

GRACE

GODLY RESPONSE TO ABUSE IN THE CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT

Sexual Offenders in the Christian Community

**How Do They Operate and
How Do We Respond?**



The Prevalence of Child Abuse in the United States

- * Child sexual abuse is 75x more common than pediatric cancer.
- * One child molester per square mile in the United States – Dept. of Justice
- * 38% of all girls and between 9%-16% of boys will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday.
 - * With 75 million children in the United States, this translates to almost 15 million children who will be sexually victimized over the next 18 years!!
- * 40% of children between 10-17 have been sexually solicited online.

The Prevalence of Child Abuse inside the American Church

- * Child abuse allegations against American churches average 70 per week. - Christian Ministry Resources
 - * This number could be much higher due to under-reporting
- * 1 % of surveyed churches reported abuse allegations annually!
- * Volunteers are more likely than paid staff to be abusers.
 - * 42% were volunteers
 - * 25% were paid staff
 - * 25 % were other children

The Prevalence of Abuse Survivors inside the American Church

- * Most recent statistics have found that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are sexually abused by the time they turn 18. What does this mean for the American Church?
 - * A 200 member church (100 women and 100 men) would have approximately 41 child sexual abuse survivors... ..20.5%!!
 - * Yet very few Pastors ever mention it let alone preach a sermon about it.
 - * How would pastors respond if;
 - * 20.5% of their congregation had cancer;
 - * 20.5% of their congregation had lost a child; or
 - * if 20.5% of their congregation had lost their homes in a natural disaster?
 - * Addressing and ministering to these members would immediately become the primary focus of church ministry.
- * The culture of silence is not acceptable.

Abusers – Who Are They?

- * Empirical research provides evidence that child molesters comprise a heterogeneous group.
- * Compared to other prosecuted criminals, child molesters are more likely to be:
 - * Married
 - * Employed
 - * European American
 - * Older than 30 years of age

Abusers – Who Are They?

- * **The Three General Categories of Child Molesters:**

- * **Stranger Child Molester**

- * Can be someone that the child has never seen, or someone with whom the child has only had minimal prior interactions.
 - * The smallest category of child molesters (10%)

- * **Acquaintance Child Molester**

- * An acquaintance molester is a non-family member—such as a family friend, clergy member, next door neighbor, law enforcement officer, pediatrician, teacher, coach, or volunteer—who is acquainted with the child or the child's parents
 - * Larger category of child molester than strangers (40%)

- * **Intra-Family Child Molester**

- * Related to the victim and is someone who usually, but not always, lives in the same house as the victim.
 - * Generally considered the largest of the three child molester categories. (68%)

Those who harm children are often attracted to the religious environment

- * Sex offenders are often religious and many of them attend church. In a study of 3,952 male sex offenders, 93% of these perpetrators described themselves as "religious" (Abel & Harlow, 2001).
- * Sex offenders maintaining significant involvement with religious institutions have "more sexual offense convictions, more victims, and younger victims" (Eshuys & Smallbone, 2006; Firestone & Moulden, 2009).

Those who harm children are often attracted to the religious environment

I considered church people easy to fool... they have a trust that comes from being religious. They tend to be better folks all around and seem to want to believe in the good that exists in people. I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words.

- Imprisoned Offender

Prevention Begins with Education

Child Sexual Abuse: General Observations

- * Abuse is seldom isolated. The average child molester victimizes between 50 and 150 children before being caught.

I created my first victim when I was 13, a female victim. Sally was 6 and I was 13. I created my first male victim when I was 15, and I have been victimizing male children virtually nonstop until my incarceration.

Question: How old are you now?

Answer: I am 33 now, and I have been incarcerated for three years.

Question: How many total victims did you have?

