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Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

A comprehensive guide
to keeping kids safe and
understanding victims..



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Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

A comprehensive guide to keeping kids safe and understanding victims.



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Introduction

Creating True Sanctuaries



Making sure our hearts and bodies are safe at church.

by Caryn Rivadeneira

Not too long ago, my son leaned over during church. "Mom," he whispered, "I've got to go to the bathroom. Can I *please* go by myself?" After a few moments of mental deliberation, I said yes. After all, the bathroom was just outside the sanctuary, and after all, we were *in church*.

But seconds after he scooted past us in the pew and slid out of eyesight, I had second thoughts. After all, we were *in church!* My brain raced through every news story I'd ever read about kids victimized by sexual predators at church. As my eyes scanned the sanctuary, suddenly every worshiper became a molester—and I got up to follow my son.





Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Creating True Sanctuaries

As sad as it may be, our churches are hardly perfectly safe havens from sexual predators. In fact, according to one of the stories in this packet, quite the opposite may be true: Churches that don't have safe practices in place could be havens for the predators!

But many churches, including my own, are on the offensive big time. We're not only stepping up to the plate to protect our children through background checks and stringent training and procedures, we're equipping ourselves to know how to counsel those wounded by sexual abuse no matter where it occurred—and help them in their journey toward healing.

This resource serves as a comprehensive guide for those hoping to learn more about what their church can do to increase safety and understand for victims of abuse. We've also packed in plenty of other resources for you to go even farther in making your church truly safe.

Blessings,

Caryn Rivadeneira

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads
Christianity Today International



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The Heart of the Issue

I Was Sexually Abused

But I'm finally healing from the pain of my past.

by Joy Michaels

It was a sunny afternoon, and my parents were at a church function when my 13-year-old brother called me into his bedroom to show me some magazine pictures. "This is how a man and woman have babies," he told me, pointing to a photo of a naked man and woman having sex. My eyes grew wide as he turned the pages. I'd never seen pornography before.





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"You want to try it, just for fun?" he asked, as he stuffed the *Penthouse* magazine under his mattress. "You're too young to have a baby anyway," he assured me.

I followed innocently as he led me to a twin bed stored in the basement. Instructing me to undress, he did the same. Then he fondled me. I was only seven.

For the next few years, my brother periodically compelled me to meet him in his bedroom or in the basement. We never had actual coitus, but a few times he tied my legs to the bed frame, and when I let out a scream, he threatened to get me in big trouble. One time he left me naked and strapped to his bed. Alone in his room, I wept as I struggled to wriggle free.

Confused and ashamed, I couldn't bear to tell anyone—especially my Christian parents—what was going on. They trusted him implicitly, letting him babysit my four-year-old sister and me. My brother swore me to secrecy, and I felt the heavy burden of that secret.

At school, I discovered none of my girlfriends knew much about sex, so I played dumb. I was fearful and insecure, putting pressure on myself to appear normal. But at night, I'd often cry and pray to Jesus to let me die in my sleep so I could be with him in heaven.

Once my mother discovered a cartoon I'd drawn of a naked person being tickled by a big feather machine. When she asked me about it, I was so embarrassed, I cried and denied there was any significance to the cartoon. She let it go, crumbling the paper and dropping it into a wastebasket.





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There went my chance for intervention.

When I turned 11, my independent nature kicked in. Although I'd always felt ashamed about what was going on between my brother and me, it was then I finally realized something was seriously wrong with his behavior. In a moment of courage one evening while my parents were out, I turned down his advances. When he tried to persuade me with a few quarters (a temptation, because money was tight in our family), I still said no. He stopped pursuing me for sexual stimulation, but I later learned he went after my precious sister, a sweet, sensitive girl who wanted that money in order to buy candy.

In high school and college, I masked my insecurity and poor self-image by getting high grades. Although I'd always wanted to remain a virgin until marriage, I often wondered if I still qualified. So when a college boyfriend finally pressured me into sex, I felt too defenseless to say no.

After graduation, I drifted from my Christian upbringing, moved out of state, and continued to date guys who weren't good for me.

My secret continued well into my 20s, until I flew home to spend a weekend at my sister's house while her husband was out of town. While chatting on her bed, we ended up cautiously and painfully revealing some of our childhood secrets. My little sister cried as she remembered the horror of being chased and cornered in the basement, where my brother and his buddy took advantage of her. We each knew about the magazines he'd kept under his mattress. We





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each suspected my brother's friend had introduced him to pornography just when his male hormones were kicking in.

After unearthing some of those long-buried secrets and drying each other's tears, my sister and I felt some relief, but also self-pity and anger. I wondered if my relationship woes were somehow tied to my loss of innocence in childhood. My sister figured her lack of interest in sex was because of the incest. Naively, we encouraged each other to forgive, forget, and get on with life. I tried, but didn't get very far.

When a volatile relationship I was in ended in heartbreak, I decided to move closer to my roots. Depressed from failing to fix my life, I temporarily stayed with a friend who, unbeknownst to me, had become a Christian. She told me daily about the power of Jesus to heal and save. I'd grown up hearing the gospel, but never considered having a personal relationship with Christ before. I soon surrendered my life to him, and began to pray God would restore my innocence and heal me from the sexual abuse of my childhood.

I craved justice, but didn't want to cause a family feud. One night I decided to tell my father just enough to indicate my brother hadn't acted appropriately toward me as a young girl. My timing wasn't so great (it was Thanksgiving), and my father found my story distressing and hard to believe. (He said he'd spent a lot of time with my brother growing up, fishing and mowing lawns, for example, to keep him out of trouble.) I was devastated. How could he think I'd make up something like that? On another occasion, my parents came to visit me, and I lamented the way my life





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had gone, suggesting my brother was partly to blame. My mother sympathized with me, but I was desperate for my dad to acknowledge what had happened and to put his arms around me and comfort me. Instead, he told me he'd asked my brother about it, and wondered if I was confusing incest with "child's play." I raged at my dad until my mother frantically called a halt to our argument.

