

Mobile County Public School System

Personal Safety Curriculum



A Training Guide for Preventing, Detecting and Reporting

Child Abuse and Neglect

Pre-K – Grade 5

Revised October 2016

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Erin's Law

The Mandate

Revised October 2016

Table of Contents

Preface	2
Introduction.....	3
Acknowledgements	4
Overview of the Personal Safety Curriculum (PSC).....	5
Erin’s Law.....	6
Mandatory Reporting Procedures for Child Abuse and Neglect	8
PSC Lessons for Pre-K through Grade 2.....	32
PSC Lessons for Grade 3 and Grade 4.....	69
Additional PSC Lessons for Grade 3 and Grade 4.....	99
PSC Lessons for Grade 5 and Grade 6	125
Teacher Resources	145

PREFACE

The Mobile County Public School System has had a Personal Safety Curriculum in place for the last twenty-five years. In response to the Alabama Legislature's passage of Erin's Law (HB197) in July 2015, a committee has worked diligently to revise the current curriculum to meet the guidelines set forth by the Alabama State Department of Education for a Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program for students in grades Pre-kindergarten through twelfth. This curriculum will be consistent with techniques to teach children to recognize child sexual abuse, equip them with skills to reduce their vulnerability, and encourage them to report their abuse.

The curriculum guide is divided into four teaching units. The concepts are the same for each grade; however, the vocabulary and lesson plans are appropriate for each grade. Each unit will add to previous skills taught. Although several lessons may be presented per unit, the counselor/teacher is obligated to teach only one lesson per four units to each grade level. The classroom teacher will support the school counselor throughout the lesson. The lessons may be incorporated into the existing Science, Health, Physical Education and/or Language Arts Curricula.

Teachers will be provided training prior to implementation of the program. A thorough awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse will be presented. In addition, skills pertaining to identification, handling, and reporting child abuse cases will be covered. Most importantly, teachers/counselors will be provided information to implement the curriculum with confidence.

Materials will also be provided to assist parents. Included will be information related to keeping their child safe from abuse as well as proper use of cell phones and other technology. Prior to the implementation of the curriculum, a letter will be sent to parents.

During the lessons, it is important to take note of students' behaviors. During or after the lesson, the student may share sensitive incidents or concerns with the teacher/counselor. Most importantly, students should be listened to, believed and feel cared for by the counselor/teacher.

INTRODUCTION

BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO TEACH PERSONAL SAFETY

Teachers are frequently the caring, compassionate and consistent adults with whom students share their concerns about abuse. Few adults have the same opportunity as a teacher to identify abused children and start a process that will restore safety in a child's world. However, many teachers have not been adequately prepared to deal with the complex social issues that have so strongly affected abused children. When properly trained, a caring, open teacher who knows and listens to his/her students will often be the adult to whom the student discloses sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse.

Prior to 1975, no laws existed in Alabama to protect children from child sexual abuse. In 2013, Alabama amended the law relating to the mandatory reporting of known or suspected child abuse or neglect. The amendment expands the persons required to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect to include all employees of both public and private K-12 schools and requires that the person who hears the disclosure make the necessary report. The amendment also provides that any public or private employer who disciplines or penalizes an employee for reporting suspected child abuse and/or neglect is guilty of a Class C misdemeanor.

In 2015, the Alabama legislature passed Erin's Law, which mandates that each school system provide a personal safety curriculum. Age appropriate sexual abuse awareness and prevention education in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve is required to be implemented immediately.

YOUR PERSONAL PREPARATION IS IMPORTANT

Guidelines and lesson plans are included to be used with the students. Background information about child sexual abuse and procedures to follow in the event of student disclosures are also included in the curriculum. It is also necessary to consider the well-being of the counselor/teacher in the event of disclosures of abuse.

Take time to become thoroughly familiar with the materials. Choose the lesson format that best fits your class. Although it is the responsibility of the school counselor to teach the lesson, the classroom teacher must remain to assist as needed. During the lesson, the teacher should be observant of the students' behaviors and report those to the counselor for follow-up.

It is vital that each teacher/counselor assess their own personal comfort level and be mindful of biases regarding abuse, including child sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse. Included in the curriculum are resources to assist teachers, counselors and students in the healing process. Unfortunately, abuse is still prevalent in our society and often remains a secret. With the help of this personal safety curriculum, we hope to help victims of abuse become survivors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The team members, who revised this guide, are to be commended for their capable and dedicated leadership. This team recognizes that classroom teachers and school counselors have a unique opportunity to identify abused children. They realize that probably no adult is more trusted by children who have been abused, than a beloved and caring teacher.

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OVERVIEW OF THE PERSONAL SAFETY CURRICULUM

The Personal Safety Curriculum has been taught in Mobile for twenty-five years. In fact, Mobile County Public School System is one of the few school districts in Alabama with written guidelines, objectives and activities in which school personnel provide instruction to students. The program goal and the corresponding student learning objectives are intended to help students achieve, maintain and enhance their well-being. Over the years, this curriculum has provided a framework for students to report all forms of abuse and/or neglect.

Erin's Law, which was passed in Alabama in 2015, has prompted the MCPSS to reevaluate their curriculum and to make revisions to accommodate the new state guidelines. The broad goal of the Personal Safety Curriculum is to help prevent and address child sexual abuse. The overall goal of Erin's Law is to create a safe and engaging environment where students learn about and become aware of the signs of child abuse.

Included in the learning process of child sexual abuse, students learn the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touches. A unit on recognizing safe/good secrets and bad/unsafe secrets will be presented. Empowering students to find their voice, the confidence to speak up, and the ability to recognize potentially dangerous situations is vital to the well-being of all students.

To accomplish these goals, children require the following:

1. Knowledge and ability to identify abuse and an understanding of the problem
2. An understanding that everyone has the right to control their own body, especially during exchanges of physical affection
3. Effective communication skills and assertive techniques for telling someone not to hurt them
4. Knowledge of whom to tell when abuse is occurring
5. Confidence that their family or community support system will believe and protect them
6. Perseverance to tell their story until the child abuse stops
7. The understanding that: **IT IS NEVER THE CHILD'S FAULT!**