is especially suited for boys and comic books generally meet their reading interests. On the one hand, boys enjoy reading these kinds of illustrated stories and on the other hand, this method helps the boys to keep a certain healthy distance from this, often threatening subject. The boys can also relate well to this visual teaching method.

This comic book includes eleven stories that have originated out of practical work with groups of boys and girls from multicultural backgrounds and they show ways children can resist against a violation of their permissible limits. The comic book does not create any false illusions denying the power gap between children and adults: boys' and girls' anxiety is taken seriously as well as their feelings of shame and confusion. One of the central themes is that it is appropriate and important to seek help from friends as well as adults. The children are characterized in their full complexity, the traditional gender roles and stereotypes are surmounted. In this way, the behaviour of the girls and boys depends on their personality and situation, rather than gender. This subject matter which at first glance may seem hard, unfortunately reflects the experiences of many girls and boys. In this way, the children who read this comic book feel like they are taken seriously and are confirmed in their perceptions. The main childlike characters are not just limited to just their victim experiences, but are shown as having fun and happy experiences, as well.

Similar topics:

Body and health, identity, aggressiveness, culture and society

Materials:

- “Lass das – nimm die Finger weg! Ein Comic für Mädchen und Jungen” (“Stop it! Get Your Hands Off Me! A comic book for girls and boys”)
- Cushions and possibly chairs

Duration:

The duration varies with the use of the comic book stories. The reading of a story is estimated to take about 15 minutes. Any follow-up activity such as pupils acting out scenes (e.g. a role play), must be scheduled in and depends on the interest of the boys.

Number of participants

A maximum of 12 participants

Age:

7 to 11 years of age

Aims:

- To learn to trust your own feelings;
- To know your own limits and those of others;
- To learn to see powerlessness as a male trait;
- To be aware of sexual abuse/ sexual violence;
- To discover alternative solutions;
- To increase your courage to “say no!”, setting-limit strategies;
- To gain an awareness of body language and to make good use of that;
- To cultivate a feedback culture amongst boys.

(Short) Explanation:

Eleven, basically everyday stories are presented in a comic book format for boys and girls of primary school age. These stories give useful tips about how children can protect themselves when someone gets too close to them.

Depending on the concentration capacity of the group of boys, two to three stories per class session can be presented and reflected upon either as the story is being read or at the end of the story. Different ideas for solutions can be acted out in the form of role plays.

It would be a good idea to alternate reading a story with some kind of physical activities or games to boost concentration level back up again and so the pupils will be motivated to listen to another story. Naturally, these activities in-between stories should enable the theme of the particular comic book story to be handled in more depth. For example, the pupils can practice “saying no!”, reflect on the notion of getting-help or work on increasing their sensitivity to body language, so that what they have heard is sufficiently and solidly integrated into their individual behaviour skills



A brief introduction to the comic strip
 "Lass das – nimm die Finger weg!"
 ("Stop it! Get Your Hands Off Me!")!

The girls and boys from the Kölner Straße meet afternoons at the construction playground. There they build their playhouse, they invent games, have fun and also get together when they have something important to say to each other. They also think about how they can defend themselves whenever adults, young persons or other children hurt their feelings and intimidate them. Together they drive out an exhibitionist, they bolster Leo's courage to defend himself against his football coach if he tries to fondle him, they complain to their parents about the inappropriately insistent babysitter and come up with a great idea about how they can protect themselves against nasty telephone calls.

Learning setting:

The boys sit in a semi-circle on soft cushions on the floor. Ideally, the person reading (the group leader) will be sitting opposite the boys on a chair. As the illustrations in the comic book are sufficiently large, it is possible to constantly show the boys the DIN A4-sized comic book as they are being read. The reader sits behind the comic book and in this way can best see the boys' reactions and if need be, can also close the book if the reader notices any questions or to give the boys a chance to ask questions. The reader must be so familiar with the contents of the stories to be able to tell the stories from memory. Due to the construction of the individual stories it is also possible to deliberately interrupt the stories before the final ending and place the comic book aside, for a minute or two, and to ask the boys: "What would you have done if you had been in "Leo's shoes" in this situation?" The boys should be encouraged to think about other solutions and to discuss them with each other.



Reflection:

During or at the latest at the end of each individual comic book stories, the boys present should be queried about their impressions if possible, but also be given the opportunity to express themselves. It is also a useful feedback exercise to act out the stories in role plays.

Variations:

It is possible to act out the comic book stories as role plays in order to identify other solutions.

If the group already knows each other, then individual themes of a given comic book story can be acted out separately. The rationale behind this is that certain conflicts (hierarchy, outsider roles, etc) that exist latently in the boy-group, can better be discussed using one or the other comic book (as reinforcing elements).

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

According to statistics, every 4 to 7 boys in Germany has experienced sexual violence, i.e. an adult of another young person has used his position of authority, his physical/mental dominance as well as the naivety, the trust or the dependence of the boys for their personal sexual gratification and at the same time impose silence on the boys.

Boys (as well as girls) experience sexual abuse/ violence in very different forms and relationships. Sexual assaults occur in most cases from close social contacts: the family, neighbourhood, during sports and leisure activities, but also to a large extent from their own family of origin. Only about 25% of the boys are assaulted by strangers.

Sexual violence includes the following:

- A child is fondled for one's own sexual gratification or the child is lead to touch another's intimate parts;
- A child is forced or persuaded to be seen naked, or exposed to sexual activities;
- A child is used for pornographic purposes or exposed to pornography;
- A child is approached in an exhibitionist manner;
- The intimate parts of a child are touched and the child is forced or persuaded to have oral, anal or vaginal sexual intercourse or any other sexual activity.

For these children, there is hardly any possibility to escape child abuse. Through threats and pressure to keep quiet, the children are forced into silence. Often the sexual violence takes place over a long period of time and leads the victim into a hopeless situation. They are seeking love and protection and they experience a breach of their trust, powerlessness as well as constant demonstration of violence. This has a serious and lasting effect on their future lives.

In the context of male socialisation, on the one hand, being a man/ being a boy and a victim experience have hardly anything to do with each other. Often they must confront myths and messages like a "real boy defends himself!" and "an Indian knows no pain." On the other hand, no male socialization process goes without general victim experiences. These experiences are fed by different experience horizons. Usually they don't belong to the male image and – if at all – are only used in order to degrade others or distance oneself from others. Many boys must live with this conflict and cope with it in one way or the other.

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