Eventually, I saw a Christian counselor who tenderly prayed with me. He used the Bible to show me my view of God was incomplete. Yes, God was almighty and powerful, but he seemed unfamiliar and distant—not the heavenly Father who cared deeply for me. Over time, my counselor helped me change my viewpoint and deal with the issue of forgiveness—toward my brother *and* my father. I began to accept that my dad may never respond the way I'd like, but that God understands and has adopted me into his family (Rom. 8:15–18). As I've grown in my faith, my desire to be vindicated has lessened, and my relationship with my parents has improved greatly. My sister and I also remain close.

A few years ago, I met with my brother, now married with his own family, and prayerfully confronted him about the past. He talked of a somewhat strained relationship with Dad, but denied most of his incestuous conduct or diminished the severity of it. I told him I forgave him anyway, that my attitude didn't depend on his response. However, when another relationship fizzled months later, I felt anger and sadness all over again. Forgiveness, I'm realizing, is something I'll need to practice whenever hurt feelings come to mind.





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On one occasion I tried to talk to my brother about the dangers of pornography—its addictive nature, its degradation of women, its perversion of sex—but he didn't fully agree. He says he's a Christian, but it's not clear he's turned from this sin, as the Bible commands.

Despite the far-reaching ravages of pornography and sexual abuse, I don't blame my brother for the botched-up decisions I made in adulthood. (After all, I alone am responsible to God for my sinful actions.) Instead, I pray my brother will one day experience the forgiveness and grace I've experienced. And I thank God for saving me from a few potentially disastrous marriages and for teaching me to trust him with my life and future—whether or not I marry. Thanks to my church, I'm learning to adopt healthier dating habits and use discernment in my friendships with men. God, who brings good out of evil, has given me empathy for abused women. Some statistics show one out of five girls are sexually abused before they reach adulthood—usually by a close relative. That number is likely to increase as long as society tolerates pornography, the impetus for sexual molestation, rape, and other crimes. My prayer is that Christians will oppose porn at every level—on the internet, on screen, in bookstores, in their home.

The greatest healing I've received isn't from a psychologist or a counselor, but from God's Word. I agree with Psalm 27:1, which says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?" I don't need to dredge up the past repeatedly; I don't need to hold a lifelong grudge against the one who stole my innocence; I don't even need to claim victim status. I'm of inestimable worth to the God who fashioned me in my mother's womb. His Son, Jesus, has





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borne my griefs and carried my sorrows. Through his power, I can overcome my past. The longer I follow God, the more optimistic I am that I can laugh at the days to come.

Mother Teresa once stated that Jesus Christ is the Way to be walked, the Truth to be taught, and the Life to be led. I've found this to be true. He can redeem any life. He can restore innocence and joy. I'm living proof.

Joy Michaels is a pseudonym. This article first appeared in the November/December 1999 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Reflect

- *Joy writes, "I was fearful and insecure, putting pressure on myself to appear normal. But at night, I'd often cry and pray to Jesus to let me die in my sleep so I could be with him in heaven." Girls and boys in your congregation and community who "appear normal" may be praying the same thing. How might God be calling you to help them?*
- *She also writes that while she "craved justice," she didn't want to create a family feud. How can you help victims in the Christian community understand the importance of justice from a Christian perspective?*



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One Church's Story

Sex Abuse: 'A Time of Justice'



A California congregation plays a critical role in the arrest of a sex abuser.

by Corrie Cutrer

Pastors at First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, California, told local authorities ten years ago that they suspected prominent church elder James Truxton, then 76, of molesting a child. A young woman said in a premarital counseling session that Truxton had molested her as a child. Other women came forward later with similar allegations.





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Truxton, a member of the church since 1958, eventually confessed to committing the sexual acts. He wrote letters of regret to victims and church members, and set up a \$30,000 trust fund to help pay the counseling costs of victims. The church, led at the time by Charles Swindoll, removed Truxton as an elder and revoked his membership.

That year Swindoll preached a strong sermon against church-related sexual abuse, "In Defense of the Helpless," which aired on his radio program, *Insight for Living*. But because the cases dated back more than six years, the state's statute of limitations applied, and the window for authorities to prosecute had closed.

Last summer, however, *Insight for Living* rebroadcast Swindoll's sermon. A woman listener called Fullerton police to find out what had happened to Truxton. After hearing he had never faced criminal charges, the woman, 29, told police that Truxton had molested her at his home from 1978 (when she was 7) to 1981.

In the interim, California law had changed. The statute of limitations no longer applied to new claims, and the police reopened the case, with the full cooperation of the Fullerton church.

Authorities filed charges in March that Truxton, now 86, had performed oral sex on a child. Now living in San Diego, Truxton faces a possible eight-year prison term if convicted. He was released from the Orange County jail after posting a \$25,000 bond.





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Prosecutor Randy Payne was surprised that an evangelical church had turned in one of its own. Payne, a deputy district attorney in Orange County, says the Fullerton church's willingness to investigate claims against Truxton and report the case to local police is not typical.

"It's unusual in the sense that when this came to light in 1992, they gathered enough information to take action against Truxton," Payne says. "I wouldn't have expected that 10 years ago. A lot of times, a church will go into [a] coverup. From our experience, people just don't want to believe this happens."

Heightened Awareness

The clergy sexual abuse scandal that generated headlines across the country has changed all that. Boston's Roman Catholic archdiocese was under heavy fire for covering up for homosexual priests who engaged in sexual relations with children.

The archdiocese had to pay millions of dollars in settlements. More than 200 people in the archdiocese filed clergy sexual abuse claims. Dioceses in New York, Ohio, Florida, Maine, and Pennsylvania also faced cases.

While no definitive figures exist, the frequency of reporting church-related sexual abuse has increased. As in the case of the Fullerton church, CHURCH LAW & TAX REPORT notes that church volunteers commit 50 percent of all incidents of sexual abuse. Paid staff commit 30 percent, and other children commit 20 percent.





