

Protective Behaviours training – 7th and 8th March 2016

I work as a social worker within a very small project in a national charity offering therapeutic support to children and young people who have been sexually abused. Through the funding provided by the FPSA I was able to attend local training that is offered by the Protective Behaviours Consortium.

I had heard about the Protective Behaviours Process from primary mental health colleagues and school nurses and was interested in finding out more as I felt it would be relevant to the young people I work with. It is an approach that originated in Australia by Peg West and its broad aims are to prevent bullying, victimisation and abuse and to promote happy, healthy adventurous living.

The process is centred around two themes: we all have the right to feel safe all the time; and we can talk to someone about anything even if it's awful or small.

Within these themes are strategies to help us, and those we work with, to understand that we have a right to feel safe 24/7 and to recognise that when we are starting to feel unsafe we have options open to us to either avoid or deal with the issue/ situation. We can learn to recognise that we are starting to feel unsafe by identifying our early warning signals (e.g. a racing pulse, tight chest etc.) and understanding that feeling unsafe is different from feeling scared for fun (e.g. watching a scary film, riding a rollercoaster) and from taking a risk on purpose (e.g. going out of our comfort zone with a positive goal in sight). Part of the process is identifying our own coping strategies and identifying our supportive network of specific people we can approach if we feel unsafe.

The themes of the protective behaviour process are helpful to practitioners (recognising and accepting when we may feel unsafe and seeking solutions) and to the young people we work with (who are at increased risk of revictimisation, often feel anxious and unsafe, and present worrying behaviours e.g. self harming). The strategies within the process are not new concepts – e.g. identifying supportive people and paying attention to our early warning signals. However these were explored in some depth and it was helpful to consider them within a clear framework and underpinned by the two themes. The course provided some practical ideas that I will be using in both group work and individual work with young people.

Thank you FPSA for enabling me to attend.