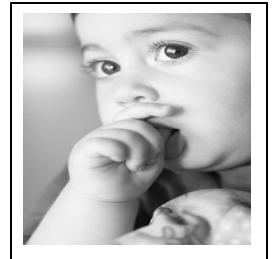


THE ENCOURAGER

Help for Sunday School Teachers— Dedicated to those who take the Word of Life to Children Everywhere



DOES THIS SHOCK YOU?

- Pedophiles in the Pew

You might find this incident shocking but we trust that you will not be offended by the plain nature of this article. It's sole purpose is to make us all aware that in these days we must deal with such matters more pro-actively.

In the Sunday School nursery, the three-year-old's words came without preamble. "She raised her shirt and asked me to touch her."

Such a statement would have been appalling anywhere, but it was especially shocking since the child was referring to a trusted 15-year-old girl whose family was deeply involved in children's work. This just couldn't be! Something would have to be done, but what? *

From Michael Jackson to Mary Kay Letourneau, from parents to priests, national news is saturated with nauseating stories of child sexual exploitation at the hands of individuals in positions of trust. If the Sunday School won't be a safe harbor, is there any refuge for childhood innocence and purity? And if the leadership doesn't forcefully address the issue, who will?

Parents have a lot reasons for apprehension today. Security and personnel screening, once regarded as an annoyance both to parents and those who work with youth, are considered to be major factors.

While the need for volunteers is great, the screening process must be in place.

"We would rather turn children away than put them at any risk by sloppy screening," said Gary Webb – the Children's Ministry Director for the Northwoods Community Bible Church—Peoria IL. "We practice responsible follow-up for anyone who expresses interest to be a childcare volunteer."

The follow-up process generally has three steps before a volunteer is approved. They must:
1. Complete an application in which references are checked. 2. Attend an orientation session, clearly spelling out the mission, vision, values, safety, and expectations policies. 3. Have a personal interview with a Supervising member.

Those who conduct children's ministry seminars, worry that children attending smaller Sunday Schools are more at risk for sexual exploitation than those in bigger ones. "In smaller groups, there can be a sense of false security. People say, 'Abuse would never happen here. We know our people.' They only think they know people. Statistics show that abuse is more often perpetrated by people familiar and trusted by the child. In a larger setting, we must have systems that work because we don't know everybody."

Will we do what we must— to protect the Children?

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**The CANADIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
MISSION
insists that those
involved in
Sunday School
Work should have
Police Checks
every 2 years.**



Why is Sunday school on Sunday? I thought it was supposed to be our day of rest. Tom

Please send me a pony. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up. Bruce

I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool. Eugene

Our school teacher told us that Thomas Edison invented light. But in Sunday school they said You did it. so I bet he stoled your idea. Sincerely, Donna



* When the 3-year-old (mentioned on page one) originally made his charge, several other children offered unsolicited confirmation. The local Church authority was notified, and as the law requires, proper local authorities were contacted. Then the teen and her parents were confronted.

The teen said little but her parents flew to her defense, vehemently denying the accusation. "I don't know why those children would lie about our daughter," they argued. "She loves children. She would never hurt one. She even baby-sits free-of-charge for all of the neighbors."

In dealing with problems of this sort, the individual has to be contained while a thorough internal investigation is conducted - regardless of what the official legal investigation uncovers. A church has legal options and no one person should handle this alone."

While child protection is uppermost, care has to be extended to the accused. "The (guilty) individual will absolutely deny that they did anything wrong. And even if they aren't guilty, they need to remove themselves from ministry. Why would they put themselves at further risk? Certainly some level of counseling is warranted."

Webb counsels that all groups, regardless of the size, should be proactive in defense of children. He suggests that churches:

- Create and follow systems protecting children and volunteers.
- Recognize that systems are never perfect and be vigilant about watching people.
- Rather than skepticism, create an atmosphere of accountability and mutual understanding that security is in everyone's best interest.
- When and if you have a violation, report it immediately. Do not attempt to handle suspected abuse in a vacuum.
- Be aware that everyone has limitations of resources and wisdom.
- Suspected incidents should be handled privately and discreetly, but not buried.



If homes and schools are no longer safe, the Church must be a protected haven for children. Of all people, Christ's followers must safeguard children and minister to them as Jesus did when He delivered strong words for those who would abuse children and those who are party to allowing it to continue: "Let the little children come to Me," Jesus said, as He volunteered for a hands-on role. "But anyone who causes a little one to sin should have a millstone tied around his neck and be drowned in the sea. But woe to the person who causes others to sin." Matthew 18 paraphrase)

Postscript: Nearly a month after the nursery incident was reported, authorities investigated. The incident was declared unfounded. "The children could not give adequate details," they reported. At the insistence of the parents, the teen is still involved in children's ministry.

(Some details have been altered to protect identities.)