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In all, authorities suspect that Truxton may have abused as many as 25 girls, starting in the 1950s while he was with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). Truxton and pilot Betty Greene founded MAF in 1945 to provide air transportation to missionaries working in remote areas. Victims were girls between the ages of 7 and 13.

At least one similar charge had been made against Truxton while he worked at Redlands, California-based MAF, but the matter was handled privately. "It was dealt with as being inappropriate and unwise," says current MAF President Gary Bishop. "Leaders at the time felt that counseling was the appropriate response."

Swindoll's sermon was more direct. "It was very intense," says Dave Carder, assistant pastor of counseling ministries at the Fullerton church. "[Chuck] was very strong about practicing what you said you believed and living a pure life. Chuck's always been forthright."

Payne says that First Evangelical Free has set an important benchmark for other churches when handling molestation charges. "It could be painful in the beginning, but churches need to realize they must watch out for victims," he says.

Jim Henderson, an attorney with the American Center for Law and Justice, says that churches should be aware of members who have a history of molestation charges.

"Churches could be havens for pedophiles structurally because they have little [in the way of] procedures," Carder says.





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After handling the situation with Truxton, Carder says, his church enforced stricter screening requirements for all members and staff who work with children. Churches and religious groups should also understand that molestation is rarely a one-time event. "The church has got to be painfully aware that this [misconduct] is a pattern," he says.

Legal Fallout

Colorado Springs attorney Martin Nussbaum says there is no court precedent requiring churches to screen all potential employees for past sex assaults. But he says churches could be held accountable for negligent hiring if behavioral problems evident during the hiring process later result in sexual misconduct.

Nussbaum, cochairman of the Religious Institutions Group of the Gerber, Johnson, and Lyons law firm, says he fears the current controversy might invite constitutionally suspect government oversight of church hiring practices: "It encourages legislators to say, 'We've got to fix the church.'"

Nussbaum, who has represented religious institutions for 15 years, says there are more sexual abuse cases in government agencies and foster care homes than in churches. "I would disagree with someone who says there's a bigger problem in churches than in other institutions," he says.

Learning from Mistakes

Truxton has had no involvement with MAF since his retirement in 1985. Leaders removed him from prominent





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roles with the organization in the 1960s, when questionable cases from the 1950s came to light. Truxton mainly raised funds for MAF in his last two decades there.

While MAF's Bishop says that former leaders at his organization did not consider early claims of "exuberant hugging and kissing" by Truxton as acts of molestation, he adds that MAF would respond differently now. "Today, the ministry would have reported anything like that to the authorities," he says.

While the situation was difficult for the Fullerton church to handle, the congregation fully supports Payne and his current prosecution of Truxton, says Jenni Key, director of communications.

"Our concern is still for the victims," Key says. "I believe in a God of both justice and mercy. This seems to be a time of justice."

Corrie Cutrer is a freelance writer. This article first appeared in CHRISTIANITY TODAY, May, 2002



Reflect

- *The local prosecutor was surprised that an evangelical church had turned in one of its own. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?*
- *Martin Nussbaum says there are more sexual abuse cases in government agencies and foster care homes than in churches. How do you think this squares with the media's portrayal?*



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Churches at Risk

How the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal Affects Evangelical Churches



Sin and secrecy aren't limited to Roman Catholics, say pastors and scholars.

by Ted Olsen and Todd Hertz

Abuse of children and adolescents by Roman Catholic clergy was, sadly, the religion story of the year in 2002. And in Boston, reports Scott M. Gibson, associate professor of preaching and ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, some priests have stopped wearing their collars in public. "It's almost like wearing a turban," he says. "It's a symbol of suspicion."





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Each day, newspapers published dozens of articles reporting new accusations, dismissals, and other developments in the scandal. Los Angeles police investigated between 6 and 12 priests accused of sexual abuse who were eventually dismissed. New York's Cardinal Edward M. Egan was under fire after a report said he ignored abuse complaints while he was a bishop in Connecticut. More cases are underway in Florida, Maine, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and many other places around the country.

Some observers are saying the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. has paid as much as \$1 billion to sexual abuse victims in the last 18 years. Even where allegations are coming to light, clergy and laity alike are experiencing the pains of betrayal and inquisition.

But no diocese is more ensnared in the scandal than Boston's, where former priest John J. Geoghan is accused of molesting more than 130 people.

Recent clergy abuse scandals in the U.S. aren't limited to Roman Catholics, nor even to Christian churches. Both Hare Krishnas and the Jehovah's Witnesses are also facing charges over the leaders' sexual abuse of minors.

Thankfully such abuse is less common in Protestant churches. "There are absolutely no Protestant equivalents," Anson Shupe, an Indiana University-Purdue University sociologist who researches clergy misconduct and new religious movements, told *The Boston Globe*. "If I could find some spectacular cases, that would help my career, but I can't. You don't have rapacious serial predators, and the





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Protestant establishment doesn't tolerate it the way the Catholic establishment has."

Still, scholars warn against believing that such abuse doesn't happen in Protestant churches. "I have read all the reported cases involving the sexual molestation of minors by clergy, and I can assure you that this is not a 'Catholic' problem," says Richard Hammar, editor of *CHURCH LAW & TAX REPORT*. "To the contrary, this problem affects all churches, and any attempt to identify it with one religious group will only serve to lessen the attention and vigilance it deserves by all congregations."

Indeed, both Canada and Australia are currently involved in major child sex abuse scandals that involve Anglican, not Roman Catholic, churches.

"Protestant churches are certainly not immune to cases like this, but it is much rarer. That doesn't mean they are clean," says Kenneth L. Swetland, academic dean and professor of ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston. He laments that though Protestant clergy may not be directly involved in the current scandal, they are feeling the effects. "Public opinion for Christian clergy as a whole has dropped," Swetland told *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. "Clergy are not viewed with the respect of the bygone era largely because of sexual misconduct cases like this."

Gibson, who is associate professor of preaching and ministry at Gordon-Conwell, also feels the shame of others' actions. "It was plastered in our papers everywhere here."





