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Targeting Sexual Abuse/Maltreatment in Children with Disabilities

Abstract

Sexual abuse and maltreatment in children with disabilities have become a more widespread, and critical public issue (Hibbard & Desch, 2007). Recent research studies show statistically that in 2015, children with disabilities were more likely to experience sexual abuse, maltreatment, and violence more frequently than their peers who lack disabilities (Harrell, 2017). One of the following pronounced barriers that children with disabilities face is failure to realize when sexual abuse and maltreatment has occurred. In addition to this, professionals frequently lack the appropriate knowledge needed to assess and identify when sexual abuse has taken place. Many professionals are unfamiliar with the policies, procedures and institutional protocols put in place for reporting, and because of this, usually tries to resolve and investigate the issues in question without alerting the appropriate authorities. Depending on the disability that the child presents with, most disabled children lack the ability to verbalize the continuous acts of sexual abuse and maltreatment, thus, leaving the sexual offense unrecognized and unreported. The purpose of this paper is to provide awareness to professional special education teaching staff of Jacques Cartier/Robert F. Kennedy school on identifying signs and symptoms of sexual abuse in children with disabilities. Three special education teachers were utilized for this project--1 lead teacher, and 2 paraprofessionals (assistant teachers). The goal set for each teacher was to increase their knowledge on identifying sexual abuse and/or maltreatment. In addition, they familiarized themselves with knowledge on proper policies and institutional procedures for reporting suspected sexual abuse cases. The average score on the pre-test was 86%, whereas after the lecture, and question and answer session are completed, the average score on the post-test was 100%. The results of the testing show that the staff successfully received proper understanding on targeting signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and maltreatment in children with disabilities. In addition, they verbalized increased understanding and consequences of failure to report suspected sexual abuse cases to appropriate authorities.

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