Answer: I have eleven male rape victims, one female rape victim, and I have approximately 1,250 male molestation victims, and I say approximately because I really don't know. - **Predator**

The “Double Life”

I want to describe a child molester I know very well. This man was raised by devout Christian parents and as a child he rarely missed church. Even after he became an adult, he was faithful as a church member. He was a straight A student in high school and college. He has been married and has a child of his own. He coached little league baseball and was a choir director at his church. He never used illegal drugs and never had a drink of alcohol. He was considered the clean cut, all American boy. Everyone seemed to like him and he often volunteered in numerous civic community functions. He had a well-paying career and was considered “well to do” in society. But from the age of 13 years old, this boy sexually molested little boys. He never victimized a stranger..all of his victims were “friends”...I know this child molester very well because he is me!

- Convicted child molester

Offenders often prey on trusting and vulnerable young people.

Question: At church, you did not molest all the children... how would you choose?

Answer: First of all, you start the grooming process from day one..the children you are interested in... You find a child you might be attracted to..for me, it might be nobody fat. It had to be a you know, nice-looking child..You maybe look at a kid that doesn't have a father image at home. You know, you start deducting..this kid may not have a father, or a father that cares about him... say you have a group of 25 kids, you might find 9 that are appealing..then you start looking at their family backgrounds... then you find out which ones are most accessible. Then eventually, you get it down to the one you think is the easiest target, and that's the one you choose to abuse.

- Imprisoned Pedophile

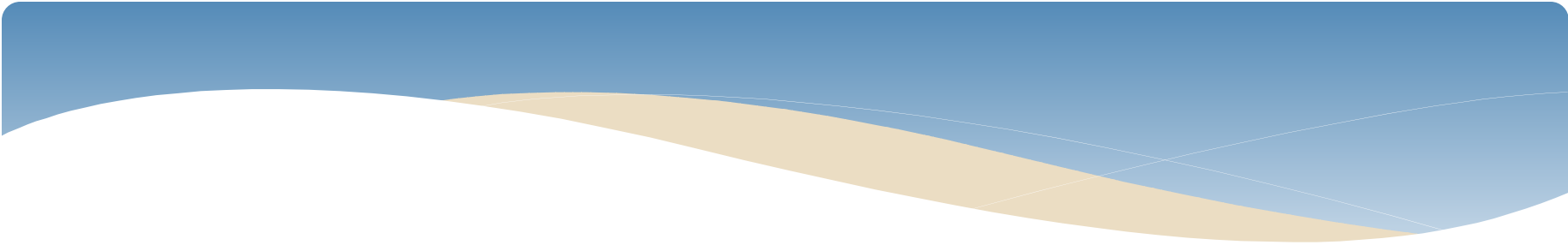
Likeability versus Trustworthiness

* Impact of Likeability:

- Victims Protect Them
- Parents Refuse to Believe
- Authorities Discount
- Communities Support Them
- Juries Acquit Them

“Niceness is a decision... not a character trait”

- DeBecker, 1997



Child molesters are very professional at what they do, and they do a good job at it.

- Convicted child molester

The 5 Exploitations Used By Offenders Within the Christian Community

* Exploitation of Religious Cover

- * “Religious Cover” is the outward demonstration of religious practices or doctrine that covers over more sinister intentions and behaviors.
- * Used to gain access and trust of children and their families (eg. youth workers, pastors, teachers, and coaches. or even SP volunteers!)
- * Hard core offenders maintaining significant involvement with religious institutions “had more sexual offense convictions, more victims, and younger victims.” Eshuys & Smallbone, Religious Affiliations Among Adult Sexual Offenders (2006)

* Exploitation of Religious Issues

- * Issues of faith are often distorted & manipulated to coerce victims in submitting to abuse and to be quiet about it:
 - * Defining “sin” to justify (Ex. This is the expression of God ordained love)
 - * Defining “sin” to silence. (Ex. You should be ashamed of your sin)
 - * Distancing from God (Ex. Because of your sin, God doesn’t care about you, but I do.)
 - * Can you think of others?

The 5 Exploitations Used By Offenders Within the Christian Community

- * Exploitation of **Religious Issues Continued:**
 - * The victim's own analysis of religious doctrine may result in confusion and silence.
 - * Child Victim: "Am I having sex outside of marriage?"
 - * "God is going to punish me for this secret sin."
- * Exploitation of **Power:**
 - * Submission to authority. From the earliest age, children are taught to "respect and obey their elders".
 - * Authoritarian Leadership – Religious leaders often distort their role & authority by claiming to speak for God.
 - * No accountability
 - * Unresponsive to concerns raised regarding abuse.
 - * Adults are valued more than children.
 - * Victims are seen as "sinful" and trouble-makers and are often ostracized.
 - * These environments are ripe for abuse.