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Pastors of every denomination will face increased suspicion from their own parishioners, Gibson says. Now married, Gibson says his days as a single pastor would be much more difficult today. "People's suspicions could be heightened," he says. "Single pastors must be vigilant and people of integrity."

Bryan Wilkerson, senior pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Mass., says disillusionment in the wake of the abuse scandals could significantly affect Protestant congregations. "We could see an increased number of people coming to us who are disenchanted with the Catholic church," he said. "At the same time, we are prepared for people pulling away even from us in fear and anger."

Evangelicals should not be quick to dismiss such anger, especially since the number of people hostile to organized religion may increase as a result of these scandals, says Wilkerson. "We cannot write them off as cranks, but let them talk and be heard."

Hammar says it's also crucial to listen to critics in the congregation. "These recent scandals have occurred because of an inadequate response to credible allegations of misconduct," he told *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. "The important lesson for Protestants and evangelicals is that the same kind of indifference pervades their own churches. It is common for church leaders to ignore credible allegations of misconduct." He quotes from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*: "Nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy."

Wilkerson agrees. "In evangelical circles, agreements tend to be 'you go away quietly and it stays quiet.' It is done





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under the guise of being better off for everyone, but it is harmful." Even when a leader's sin becomes public, he says, there can be a rush to offer a second chance. "When people are just reinstated after a moral problem without consequences, it sends the wrong message to young people."

Pastors and those who train them say it's important for everyone to be alert and watch for signs of abuse. "Listen to your gut," advises Wilkerson. "I have had it happen to me twice and my gut was right in both situations. It's a delicate matter, but you will kick yourself later."

The gut shouldn't act alone, says Swetland. "You can see how people relate to each other and sometimes it just doesn't look right," he told *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. "Not that we should be paranoid, but the Spirit gives us discernment, so we should follow our hunches if we sense something."

Swetland and others say just watching and listening isn't enough. Churches must actively screen Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, and other workers. Hammar, legal counsel for the Assemblies of God, says even laity must apply Ronald Reagan's maxim during arms negotiations with the Soviet Union: "Trust, but verify." "The widely held conception among church leaders that 'the people will not tolerate screening' is simply no longer true. To the contrary, people expect it and want it. What parent would rather attend a church where youth workers are not screened?"

In fact, while volunteers often undergo far less scrutiny than paid staff, a report in Hammar's *CHURCH LAW & TAX REPORT* found that half of all sexual misconduct offenses in





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churches were committed by voluntary workers. Paid staff constituted only 30 percent of the cases, and the remaining 20 percent were committed by other children in the congregation. Hammar says proposed federal legislation will allow churches to directly access FBI criminal records on any volunteer worker for free.

Other important measures include installing windows in classrooms and offices, having someone periodically check in on Sunday school classes, implementing strict rules on Sunday school bathroom breaks, and not allowing any adult to be alone with a child. But to these must be added another important church-wide action, says Gordon-Conwell's Swetland: "We need to be on our knees praying for the church that the Evil One would not use this to compromise the body of Christ."

Ted Olson and Todd Hertz are editors at Christianity Today International. This article first appeared in the CHRISTIANITY TODAY Weblog on March 1, 2002.

Reflect

- *Which, if any, of these statistics surprise you? How so?*
- *How does the idea of background checks for all church staff and volunteers sit with you?*



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Churches at Risk

New Abuse Charges Rock Churches Each Week



Every week, 70 new child abuse accusations are made against churches—and most are Protestants.

by Ted Olsen

Our weblog was deluged with letters about the article "How the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal Affects Evangelical Churches," on what the clergy abuse scandal means for evangelicals. Many readers didn't like part of the article's report, which suggested that clergy abuse of minors is less common in Protestant churches than it is in Roman Catholic parishes. Don't blame the messenger: That's what the interviewees and other reports said.





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An Associated Press report, however, has an opposing view. "While data are sketchy, at least one expert believes the incidence of clergy molesting young children may be about as frequent—or infrequent—in Protestantism as it is in Catholicism," reports AP religion writer Richard N. Ostling. The expert is Penn State historian Philip Jenkins, who says Catholic cases get exaggerated and Protestant cases get ignored. Jenkins admits he has no hard numbers to back up his case, but says neither do those who say it's more common in Catholicism.

Actually, some hard numbers have surfaced from Christian Ministry Resources, the publisher of CHURCH LAW & TAX REPORT (the editor, Richard Hammar, was quoted in the earlier CT online article). "Despite headlines focusing on the priest pedophile problem in the Roman Catholic Church, most American churches being hit with child sexual-abuse allegations are Protestant, and most of the alleged abusers are not clergy or staff, but church volunteers," summarizes *The Christian Science Monitor*. "Over the past decade, the pace of child-abuse allegations against American churches has averaged 70 a week."

Ted Olson is an editor at Christianity Today. This article first appeared in the Christianity Today Weblog on April 1, 2002.



Reflect

- *What do you make of the conflicting reports?*
- *What does it say to you that this is such an issue for churches—regardless of where it happens or gets reported the most?*



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Churches at Risk

Churches Must Recognize Threat of Youth Sexually Abusing Youth



Legal experts say rape, like in a recent ELCA case, is rare in youth ministry. But sex abuse by children against other children is a very real risk in churches.

by Todd Hertz

It's every parent's worst nightmare. On Sunday, July 27, hundreds of miles from home, three Alaskan teens were reportedly raped while attending an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) youth conference in Issaquah, Washington.





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The girls, two 14-year-old cousins and a 15-year-old, say that three boys attending the "Rainbow of Gifts" conference invited them late one night to their dorm room to talk. The next day, the girls reported to the police that the boys, all from the Issaquah area, raped them. The boys have pleaded not guilty and will be tried as juveniles.

The ELCA expressed shock and distress at the incident, but the news no doubt left many parents and church leaders wondering. How common are such incidents? Church law experts have both good news and bad news. While they say that violent sex crimes like this are extremely rare in youth ministry, sexual misconduct by minors is a serious danger.

