

Erin's Law: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Erin's Law?

A: Erin's Law (in Illinois, Public Act 96-1524) mandates that Illinois public schools provide training to certified staff on prevention of child sexual abuse. It also mandates that public school children pre-kindergarten through 12th grade be educated on body safety rules and how to protect themselves from a perpetrator.

Q: What will my child learn in these lessons?

A: Lesson content varies with the age of the child. The focus of lessons for pre-kindergarten students is identifying body parts (arm, leg, etc.) and feelings. Kindergarten through 2nd grade will learn about personal body safety rules, safe touches, and defining safe people. 3rd through 6th grade will continue to reinforce the body safety rules, body boundaries, safe touches, good vs. bad secrets, identifying a safe person, advocating for themselves, and how to use social media appropriately.

Q: Who teaches the lessons?

A: Lessons are taught by the social worker who works in your child's building. There will likely be an additional support staff (school psychologist or counselor) who will be in the classroom as well. The classroom teacher will also be in the classroom and involved with the discussion.

Q: When will the lessons be taught?

A: Lesson will be completed in the spring semester of the school year. Specific lesson times will vary within each elementary building. Please contact your building Principal or classroom teacher.

Q: Do I have the right to refuse and opt out?

A: We hope all parents will partner with us to educate our children. Please contact your building principal if this is a concern. Parents have also asked questions about participation for a child who has been abused; we will work with parents and students on an individual basis to make the best decision for that student.

Q: How was District staff trained?

A: All District staff were trained in January by social workers, psychologists, and counselors. Staff members previewed the materials and videos that will be used to teach the students. They learned about the warning signs of sexual abuse and how those signs differ depending upon the age of the child. They also learned what to do and not to do if a child discloses to them, as well as how to report potential sexual abuse.

Q: What happens when a child discloses to a staff member?

A: Just as for any other circumstance in which a child reports or a staff member discovers any kind of abuse, staff members are mandated reporters. That means staff are required to make a report to DCFS. Parents may also be contacted.

Q: How does that process work?

A: Illinois law requires that the person who has first-hand information must be the person who makes the report. An administrator, social worker, or psychologist may sit with a staff member during the report. During the report, DCFS takes basic identifying information as well as information on what the staff member saw or heard. By law, staff do not investigate claims made by children—that is solely the role of DCFS and law enforcement.

Q: As a parent, what is my role?

A: Parents are vital partners in the fight against child sexual abuse. Parents can help to reinforce and clarify concepts that children learn in sexual abuse prevention programs. Communicating with your child about body safety can potentially decrease the chances of children keeping the abuse a secret. (Fieldman & Crespi, 2002).

Additional resources: www.erinslaw.org www.erinslawillinois.org/ www.ncsl.org/