

Workshops teach kids, parents and teachers how to prevent child assault

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WOODLAND PARK — John DiGiovachino, the school district's director of special education and student support services, talks about the NJ Child Assault Prevention program, a series of workshops that teach students, teachers and parents about child abuse — what it is, how to spot it and where to go for help.

The district's next workshop, for parents with children in Grades K-6, will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Beatrice Gilmore School.

Q. What is the NJ Child Assault Prevention Program?

CAP is a three-tier program. There's a children's program, there's teacher training and there's parent training. The CAP project teaches children to recognize dangerous situations. The teacher and parent training is to prevent the victimization of children. They're going to learn what child sexual assault is, how to identify it and how to report it if they feel the child has been abused. The CAP program is not new. It was started by former Gov. Thomas H. Kean, and this is the 25th year the program is running.

Q. How does it work?

The trainings are done at each school, one by one, by counselors from the NJ Child Prevention Program. The student workshops are about an hour long and use guided group discussions. They also do role playing on what situations children might encounter, like a stranger giving them candy to get them into their car. It could be child-to-child assault, adult-to-child assault or an assault involving an adult the child knows. The strategy the counselors work on is assertion, peer support and to tell a trusted adult if something happened to them. That's where the parent and teacher training comes in.

Q. Why target the parents and teachers in this program?

Parents and teachers are an integral part of the process, and rightly so. This way, they understand what's going on. If a child tells them they've been assaulted, then they know who they should be contacting.

Q. How much does it cost?

I wrote the grant for the district. The state paid \$5,515 and the district is responsible for \$2,500. They come up with the amount based on how many sections you have in each grade.

Q. Why did the district decide to host this training?

God forbid, if they find themselves in this situation, they'll know how to get help. Lately, we've heard a lot about abductions. You think of that situation in California. (Jaycee Dugard was kidnapped at age 11 and held for 18 years, allegedly by a convicted sex offender.) We want our children to be safe.