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Full backing for child programme

By **DYMPHNA BRACKEN**

A CHILD abuse programme has received 100 per cent support in Limerick schools.

The stay safe programme is a joint initiative between the Departments of Health and Education.

No school in the county has turned down the offer of teacher training and parent meetings have been extremely well attended.

In some schools almost 100 per cent of families have been represented at parent meetings.

The programme is designed to teach children personal safety skills and covers such areas as touch-good and bad touch, and how to respond to inappropriate touch—about strangers and safety strategies.

It also deals with bullying, what to do if lost, or if left home alone and the phone or door bell rings.

The programme is not compulsory, both teachers and parents have a choice in its implementation.

It has the backing of Church bodies, the National Parents Council, and the INTO.

The programme takes a gentle low-key, non-explicit approach.

The programme was very successfully implemented in the Eastern Health Board area last year, and a random sample of 54 schools was surveyed in May and June

to ascertain the impact of the programme. Over 10,000 children were involved.

At that stage over 86.5 per cent of those schools had taught or were planning to teach the programme and 98 per cent of these were planning to teach the programme again the following year.

Some of the results of this survey dictated that children now had a language to express their feelings, and were aware that they could talk to someone if necessary.

Teachers reported an increase in awareness of, and knowledge about, child abuse and bullying.

And parents found the worksheets very useful in promoting communication between parent and child.

Teacher training in Limerick is now virtually complete.

"I think very strongly that the lessons should be as soon as the child begins school — if a child lives long enough with abuse her or she will accept this as normal" commented one teacher involved with the programme.

"I, as a teacher, would feel quite confident in tackling this area with my class," said another.

The co-ordinators of the programme in the Mid West are Barbara O'Neill, a primary school teacher, and Carmel Keane, a social worker.

They can be contacted at the Limerick Social Services Centre, Henry Street.

