

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

An Exploratory Study of the Knowledge of Personal Safety Skills Among Children with Developmental Disabilities and Their Parents

Miller, H.L., Pavlik, K.M., Kim, M.A., & Rogers, K.C. (2017). An exploratory study of the knowledge of personal safety skills among children with developmental disabilities and their parents *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 30 290-300. doi:10.1111/jar.12239

SUMMARY: Children with developmental disabilities may have decreased knowledge of personal safety skills, increasing the risk of maltreatment. Structured interviews assessed the personal safety knowledge of children with developmental disabilities referred to a risk reduction program. In addition, a questionnaire was used to obtain parents' perception of their child's personal safety skills. Both child interviews and parent perceptions indicated low personal safety knowledge in several areas including identifying appropriate and responding to inappropriate touch.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The majority of children with developmental disabilities in the study displayed incorrect knowledge of private parts (73%), and could not correctly identify physical changes associated with puberty (86%).
- Over half (54%) of the children could not correctly identify appropriate touch.
- Few parents (11%) of children with developmental disabilities indicated their child had the skills to keep themselves safe frequently or always.
- More than one third (38%) of parents indicated their child rarely or never is able to know how to respond to inappropriate touch.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with other professionals about ways to provide personal safety skills training to children with special needs in military families
- Facilitate activities designed to assist military parents of children with special needs in educating their child about healthy child behaviors

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education for military parents of children with special needs on strategies for teaching appropriate touch
- Enhance programs for military families of children with special needs to include personal safety skills education

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of programs that assist children with special needs in military families learn personal safety skills
- Recommend courses for professionals to learn strategies to assist military parents in teaching their children with special needs healthy development behaviors

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METHODS

- Children with developmental disabilities participating in a risk reduction program and their parents were recruited from a mental health clinic.
- Clinicians used structured interviews to assess children's knowledge of personal safety skills.
- A questionnaire was used to measure each parent's perception of their child's level of personal safety skills knowledge.
- The percentage of children answering each type of personal safety question correctly was determined, and compared to parent perceptions.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 37 children between the ages of 7 and 19 years with developmental disabilities and one of their parents.
- Most children were male (54%) and most identified as Latino (84%).
- In addition to having a developmental disability, all children had at least one psychiatric diagnosis.
- Parent demographics were not included.

LIMITATIONS

- Children in the study were referred to the risk reduction program by a clinical professional that perceived a need; thus, the sample was likely biased toward including higher numbers of children without the appropriate skills.
- The majority of children were Latino; therefore, the results may not generalize well to other populations.
- Because children were required to have sufficient language skills to comprehend and respond to the interview questions, the results may not generalize to children with more severe language impairments.
- Due to the wide age range of children and relatively small sample size, the results may not generalize to more selective age groups.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess the level of personal safety knowledge children with special needs have who were not previously referred to a risk reduction program
- Determine the levels of personal safety knowledge in a variety of populations of children with special needs
- Explore strategies that effectively increase personal safety knowledge and skills in children with special needs

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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