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Children and abuse

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I applaud Elizabeth Smart's call for increased support for child abuse prevention programs like radKids ("Smart to Obama: Help kids," Tribune, Nov. 15). Recent reports on a decline in child sexual abuse ("U.S. has made headway against sex abuse," Tribune, Nov. 17) may seem to suggest that we can relax about offering such programs to Utah's children. Not so.

According to sociologist David Finkelhor, an expert on violence against children, the reduction in sexual abuse may be partly attributable to school-based child abuse prevention programs. These programs, provided to some Utah school districts free of charge by Prevent Child Abuse Utah, teach children that no adult, no matter who, has a right to hurt them or touch them in ways that make them uncomfortable.

The programs give children effective assertive strategies for protecting themselves. Reduction in child sexual abuse rates is cause for some satisfaction, but not a signal that prevention programs are no longer needed. That the polio vaccine works does not mean we can stop immunizing children.

Utah children will be safe only when they can confidently and assertively stand up to would-be adult predators and can count on trusted adults to stand with them.

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