

Conference
Preventing sexual abuse of children
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Focused prevention: empowering children in preventing sexual abuse

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Summary

The focus of this paper will be on the benefits of early intervention with children and teenagers who engage in sexually inappropriate or sexually abusive behaviour. One third of all child sexual abuse (CSA) is perpetrated by teenagers and, increasingly, there are indications that much younger children are also responsible for a significant amount of problematic sexual behaviour, which can be the antecedent to more serious abusive behaviour later. From the point of view of prevention, early intervention with this population is considered very important.

The presenter has published a guide for parents and carers on sexualised behaviour which is available in both English and Spanish. The aim of this publication was to help parents and carers to be able to distinguish between NORMAL, PROBLEMATIC and ABUSIVE behaviour and to be able to intervene in a way that is proportionate to the degree of difficulty involved. This is particularly important given that many children and young people are being exposed to pornography, via smartphones and the Internet, which in many cases is having a very detrimental effect on their behaviour. This publication is available as a free download in both languages.

He has also been involved in the development of services for the evaluation and treatment of young people who sexually abuse, both in Ireland and Spain. In the latter case he was the designer of the ATURA'T programme in Palma, Majorca which treats young people between the ages of 14-18 years who have been convicted of sexual offences in the Balearic region. This service has been in operation since 2008.

A major obstacle for Spanish professionals working with youth who have sexually abused is a lack of access to up-to-date resources in Spanish. The quantity of material in English is vastly greater and unless professionals have a very good command of English they are very restricted in its use. A reliable evaluation instrument was a basic requirement for a service that sought to assess and treat youth who had committed sexual crimes. However, no such instrument existed in Spanish. As a consequence, the presenter sought and obtained the permission of the authors of the AIM2 evaluation model (Print et al, 2007) to have it translated into Spanish. Since 2009 the Spanish version has been used by the ATURA'T team in preparing evaluations on young people who attend their service.

The presenter strongly believes that effective prevention strategies must include early intervention with both young people who sexually abuse and those at risk of it, through problematic sexualised behaviour.