"We have done hundreds of church misconduct investigations, and I have not heard of [a youth-on-youth rape] reported in any church we serve across the religious spectrum," says Martin Nussbaum, cochairman of the Religious Institutions Group of Colorado Springs law firm Rothberger, Johnson & Lyons. "However, kids misbehaving and acting out sexually is not uncommon. It is not more frequent in church activities than [at other youth events], but it does happen. Churches need to be prepared for that."

James Cobble, executive director of Christian Ministry Resources, said studies conducted by his group's CHURCH LAW & TAX REPORT show that about one of every four sexual misconduct cases reported in churches were committed by minors.





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Churches Must Recognize Threat of Youth Sexually Abusing Youth

In 2003, 1 percent of 891 churches polled said their church received allegations of child molestation in a 2002 program or activity. Of those, youth were the alleged perpetrators as well as the victims in 29 percent of the cases. This number has fluctuated in the past decade—but not by much: 25 percent in 1995, 21 percent in 1996, and 22 percent in 1999. Extrapolated to America's 400,000 churches, that would mean that last year alone, between 800 and 1,200 congregations faced a case of youth sexual misconduct.

Nussbaum says typical cases in church activities include fondling, indecent exposure, and verbal harassment. Incidents between similarly aged youth are far less common than cases involving older perpetrators and much younger victims, he said.

Protecting Youth and the Church

Youth-peer sexual harassment also presents a serious liability risk for churches. Institutions can be found guilty of negligence in such cases for not providing security against such abuse. Nussbaum told CT that sexual misconduct by youth accounts for as much as 20 percent of church liability claims.

"Churches are aware of the dangers of sexual abuse by volunteers and church staff, but we are not looking at adolescents as a source for this sort of behavior," says Richard Hammar, attorney and editor of *CHURCH LAW & TAX REPORT*. "It is a significant risk people are aware of. Churches don't know what to do."





Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Churches Must Recognize Threat of Youth Sexually Abusing Youth

Because churches cannot screen all the kids active in youth ministry and because potential 16-year-old offenders have no criminal record, normal sexual misconduct preventions do not apply. They are not being hired or selected. Nussbaum says he knows of no church that screens minors to be in youth ministry.

Nussbaum says the best risk management protocol is to *have* a risk management protocol. "In the sexual misconduct policy, the church must name it, describe it, and forbid it," he says. "The policy should have a clear but flexible disciplinary provision."

For child perpetrators, the consequences should always include notifying the parents. Nussbaum said other provisions may include expulsion from an event, restriction of youth ministry activity, completion of some sort of chore, or constant parental supervision in order to be active in the program. If rape were involved, Nussbaum says, the reaction would have to be expulsion and reporting to law enforcement.

Hammar said the most dangerous areas for sexual misconduct are where older youth are given full supervision of younger children, such as in vacation Bible school or nurseries. Hammar says this practice is very common in churches, but he estimates that only one in 500 churches require any kind of reference or screening.

"The churches' liability will be based on negligence or carelessness in selection of that worker," Hammar says. "My response is to require references from youth pastors,





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public school teachers, scout leaders, or coaches. You need to get approval from adults with firsthand experience of this kid to say he or she is suitable to work in a supervisory capacity with minors."

For prevention of sexual misconduct in youth ministry events like overnight trips, Hammar suggests contacting other youth-oriented organizations, like schools and scouting groups, to see how they manage such risks. "In a case of negligence, one thing a court will look at is the community standard of care," Hammar says. "How that is established is by looking at other local organizations. To contact them to see what their guidelines are goes far in proving the church exhibited reasonable care."

Hammar argues for churches to rethink the concept of lock-ins. He says that it is nearly impossible to exercise sufficient supervision in that environment.

Adequate supervision is also important when kids could be roaming church premises when they shouldn't be—like during worship services. Cobble suggests having someone function as a grounds monitor to walk the building during events and services to make sure that doors are locked and no one is off alone.

But even with these preventions, Hammar warns, the risk of youth-peer misconduct cannot be eliminated. "It can still happen no matter what we do," he says.

While churches have to show that they were vigilant in prevention, liability falls mostly on how churches





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react after allegations have been made. This is why, as Nussbaum says, clear disciplinary plans are so important.

"If Johnny gropes Susie, that ought not give rise to a liability suit," he says, "But if it happens twice, or the church knew of a previous incident, there would be real concerns there. Where a church has theoretical exposure is if they knew that a child was a problem and failed in supervision."

Todd Hertz is a former editor for IGNITE YOUR FAITH.

This article first appeared in the August 2003 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.

Reflect

- *According to this article, "the most dangerous areas for sexual misconduct are where older youth are given full supervision of younger children, such as in vacation Bible school or nurseries." What thought has gone into preventing child-on-child abuse at your church?*
- *How prepared is your church to react to an allegation of sexual abuse, God forbid, it were to happen?*



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Bringing It Home

Opening the Door to Healing

When childhood sexual abuse
affects a marriage's intimacy.

by Mary DeMuth



“Don'tcha wanna be married? Or have kids?”

I nodded, tears streaming down my five-year-old face,
thorns and brambles cutting into my backside.

“You gotta do this, then, or you can't ever be married.”
The voice—which came from a teenage boy, accompanied
by the snicker from his kid brother—would haunt me for
18 years until I got married.

It still haunts me.





Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Opening the Door to Healing

The statistics about sexual crime both alarm and numb. According to the Department of Justice, by age 18, one in four women and one in six men have been sexually abused.

What happens to the titanic number of sexually abused men and women when they marry and enter regular sexual experiences with their mates? One study published in *Contemporary Family Therapy* estimates that 56 percent of women who were sexually abused as children feel discomfort during sex and 36 percent seek some sort of sexual therapy.

Although I told my husband, Patrick, about the abuse while we were dating, after we were married, I pretended immunity from my past trauma. But keeping up the charade wasn't so easy, since sex reminded me of the abuse. I didn't tell Patrick, though, because I felt guilty, as though I were a poor wife.

