



Sexual Safety Risk Management

In recent years, several high-profile sexual abuse and molestation cases have come to light, including Boy Scouts of America, the Catholic Church, and many more allegations stimulated by the #MeToo movement. These cases have brought attention to sexual safety, exposing more instances of sexual abuse and misconduct across industries, specialties, and organizations.

How do you address the risk of sexual abuse and molestation within your organization or practice?

It's important to know the patterns and vulnerabilities as well as warning signs of potential sexual abuse behaviors. Potential risk exposures can look different depending on the setting, but there are three common scenarios to be aware of:

1 Crimes of opportunity

These are scenarios where a vulnerable party is exposed to a sexual abuser in a one-off situation. Think of a victim alone in a dark area or an unusually vulnerable situation when an offender takes advantage of the opportunity to assault a victim. Warning signs of an abuser may not be as evident in this scenario. It's important to prevent opportunistic abuse by raising bystander awareness; using escorts; making sure all areas are well lit; using security officers, cameras, and other security measures, such as alarms or panic buttons; and using whatever tools may be effective in that setting to prevent, deter, and interrupt attempts.

2 Predatory behaviors

Predators often choose to work, volunteer, or frequent settings where potential victims are especially vulnerable to opportunistic crime or ongoing grooming behaviors. Think youth-serving organizations, healthcare and senior care facilities, religious institutions and nonprofits, where staffing or budgets are often stretched or the organization is dependent on volunteers. Many of these are settings in which there is a high degree of trust. Often, victims are emotionally, physically, intellectually, or even financially vulnerable.

Organizations should be aware of the vulnerabilities in their settings and proactively protect against sexual abuse using safety science principles to set up systems that prevent adverse events and outcomes. This requires organizations to recognize situations where there might be a vulnerable person alone with or exposed to a person with power and influence that could be abused and to take steps to prevent that from happening.

Organizations should promote a just culture, encouraging the immediate reporting of risky behaviors or situations.

3 Slippery-slope situations

This type of sexual abuse is more likely to occur in an ongoing and existing relationship. Think of counselors with clients, teachers with students, or clergy with parishioners. Conduct between the two parties may seem harmless and even caring at first but becomes increasingly inappropriate until boundaries are clearly crossed and ethics are breached.

It is important that employees know the factors that make a person vulnerable to slippery-slope scenarios and the warning signs to look out for in their peers. The more educated individuals are on the precipitating factors and avenues for speaking up, the less likely it is that a sexual misconduct case will occur. Education can be made available in the form of training, counseling, or awareness campaigns, complete with posters and educational materials.

Warning signs, education, auditing, investigating, and reporting best practices can vary by setting, but OmniSure can help. With a nationwide network of clinical experts, OmniSure is a valuable partner, assisting you in making the right decisions when it comes to protecting your organization and your patients.

[Advice is confidential and available at no charge to professional liability policyholders by specialists in healthcare and human services.](#)

What customers are saying

"Extremely informative. I learned many new things to help with the day-to-day running of our facility to help keep us up to date on best practices." - Marlya D.

"Karen Black's onsite visit provided us with a wealth of information for risk management including policies and forms to be used. She is the utmost professional and was a pleasure to work with." - JR P.

"Carol had many visions for our building. She was a great help. We look forward to maintain our partnership with OmniSure and their many resources." - Lordins G.

"As a small organization, it is difficult to establish relationships with specialty organizations for expert advise on the few topics which come up. It is also risky to wait until an event occurs to get the guidance needed to get through some tough situations. The advise is both key in preventing error as well as providing peace-of-mind." - George D.