The 5 Exploitations Used By Offenders Within the Christian Community

- * **Exploitation of Needs:**
 - * **Christian communities are often in need.**
 - * How many churches can you think of that are not in need of volunteers to help out with our children and young people? i.e.. Nursery, youth group.
 - * Child molesters will always use this need to their advantage in gaining access to our children.
 - * **Christian communities are filled with people in need.**
 - * Needy children and/or adults are targets for those who sexually victimize children.

The 5 Exploitations Used By Offenders Within the Christian Community

- * **Exploitation of Trust:**
 - * Religious people often foster a very trusting environment
 - * “Church Family”
 - * Mission field where the children referred to every adult as “Uncle” or “Aunt”.
 - * Dropping off child in the nursery
 - * Can you think of other examples??
 - * Children are taught to trust in God. Clergy and adults should be “trusted” since they are “God’s representatives on earth”
 - * *Eddie [pastor] always said that God had chosen me for something special. I guess I really wanted to believe that. Doesn’t every kid want to think they’re special? Besides, who was I to question a man of God? It wasn’t my place. My role was to be submissive.*
- **Christa Brown**

What We Can Do About It

Minimizing the Opportunities Effective Child Protection Policies

Effective Protective Policies

Foundational Prerequisites

- * **Policies must protect all ages**
 - * Understand that children and teens have differing vulnerabilities.
 - * Grooming tactics often differ based upon age.
- * **Training must accompany implementation**
 - * Mandatory for all paid staff and volunteers.
 - * At least one parent should be strongly encouraged to attend.
 - * All members should be encouraged to attend.
- * **Create and encourage a Culture of Protection**

Effective Protective Policies

Fostering a Culture of Protection

- * **Create and foster an environment where kids feel safe and parents are educated.**

- Offer personal safety classes for the youth
 - ✓ This is **not** a sex education course.
 - ✓ Teaches younger children that the parts of their body covered by a bathing suit are not to be touched by an adult
 - ✓ Teaches older kids (youth) ways to guard against becoming too “attached” to a non-parental adult, including but not limited to, being alone with adults
 - ✓ Educates older youth about how predators think & act
 - ✓ Instructs children of all ages what to do if they are inappropriately touched or simply uncomfortable around a certain adult
 - ✓ Explains to all youth the difference between sinning and being the victim of a sin
 - *13 year old girl who told my prosecutor friend that she had kept her abuse secret for 8 years because the only thing she knew about sex outside of marriage was that it “is sinful”.*

Effective Protective Policies

Fostering a Culture of Protection

- **Educate parents about sexual abuse and abusers**
 - ✓ Teach parents the mind of a predator so that they can be more in tune with the interactions their kids are having with adults.
 - ✓ Internet dangers and steps to take to minimize those dangers.
 - ✓ Provide guidance to parents in teaching their children personal safety issues
- **Ongoing education of all church staff/volunteers about the sin of child abuse and the mind of those who victimize children -> Culture of Protection**

Effective Protective Policies

Train and Keep Training!!

- * **Exhort and Encourage your congregation to **keep their antennas up!!****
 - Does this person have any adult friends or do they constantly surround themselves with children? Regardless of whether or not they have children!
 - Does this adult seem to take a special interest with any one particular child? (i.e.. Always kidding around with one particular child, always talking to one particular child, providing gifts or favors to a particular child.)
 - Pay attention to the adult that takes a special interest in “helping” or “mentoring” troubled children.
 - Does this adult make unusual statements such as commenting on a boy or girl’s development or attire?
 - Listen to congregation members who bring concerns to your attention!

Effective Protective Policies

Train and Keep Training!!