I hoped somehow I could work out everything through sheer willpower. So throughout our early married life, I tolerated sex, never letting Patrick know how much I was hurting. I'm not sure if I even knew the extent of my pain, at least enough to verbalize it.

When our eldest daughter turned five, however, I began to relive the molestation I'd experienced at her age. I felt the horror afresh. I saw those brothers steal my innocence on muddied nature trails, in secluded playgrounds, and in their bedroom.





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I puzzled over the photos my divorced father took of nude women and his insistence that I bathe him while he sat naked in his claw-footed tub. I ached over my mother's lack of protection. I felt abandoned.

Although I grieved, I still didn't realize how much those experiences were poisoning my sexual relationship with Patrick. It wasn't until we went through some marital difficulties and I spent two years in counseling that I finally realized the problem.

Now 12 years into our marriage, Patrick and I see clearly how the past affected our relationship—especially sexually.

Fear of being used. I felt used easily. If Patrick didn't talk enough with me during the day, but then initiated sex, I'd remember that frightened five-year-old who was simply a rag doll to be played with. If he touched me in a way that triggered the abuser's touch, I'd grit my teeth and silently recoil.

I'd think, *Men want only to use me. I'm just a plaything.* My resentment grew toward Patrick, yet I remained quiet, and he grew frustrated that I wouldn't tell him the problem.

A distorted view of sex. It was difficult for me to see sex as beautiful and what God intended. I felt if I enjoyed sex, I was somehow legitimizing my abusers, that they were right in molesting me. But if I didn't enjoy it, I wasn't a good Christian wife.





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My view of sex was that it was solely for a man's gratification. I longed (and still long) for the passionate Song of Songs-kind of abandon.

Guilt over failure to perform sexually. I've often lamented to God, "Why did you give me a man who loves physical touch? Are you setting me up for failure?" I've felt overwhelming guilt over not having enough sex. The Christian marriage books I read and the sexual intimacy seminars I attended further thrust me into shame's cesspool; it's my duty after all—I'm depriving my husband. Couple that advice with a deep-seated ambivalence toward sex and I was a sexually defeated wife.

Part of my denying Patrick sex stemmed from wanting to avoid the deeper problem. When I "gave in," I uncovered prickly emotions I couldn't understand. It was easier if I avoided intimacy as much as I could so I wouldn't rip open a festering wound I couldn't handle.

Isolation and emotional disengagement. Of all the issues Patrick and I have confronted, this carries with it the deepest, most insidious pain.

Patrick once told me about a vision he had in which I was pacing on a high diving board while he and the children beckoned me from a swimming pool far below.

They shouted, "Dive in! The water's great!"

I peered over the edge of the board.





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I saw their laughter-infused antics, but I turned away and walked down the ladder. Instead, I settled for putting my toe in the water while the rest of my family splashed and laughed.

I longed to be the spontaneous one who dives into the lives of my family, but I'd disconnected somehow, which prevented me from letting my husband into the recesses of my heart.

Lack of affection and passion. I found myself unable to be affectionate with my immediate family. While I knew I was supposed to demonstrate my love in tangible, physical ways, that seldom came naturally. When my son cried, I had to tell myself to hug him. When my husband came home from work, I had to make myself kiss him.

Coping Strategies

I wish I could say I'm free and the wound of sexual abuse is completely healed. I still have tender spots. But as Patrick and I have explored these areas, we've learned some important coping strategies.

Be willing to be healed. I liken emotional healing to a tunnel that links a barren land with a pristine forest. We'll never drink from the forest's mountain spring if we don't go through the tunnel. But most of us feel too afraid to step inside for fear of the dark; and the barren land—bleak as it is—has a staid familiarity about it. The truth? It's dark in the tunnel. The hurt is intensified, especially when we can't see the other side.





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When I became a Christian at 15, I clung to the apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" I decided I'd been healed of all emotional wounds when I became a Christian and viewed others who struggled as lacking faith. But my emotional world fell apart in college and I became a struggler. I cried a lot. God sent many friends who simply listened and prayed for me.

I thought those prayers in college and my grief were all I needed to be whole. After things began to fall apart in our marriage, I realized how much more healing I needed and sought help from a Christian counselor.

Talk about your sexual relationship. As difficult as it might be, Patrick and I had to speak frankly about our sexual relationship.

Through God's strength, I was finally able to tell Patrick, "When you complain about our sexual frequency, I want to give up and never try," or "When you say or do that, I feel used, that I'm only an object."

In that same God-strength, Patrick was able to say, "When you don't place sex and affection as a priority, I don't feel loved," or "When you don't kiss me, I feel distant from you."

We also had to resolve not to hide our anger or our pain. Patrick buried his anger over my lack of response and then quit communicating altogether. I erroneously thought if I hid my pain over my past, I could magically improve





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sexually. But we realized not addressing the truth was disastrous for our sexual relationship.

Heal together. I used to think I was the only one working on issues from my past. When I struggled, I'd turn to my "normal" husband who had a seemingly idyllic upbringing and say, "You're perfect and I'm yucky."

Patrick seldom explored his own childhood issues. Consequently, I felt alone in my grief. In his book *The Wounded Heart*, Dr. Dan Allender suggests that one way a marriage can offer healing is if the non-abused spouse will look at where he or she has been harmed from childhood. I felt a sense of comfort when I read: "We all have wounds; some are stab wounds, others pinpricks. The category isn't the degree of bleeding but 'have you ever bled?'"

The camaraderie returned in our marriage when I saw Patrick begin to explore his family of origin issues. When he saw me becoming free from my past issues, it spurred him to look at his upbringing. He began to look at his quick temper, how he saw that modeled as a child, what it did to him to be on the receiving end of it, and how it still affects him. The process for him has been slow. He's quick to dismiss pain from his past, but he's beginning to see how that dismissal has helped him wall himself off from others, including me.

Now instead of feeling like a solitary pilgrim, I have Patrick's hand to grab as we share our past injuries and our future.





