

From Challenge to Triumph: Implementing Body Safety Education in Los Gatos

Childhood Victories' Be Seen and Heard® curriculum empowered Los Gatos Union School District to meet Erin's Law mandates effectively, transforming how educators, parents, and students address and prevent child abuse.



LOS GATOS
UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Challenge:

In 2011, author, speaker, activist, and childhood sexual abuse survivor Erin Merry introduced legislation in her home state of Illinois that would mandate child sexual abuse prevention education in schools. Since then, Erin's Law has been passed in 38 states, but schools and districts often struggle to meet these mandates effectively without personnel specifically trained in this area. The fact is that, with one in five children experiencing a form of child sexual abuse and ninety percent of those victims being abused by someone they know, getting body safety education right is essential.

Misty Hartung, Director of Student Services for Los Gatos Union School District in California, faced the challenge of integrating a comprehensive, cohesive body safety education program that resonated with students and teachers and put parents at ease. Prior to partnering with Childhood Victories, the district's approach was fragmented, developed in-house, and lacked the depth necessary to foster genuine understanding and safety among students.

Supporting Research:

- One in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys will experience sexual abuse at some point in their childhood.
(Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#))
- Children who receive school-based prevention programs are more likely to disclose abuse.
(Source: [Crimes Against Children Research Center](#))
- Teachers often feel unprepared to address childhood sexual abuse with students.
(Source: [Journal of Child Sexual Abuse](#))
- Parental involvement in education programs increases their effectiveness.
(Source: [Journal of Trauma, Violence, and Abuse](#))

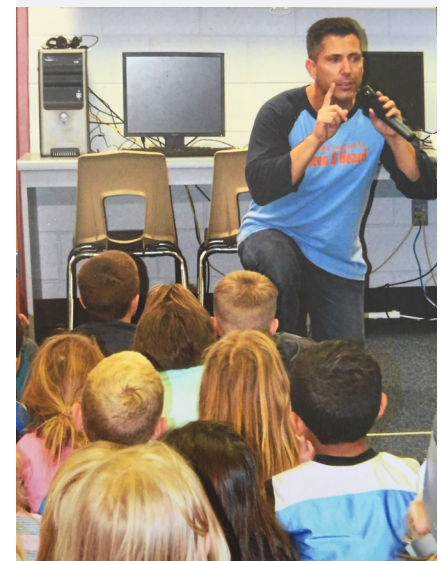
Target Outcomes:

1. Adoption of age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention and body safety instruction that supports all grade levels.
2. Increased teacher confidence in discussing child sexual abuse prevention by equipping educators with supportive language and systems for disclosure.
3. Increased student understanding and awareness of body safety and empowerment to disclose abuse.
4. Enhanced peace of mind for parents and families regarding child abuse.

Demographics:

Los Gatos Union School District Overview:

- TK to 8th grade school district
- About 2,750 enrolled students
- 4 elementary schools
- High academic performance
- 57% White, 25% Asian or Asian Pacific Islander, 10% two or more races, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Black
- 4% free and reduced lunch
- 7% English learners
- 20:1 student-teacher ratio



Implementation:

The partnership between Los Gatos Union School District and Childhood Victories began in 2018. Misty Hartung was looking for an expert provider that could equip educators with essential body safety education information, empower students to advocate for themselves, and meet Erin's Law mandates. While Los Gatos teachers were doing their best to teach child sexual abuse prevention and body safety, they ultimately felt ill-equipped and wanted a better solution. After hearing about Childhood Victories and the Be Seen and Heard© curriculum during a county office meeting, Hartung and other district leaders observed a presentation taking place at a nearby district. The team knew immediately that this was the solution they had been looking for.

We didn't want to just sit and get. We wanted something with heart and warmth. [Childhood Victories] was able to show that as we were making decisions, and they've maintained it.

- Misty Hartung, Director of Student Services

The next step was to bring the program back to Los Gatos to get educators, staff, and parents on board. Hartung remembered that "getting [the presentation] in front of staff was pretty critical because they were going to be the ones who immediately follow up. It helped teachers with how we talk about these topics. It was tangible." When asked what the biggest impact this initial presentation had, Hartung shared, "The most obvious impact is that we didn't have to ask teachers to do one more task, particularly a task that's a hard conversation to have and difficult to address. The more nuanced and powerful area of impact was giving students and teachers the language to discuss this topic."

Once teachers and staff were on board, the team planned for bringing families into the fold. Hartung shared that they wanted to make sure they "were very open at the beginning. That this was not a secret. All [they] asked was that if parents wanted to watch an assembly, that they see one that their own child was not part of." There were concerns about potential parent opt-outs, but once parents observed the Be Seen and Heard© presentations themselves, all worries were gone. Hartung and team also organized parent evenings to ensure families stayed informed and involved. She noted the positive reception, saying, "I have not left a parent night where several people are not effusively thankful that it's personal, connected, effective — they come in nervous and leave feeling comforted."

The spread of the [Be Seen and Heard©] language into other parts of our conversation is pretty tremendous.

- Misty Hartung, Director of Student Services

The way we saw [the presenters] connect with parents and kids was incredible.

- Misty Hartung, Director of Student Services

As the Be Seen and Heard© program became further integrated into the district, the benefits were quickly evident. Teachers, who initially felt apprehensive about discussing such sensitive topics, began to feel more confident and equipped. Hartung recalled, "When we've had disclosures, staff knows they have the resources and language to hear the disclosure and make space for it and get the help that's needed for it." This newfound confidence was crucial, as it enabled educators to handle these delicate conversations with the necessary sensitivity and support.

The partnership faced its most significant test when an unfortunate incident occurred involving a staff member. Hartung reflected, "We had an incident with a staff member who is now in jail. What stands out is we used everything Victor had taught in that instance. We held an extra parent event on how to talk to your kids about this, and the Childhood Victories team was there for that. The staff needed an opportunity to talk about it — there was such support available. This provided language to the staff so they could follow up with kids and parents." The comprehensive support from Childhood Victories during this difficult time highlighted the program's critical role in the district.

Results:

Since implementing the Be Seen and Heard© program, Los Gatos Union School District has seen impactful results. Teachers and staff feel better prepared and more confident in discussing sensitive topics, leading to a safer and more supportive environment for students. “The teachers love them and the assemblies. They’re one of the few things I don’t get complaints about,” Hartung shared.

“It continues to amaze me that [Childhood Victories] can make these connections with kids who may be reticent or withdrawn and this really is a way to connect with them.

- Misty Hartung, Director of Student Services

The district’s partnership with Childhood Victories has also provided invaluable support during crises. Hartung recalled, “Unfortunately, our most significant experience is something we wouldn’t have wanted to happen, but without Childhood Victories, it would have been such a different experience. The support that they made themselves readily available — they are really committed to being partners with us.” The ongoing commitment and partnership with Childhood Victories have been instrumental in creating a safe and supportive environment for all students.

“If you were to ask a question about what would you do differently or what would you change about it, there just isn’t anything I would change about it. There just isn’t anything about the way they present that we would ask them to do any differently.

- Misty Hartung, Director of Student Services

About Childhood Victories

Victor Pacini, a child sexual abuse survivor, founded Childhood Victories to provide essential education on body safety and abuse prevention through the Be Seen and Heard© curriculum. The program aims to empower children to understand and report abuse, while offering support and peace of mind to educators and parents. Victor’s personal experience and commitment to making a difference have made Childhood Victories a trusted partner for schools seeking to meet Erin’s Law mandates effectively.

