



Lorrie Wittke, Youth Services Manager

Project Child Recovery, YWCA Lethbridge and District

Theme: Children Exposed

Project Child Recovery (PCR, YWCA Lethbridge and District), is a program designed specifically for children aged 6-12 who have witnessed or experienced trauma. This encompasses issues such as family violence, substance abuse, grief, and bullying. Whether children have experienced violence in the home, changes in family dynamics through death or separation, the impact of substance abuse, or challenging dynamics at school, PCR offers them a safe place to explore and celebrate the fact that they are one-of-a-kind. Foundationally built on safety planning, PCR gives children a voice. In 2016, YWCA expanded to reach ages 13-17 through Project Teen Recovery (PTR).

Critical Elements

- Activities of the group are tailored to the needs of the group members. Creativity is important to develop new and interesting ways (and toys and activities, e.g., new science experiments) to support these children and engage them in the conversation.
- Children's safety is the priority – the staff continually work with the children, youth and families to develop and evaluate safety plans, accounting for emerging community trends (e.g., cyberstalking or children cooking at home on their own).
- Safety plan is one of the items in the "Comfort Box" or a "Memory Box" that the children design and decorate on their own and that reflect the particular concerns individual children are dealing with.
- When taking the program to different locations it is important to reflect what is unique in that that community (e.g. safety plan did not work in Kainai Blood Reserve and it had to be redone to make sure it was meaningful);
- It is important to utilize different methods of delivery. Sometimes just creating conversations around abuse is most important. (e.g., having kids respond to a statement: "My parents are in charge and can punch me wherever they want" and then talk about.
- Groups for children and youth should not be bigger than 8 and there should be at least two staff members so that the children can receive one on one attention and have a voice.
- The program expanded beyond focusing on just domestic violence, recognizing that many elements come into place when children are traumatized.