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I still hear the haunting words of my abusers, and Patrick and I still struggle in our marriage. Last night we spent an hour discussing our sexual relationship and our mutual frustration over my reticence to kiss and his reluctance to share his hurts. Even so, I'm learning to take an emancipated leap off the high dive into our marriage.

Mary DeMuth is author of Ordinary Mom, Extraordinary God (Harvest House) This article first appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.

Reflect

- *How well equipped is your pastoral staff to help childhood sexual abuse survivors in their marriages?*
- *Mary quotes a DOJ study that shows one out of four girls and one out of six boys suffer sexual abuse. In what ways can your church reach out to this huge group of people?*



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Leadership Tools

Safe at Church

5 ways to keep kids and your church safe from predators

by *Beth J. Lueders*



Jeffrey Black, former rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Missouri, knows the pain that child sexual abuse can cause a church. In May 1993, a 15-year-old parishioner came forward and indicted the church's music minister for molestation. The minister confessed, and the church terminated him after 17 years of service.

Although the boy chose not to file legal charges, the incident tore deeply into the congregation's spirit. Nearly 15 families left the church, and those who remained felt anger, confusion, and mistrust.





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"It was damaging to everyone and extraordinarily sad," Black says. "It took a lot of ministry to deal with this. We developed a clear policy about sexual misconduct and put our staff through extensive training on these issues."

No one likes to think about sexual abuse of children. But the potential damage to the child and to the church—not to mention the possibility of wrenching lawsuits—has caused many churches to take steps to protect its children.

Based on interviews with pastors, abuse-prevention experts, attorneys, denominational officials, and insurance companies, here are important practical steps to minimize the risk of sexual misconduct and to keep your church's children safe. The good news, writes attorney Richard Hammar, is that "church leaders can take relatively simple yet effective steps to significantly reduce the likelihood of such an incident occurring."

I. Develop Clear Policies

A vital first step is to develop clear, specific policies. "Churches need a clear policy that says you can't work here if you are going to act this way," says Elizabeth Stellas-Tippins, program specialist for the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. "This itself is a strong prevention mechanism."

A church policy manual should include definitions of sexual abuse, standards of conduct, guidelines for screening and training workers, and procedures to follow if an incident is reported. Be sure a lawyer reviews policies before you implement them, since state laws vary on employment and reporting obligations.



2. Screen Workers Carefully

As youth organizations like Big Brothers/Big Sisters have toughened their screening of volunteers in recent years, pedophiles have scurried to other agencies, including churches, to find children.

For a church, it's painful to think about screening potential Sunday school teachers and youth leaders. It takes time; it takes money; it can cause hard feelings; and it can reduce the number of willing volunteers when most churches need every one. But the fact is, churches are legally responsible for volunteer workers. Careful selection and supervision guidelines must apply, especially with positions that regularly work with children. "Negligent hiring" and "negligent supervising" are the two main issues battled in church sexual misconduct cases.

Have applicants for a paid or volunteer position complete an application. (Screening procedures should also be completed retroactively for current staff.) For most paid positions, churches already ask for employment history, description of prior church service, and professional and personal references. But it's important to add specific questions about criminal record, particularly convictions for sexual abuse or molestation. Finish with a statement for the applicant to sign, certifying that information in the application is true and complete and any falsified information may lead to rejection from employment. It is also important to verify the applicant's identity with a driver's license, since offenders often use pseudonyms.

Contact all references, preferably in writing. Note information you tried to secure but could not verify



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or obtain. Be sure to maintain confidentiality of all applications and records. Restrict access to these files to only a few individuals who legitimately need the information. When you interview the applicant, ask an associate to participate, to give you additional opinions on the candidate.

Many states now require a criminal records check on all childcare workers. Most local police departments and state bureaus of investigation will run a criminal records check for about \$10. Often these checks cover records only within a particular state, however. Private nationwide screening companies will run interstate checks for approximately \$50. Or contact a local daycare center to find out who handles its background checks. In most cases you need a person's consent before you can conduct a criminal records search, so include an authorization form in the application process.

If an applicant has a criminal record for sexual or physical abuse, you might still allow him or her to work in some church ministry that does not involve youth or children. A person's conversion is not a defensible position in the courts.

One of the easiest screening methods—and one that doesn't cost money—is to require volunteers to be associated with the church at least six months before they can work with youth or children. This policy gives the church additional time to evaluate workers and can ward off persons who desire immediate access to children.



But does such screening unnecessarily offend potential staff members and volunteers? "Some people get offended," admits Dee Engel, director of children's ministries at Lake Avenue Congregational Church in Pasadena, California, "because I press a little harder than they think I should in the screening process. But I don't think you can be too careful. You have to protect your kids as well as your teachers."

Engel participates in a network of children's pastors from nearly a dozen area churches who warn each other of potentially troublesome volunteers and workers.

"One man became irate when we wanted to screen him," says Joan Whitlock, director of children's ministries at Wheaton (Illinois) Bible Church. "The next week I discovered his name on a list of convicted pedophiles I received from the police department. If [our church] didn't have its screening process in place, we might have let him work with children."

3. Set Supervision Guidelines

You can minimize the risk to your church's children, and the risk to your church of being sued for "negligent supervision," by implementing approaches like the following:

- Arrange for at least two adult supervisors with minors during church-sponsored activities. The two-adult rule applies in changing areas and restrooms and even if only one or two children are present in the nursery.
- Have adults present with teenage volunteers, since the law doesn't allow screening on anyone under age 18.



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- Develop a "claim check" system in large nurseries so children are released only to a parent or guardian with the appropriate claim check.
- Install windows on the doors of classrooms and other rooms occupied by young people.
- Have church leaders randomly visit classrooms and areas of church buildings that are isolated from view.
- Provide an adequate number of adults to supervise youth events, especially overnight activities. "The highest risks," writes attorney Richard Hammar, "involve male workers in programs that involve overnight activities."
- Educate workers about appropriate behaviors between adults and children and encourage them to report potentially harmful situations. "Sometimes in church we assume another person would not dare cross a sexual boundary," says Stephanie Anna Hixon, executive director of the United Methodist Church's General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. "We don't need to create paranoia or unhealthy suspicions, but we need to be aware and show a high standard of care."
- Train all staff and volunteers at least once a year in recognizing signs of abuse; also review your policies and procedures.
- Post a copy of your state's Child Abuse Reporting Law in a conspicuous place in your child care and youth areas. To obtain a copy, call your state's Child Protective Services Agency.



