

Protecting the Flock

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse
in the Faith Community

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Created by

You Have the Power...Know How to Use It, Inc.®

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Child Sexual Abuse – Today’s Problem For the Faith Community

The Faith Community as a whole has been reluctant to believe that child sexual abuse could happen in their congregation. However, story after news story tells us a different truth. Baptist, Methodist, Seven Day Adventist, Lutheran, Catholic, Church of Christ, Episcopal – **ALL** denominations have felt the sting of betrayal from a congregation member who has committed sexual abuse. The faith community is absolutely not immune from the devastating tragedy of child sexual abuse, regardless of the denomination, geographic location, or size of the congregation. If a congregation takes the position, that “this will **NEVER** happen in my congregation”, they are putting themselves in an extremely vulnerable situation. Statistically, child sexual abuse happens to one in four girls, and one in six boys¹. These alarming statistics are based on reported cases, and it is widely believed that child sexual abuse is an extremely under reported crime.

Child sex offenders are everywhere, and they are experts at living the double life. In fact, they often look to churches as an ideal place where they not only have access to children, but also have access to trusting adults. Child sex offenders often volunteer to work with children in youth programs, in church nurseries, or as teachers; thus the extreme importance for having policies and guidelines in place to reduce the risk of victimization from occurring in your congregation. Preparation on the front end will allow a congregation to take action in a way that protects the congregation, supports the victims, and appropriately responds to the offender.

The “All Too Often” Response From the Faith Community

When an offense happens in a congregation involving a prominent church member or leader, it is all too common for many members and even church leadership to struggle with disbelief and inaction. This kind of response not only revictimizes the abuse victim and their family; it serves to re-open wounds of child sexual abuse survivors who most certainly are a part of every congregation. It also could potentially cause other possible victims to shut down or keep from disclosing for fear of not being believed. Statistics show that most sexual offenders have multiple victims; it is very rare that an offender will only have one victim. It is very important for congregations to understand the dynamics of child sex offenders before abuse happens. The entire congregation, including the survivors will be looking to the leadership

1 www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/prevalence.htm
ACE Study - Prevalence - Adverse Childhood Experiences

to see how the victim is supported, or not supported. So, if someone in your congregation should be involved as a perpetrator, are you ready to appropriately address him or her as an offender? Are you ready to care for and respond to the primary victim, other potential victims, as well as the many adult survivors of child sexual abuse who are already present in your congregation? This resource guide will help you begin the process of understanding what a congregation can do to reduce the risk of victimization, as well as knowing the importance of an appropriate church response.

Positive Steps to Risk Reduction and Serving Victims

To prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in your congregation, and to respond appropriately to victims and offenders if child sex abuse does occur, your congregation should provide comprehensive child sexual abuse education for the entire congregation, but especially for those who work with youth. Guidelines and policies should be in place for reducing the risk of sex abuse victimization. Every community has agencies that work with abused children. Their mission probably includes informing the general public about child sexual abuse. Child Advocacy Centers often have prevention programs and will give presentations at no cost.

There are many on-line resources that have appropriate materials to inform your congregation about child sexual abuse. Every church worker should have in-depth understanding and ongoing training about offender behavior, and about signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse. They need to know the law, their obligation to report suspected abuse, when the report should be made, and who that report should be made to. Every member of a congregation should understand the complicated issues surrounding child sexual abuse, so they can appropriately respond to a victim. Children in the congregation should also be educated about child sexual abuse as a form of primary prevention to reduce their risk for being victimized. But if they are victimized, they will be better equipped to tell someone about the abuse.

Teens in your congregation should be instructed about the impact of sexual violence from the perspective of a victim, but also from the perspective of a perpetrator. If we want to stop abuse before it happens, we need to talk openly about the ramifications of sexual violence, the long term impact for the victim, and the very harsh and life changing consequences for the offender and those who love him or her. The power of child sexual abuse is silence.

Proactive congregations should conduct comprehensive child sex abuse trainings that cover the following information.

What is child sexual abuse?

- It involves forcing, tricking, bribing, threatening, manipulating or pressuring a child into sexual awareness or activity for the sexual gratification of the adult. The abuse often begins gradually and increases over time.
- Abuse occurs when a person forces a child to have any form of sexual contact, or makes a child perform sexual acts. Child sexual abuse may involve touching private parts clothed or unclothed, penetration, forced sexual acts between children, or making the child view, read, or participate in pornography for the sexual gratification of the offender.
- Non-physical sexual abuse may also take the form of an offender exposing himself/herself, exposing the child, or talk of sexual nature that is inappropriate for the child's age.
- Sexual victimization of children may occur within the family (incest) or outside the family.

Who are the victims?

- Children from birth to 17 can be victims of child sexual abuse.
- They are male and female.
- Statistics indicate one in four girls and one in six boys will become victims of child sexual abuse by age 18.

Who are the perpetrators?

- 90% of sex offenses are committed by someone the victim knows, usually someone they love and trust².
- Sex offenders come from all walks of life, all professions, all faiths, all economic levels.
- Men and women alike can be offenders.
- Some sex offenders are pedophiles, meaning they have a definite sexual preference for children. They typically strive to have access to children by virtue of occupation (e.g., school bus driver, day care worker, youth minister, coach, etc). Pedophiles typically have multiple victims and often collect child pornography.
- Some child sex offenders are situational child molesters. They may not have a true sexual preference for children, but may engage in sexual

2 www.darkness2light.org

acts with children because of child availability, their own inadequacy, or other reasons.

- Child Sexual Abuse is **NOT** a “sex addiction” or “porn addiction”. A child sex offender will always be a child sex offender. They cannot be cured. Sex offenders can learn to avoid sex-offending behavior with sex offender specific treatment **IF THEY CHOOSE TO MODIFY THEIR BEHAVIOR.**

How do sex offenders operate?