- Keeping the antennas up does **NOT** mean to cast judgment or to sow discord!!
 - Be very careful not to make internal or external judgments solely upon the above-listed factors.
 - Always have a trusted and mature Christian confidante that you can bounce off any concerns you may have with regard to an adult's behavior and activities with children.
 - Be in persistent prayer that God will give you much needed discernment & wisdom with your concerns.
 - Develop a protocol within your church whereby members may confidentially express such concerns to a specifically designated pastor/staff member.

Effective Protective Policies

Responding with Excellence...

- * *This is just a general overview that does NOT include steps church should take when a disclosure is made -> See Case Study*
- * Policy of the church is to **report, NOT** investigate
 - * When a child makes an abuse disclosure, many churches and Christian organizations decide they need to conduct a preliminary assessment or investigation to determine if the allegation is plausible before reporting the matter to the police. This is problematic for 3 reasons:
 - The organization or church is not trained to assess an allegation of child abuse and thus should refer the matter to the local authorities who are specifically trained
 - Delay in reporting may result in the loss of critical evidence
 - Reporting is mandated by law -> Romans 13

Effective Protective Policies

Responding with Excellence...

SC 63-7-310 (Duty to Report)

- * Mandatory reporters must report when, in their professional capacity, they have received information that gives them reason to believe that a child's health or well-being has been or may be endangered by abuse or neglect. If the mandatory reporter has reason to believe that abuse or neglect is occurring or has occurred, reports must be made to a Department of Social Services (DSS) county office or law enforcement agency.
- * A physician, nurse, dentist, optometrist, medical examiner, or coroner, or an employee of a county medical examiner's or coroner's office, or any other medical, emergency medical services, mental health, or allied health professional, **member of the clergy** including a Christian Science Practitioner or religious healer, school teacher, counselor, principal, assistant principal, school attendance officer, social or public assistance worker, substance abuse treatment staff, or childcare worker in a childcare center or foster care facility, foster parent, police or law enforcement officer, juvenile justice worker, undertaker, funeral home director or employee of a funeral home, persons responsible for processing films, computer technician, and judge.

Effective Protective Policies

Responding with Excellence...

- * **Exceptions to the rule not to investigate ->**
 - * Abuse alleged to have occurred overseas and was not investigated or prosecuted
 - * Dept. of Homeland Security and the “Protect Act”
 - * Local law enforcement agency may be unable or unwilling to take any action.
- * **A competent investigation is critical for child protection and church discipline**
 - * Acceptable -> Independent investigation by experts
 - * Not Acceptable -> Internal investigation by attorney

Effective Protective Policies

He wants to attend here???

- * Most offenders describe themselves as religious and some studies suggest the most egregious sex offenders tend to be actively involved with their faith community. According to a national survey of 2,864 church leaders, 20% of these leaders knew of at least one convicted sex offender who was attending or was a member of their church. Accordingly, **churches need to think in advance what their policies will be when a sex offender seeks membership in their congregation.**

Effective Protective Policies

He wants to attend here???

- * Attending Church Policy should include the following:
 - * ***It is Ok to prohibit offender from attending corporate worship.*** This is a controversial position. Remember, corporate worship is only one aspect of church life.
 - * ***Review of court and investigative records of the offender's conduct*** The appropriate parties from the church will review the original complaint filed against the offender as well as any records generated as a result. A complete review of these records will be more telling than simply examining the offender's conviction record.
 - * ***Determine the level of supervision necessary to protect children.*** Find out if the offender considered high or low risk by the government and his or her treatment provider.
 - * ***Even if the offender is at low risk, he will not be allowed to join a congregation where the victim attends services.*** If the offender abused a member of the congregation, he will be prohibited from joining the church. Leadership may work to find the offender another spiritual home but the emotional needs of the victim should always take precedent.
 - * It is critical to inform new church of offender's background!

Effective Protective Policies

He wants to attend here???

- * Offenders thrive on secrecy and hate transparency. The entire congregation should be informed of the situation and there should be a public discussion.
- * Church leaders should be sensitive to the fears of survivors of abuse who may be emotionally harmed by knowing there is an offender in their midst. The church must minister to the offender in such a way that survivors are not re-victimized, emotionally or otherwise.

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Question and Answers

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