Background

Recent evidence suggesting that children with developmental disabilities are at an increased relative risk of many forms of victimization, including bullying, has created a need for efficacious prevention programs that are responsive to the highly variable and specialized needs of this population. In response to this need the Colorado Trust Bullying Prevention Initiative funded a four-year evaluation of the Personal Safety Skills Project, an educational program designed and delivered by Kidpower of Colorado. This evaluation was designed and conducted by JVA Consulting, an independent contractor specializing in various research and evaluation services for nonprofit organizations in Colorado.

The Personal Safety Skills Project represents an extension of the personal boundary-setting and safety strategies provided in all Kidpower programs - one which is specifically designed to be appropriate to children with developmental disabilities as well as their parents and teachers. It includes practice of various safety strategies with students, as well as education and “train-the-trainer” components for parents and educators. In this evaluation, Kidpower provided programs in special education classrooms in Colorado Springs School Districts 3 and 20 over a 42 month period, serving children in grades Kindergarten through Transition and their parents and educators.

Methods

Individual student skill acquisition was assessed via rating forms completed by both Kidpower instructors and JVA staff while the training process, student safety skills, adult safety knowledge, and the overall quality of the program were assessed via parent and teacher survey. Concurrently, JVA evaluators observed classes in an effort to describe pedagogical methods and demonstrated student skills. Both deductive and interpretive results are discussed.

Results

Quantitative analysis of both instructor and evaluator-ratings revealed a high level of student skill acquisition, particularly related to understanding of safety rules with strangers, ability to set physical and emotional boundaries around being touched or teased, and knowledge of how to get help from adults when needed. Parent surveys revealed high levels of confidence in their ability to help their children understand the rules around strangers and having the resources to keep their children safe after participating in the program, and modest levels of confidence in their ability to help their children use their voices and understanding what bullying is. Teachers endorsed similar confidence in their ability to handle bullying situations after participating in the workshops.

Qualitative observation of Kidpower workshops, (conducted by independent JVA evaluators), revealed that despite a number of logistical and practical challenges (related to incoming student abilities and needs, etc.), workshops were delivered with concurrent high levels of fidelity to a conceptual/philosophical model, noted ability to hold the attention of students, and responsiveness to individual students’ abilities, circumstances, and necessary accommodations.