4. Check Your Insurance

"We are experiencing an alarming frequency of claim reports," says Hugh White, Brotherhood Mutual Insurance's vice president for marketing. "People are not reluctant anymore to sue churches, and the courts are taking the issue very seriously."

Companies like Brotherhood Mutual and Church Mutual offer separate sexual-misconduct liability coverage, with annual premiums ranging from \$100 to \$500, depending on the size of the church and programs offered (nursery, Christian school, etc). Or you can add the coverage to your policy. Brotherhood Mutual offers a discount for churches that screen their workers.

Some companies—like the Church Insurance Company, which exclusively insures the Episcopal Church—lay out strict conditions of insurability for parishes. These guidelines include possessing a manual outlining behavior standards, thorough personnel background checks, and awareness and prevention training within six months of employment.

Still other insurance companies are reducing their coverage for child abuse and molestation or even excluding such coverage. It's important to review your church's liability insurance policy to determine whether you have coverage for molestation, and whether that coverage is limited in some way. If possible, add specific children's activities as a rider to your church liability policy.

5. Talk About It

"The most important thing the religious community can do to prevent sexual misconduct is acknowledge and learn about the reality of abuse in the church," explains Stellas-Tippans, from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

Conversations are beginning in more and more churches. "Most clergy and church leaders I know really care about and are in tune with this issue," affirms Chilton Knudsen, who heads the required sexual abuse training for the 150 Episcopal churches and 450 Episcopal clergy in northern Illinois. "Some may feel overwhelmed or may not have much of a budget, but I say to them, 'It's a whole lot easier to prevent than to live through a painful experience.'"

Beth J. Lueders is director of MacBeth Communications in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This article first appeared in the Summer 1997 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

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Leadership Tools

Indications of Sexual Abuse

What you need to look out for
in victims of abuse

by Michael E. Phillips

Social scientists have listed indicators that can be observed in sexually assaulted children. The presence of one to a few of these indicators does not mean sexual assault has taken place. Circumstances causing any of these indicators may have nothing whatsoever to do with sexual abuse. However, if several indicators are seen together, a possibility of sexual abuse exists.

I recommend using these indicators as clues to help keep us on guard for a widespread problem.





Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Indications of Sexual Abuse

Indicators Among Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Fear of specific adults
- Sudden withdrawal and regression
- Eating disturbances, such as choking and gagging
- Complaints of pain when going to the bathroom
- Nightmares having sexual details
- Sexual "acting-out" behavior with other children
- Sexual drawings
- Sudden and continual blinking and squinting
- The insertion of objects into the rectum or vagina
- Becoming frantic when diapers are changed or genitals are washed
- Sudden fears of certain areas of the house (common for all types of abuse)
- Sudden need for continual cleanliness; frequent baths
- Unreasonable fear of particular babysitters or neighbors
- Increase in masturbation movements

Indicators Among Older Children

Many of the preschool indicators apply in this group as well, but in addition are these:

- Refusal to undress under normal circumstances such as physical education classes or bedtime
- Avoidance of physical contact





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Indications of Sexual Abuse

- Regressive behavior, such as bedwetting or sucking the thumb
- Extremely poor personal hygiene
- Evidence of self-mutilation (cuts, sores, cigarette burns, etc.)
- Good behavior to the point of obsession
- Running away from home
- Refusal to eat foods that have been favorites (a reminder of something put into their mouth)
- Frequent unprovoked anger, such as mutilating toys
- Setting themselves up for punishment
- Panicking or flinching when being tucked in at night
- Obsession with predictability (e.g., a meal cannot be one minute late)
- Continually falling asleep during the day
- Seductive behavior
- Fire setting
- Cruelty to smaller children and animals

Common Medical Indicators

- Frequent sore throats; difficulty swallowing or choking
- Sudden weight gain or extreme weight loss
- Frequent headaches, stomachaches, or exaggeration of every minor complaint





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Indications of Sexual Abuse

- Trauma to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen, thighs, genitals, or rectal area
- Soreness, bleeding, or discharges from a nonmenstruating girl
- Difficulty with bowel or bladder control
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Attempted suicide



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Additional Resources

Reducing the Risk Kit, Keeping Your Ministry Safe from Child Sexual Abuse, from BuildingChurchLeaders.com. The Reducing the Risk Kit is a downloadable resource designed to help you institute a complete prevention program, including: screening, interviewing, training, monitoring, and responding. You'll be equipped with tools to help you keep records on each of your children and youth workers, prevent the wrong people from gaining access to children and youth, and have a fully-trained youth and child protection ministry staff.

Shepherding People in Pain, from Church Law and Tax. Everyone experiences pain at different points in their lives, and as a small group leader you will need to shepherd people who are suffering. This downloadable resource can teach you how to care for, listen to, and minister to people in pain.





Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Additional Resources

Hush: Moving from Silence to Healing after Childhood Sexual Abuse, by Nicole Braddock Bromley (Moody, 2007). Bromley shares her own painful past along with other survivors' stories in order to help fellow victims break their silence, rethink false beliefs, and begin the journey toward healing. Important reading for pastors, caregivers, and those in recovery.

Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse, by Diane Mandt Langberg (Tyndale, 1999). This book offers hope and healing to men and women who have been traumatized by sexual abuse. Through stories, Scripture, questions, and encouragement, Dr. Langberg walks with survivors on the road to healing through Christ's love and power.

Children and Sexual Abuse 5-pack, by Victoria L. Johnson (IVP Books, 2007). In this booklet, Johnson looks at the problem of childhood sexual abuse, why it is so damaging and what church leaders can do to help children who've been abused.



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