- Sex offenders seek out an approachable child to victimize. They want children who are easy to get to. They usually choose a child they feel they can control and keep quiet.
- They may choose a shy child, someone who wants or needs attention, someone who may not have many friends.
- An offender sometimes looks for troubled children, those who act out and tell lies, because if that child were to disclose abuse, they may not be believed because of their reputation.
- Abusers find ways to get the child alone by arranging for “fun” and seemingly innocent activities such as sleep-overs, camping, or babysitting. They spend time playing with the child. The abuser’s goal is to become the child’s buddy.
- Abusers break down the child’s resistance to touch. They find ways to touch the child often, play games involving physical contact, like wrestling or tickling, or have the child sit in their lap. Over time, they change the innocent touching to inappropriate touching, which is very confusing to the child.
- Abusers sometimes provide drugs and alcohol to the child to lower the child’s inhibitions.
- They may introduce pornography to younger children to “normalize” the sexually abusive behavior.
- For adolescents and teens, they may use pornography and drug/alcohol initially to seem “cool” and buddy up to the teen, and then later use their participation in those activities as leverage to keep the child quiet.
- Abusers establish trust and friendship with the child and with the parent. They exploit and often look for vulnerabilities in the parents in order to find ways they can assist them with their needs. This relationship between the offender and non-offending adults makes it difficult for the child to tell about what is happening to them. Developing this trust

relationship with non-offending adults provides the perpetrator with the additional benefit of creating his/her double life.

- Their double life provides a camouflage for their deviant behavior – allowing them to appear one way but act another – and makes it more difficult for non-offending adults to believe the child as their perceptions of the perpetrator don't match what the child is saying about the individual.
- The majority of sexual perpetrators are known to the victim. National statistics show that about 90% of sexual abuse cases involve a perpetrator known to the child. As stated earlier, this could be someone in a position of authority in the child's life (youth minister, coach, teacher, family member, family friend, etc.)

Red flags for inappropriate behavior or contact. Sex offenders are extremely skilled at living a double life. They are expert manipulators. But there are some things that might signal offender behavior:

- A sex offender “grooms” his/her victim (and their families) before he/she ever offends. He/She gains their trust and confidence before he/she ever makes a move.
- A sex offender may single out a child and begin showing that child an unusual amount of attention. Be wary of any adult who wants to spend as much, or more time with a child than the parent does. A sex offender may buy expensive gifts or give the child money for no reason.
- A sex offender may frequently touch, kiss, and pat the child in a non-sexual way. He/She may play wrestle and tickle games, and ask the child to sit on his/her lap. This desensitizes the child to his/her touch.
- A sex offender may often volunteer to change diapers or give baths.
- A sex offender may frequently walk in on children / teens using the bathroom or changing clothes.
- A sex offender may regularly offer to take the child places, or regularly offers to baby-sit the child.
- Some sex offenders seem to prefer the company of children or young adolescents, and upon closer scrutiny, they do not have peer friendships with people their own age, and spend most of their time with children. A healthy 21 year old will not have an 8 year old for a “best friend”.

Any of these things on their own may not indicate a problem, but it is always best to err on the side of the child. Family members of child sex abuse victims often say they had “uneasy feelings” about behavior of the offender

in their child's life, but that because he was "such a nice guy" or because he was a "good church going man" they ignored those feelings. Never ignore internal prompts because you might offend someone, or hurt their feelings. The child is more important.

What are the symptoms of child sexual abuse?

- Persistent sexual play with other children, themselves, toys, or pets.
- Sexual knowledge in language, drawings, or behavior beyond what is normal for their age.
- Any kind of "change" in a child's usual behavior, for example, change in sleep patterns, change in school performance, change in personality such as crying, depression, anxiety, withdrawal from others, clinging to parents, avoidance of school/friends, lying, change in appetite,
- Nightmares.
- Anger and mood changes.
- Fears and phobias, fear or dislike of certain people or places.
- Attention-seeking.
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene.
- Return to younger more babyish behavior like thumb sucking, bed-wetting, or soiling themselves when they have long been potty trained.
- Low self-esteem.
- Self-destructive behavior, putting themselves in risky situations.
- Hostility or aggression.
- Physical signs such as unexplained pain, nausea/upset stomach, headaches, swelling, bleeding or irritation of the mouth, genital or anal area, urinary tract infections.

For adolescents:

- Social problems such as drug or alcohol problems.
- Promiscuity or pregnancy at an early age.
- Suicide attempts.
- Change in dress or appearance (to appear more or less attractive).
- Withdrawal from social activities or peer groups.
- Delinquent acts.

- Self-injury, such as cutting behavior. 50% of cutters are victims of child sexual abuse³.

Symptoms can also manifest in ways that may appear “positive” at first glance, such as:

- Obsessive about being perfect in all things, to all people, overachieving, very controlled.
- Over-involvement in outside extra-curricular activities.
- Or - simply blending in, never causing any trouble or attracting any kind of attention.

Children sometimes offer hints, or indirect comments or statements about the abuse, hoping the adult will “understand” that abuse is happening. It is important to note that if a child begins exhibiting one or many of these symptoms, it does not necessarily mean that they have been sexually abused, but it is very important to talk to your child about these symptoms and/or seek professional help from a therapist. Each child responds differently to sexual abuse. Some children respond with symptoms that are much more expressive (anger, sadness, behavior changes), and others respond with more controlled symptoms (fear, low self-esteem, physical manifestations). It is helpful to be aware of the array of possible child sexual abuse symptoms to best respond to the child.

What is the long-term impact of child sexual abuse on the victim?

There are often few visible effects of child sexual abuse, making it difficult to understand how child sexual abuse can leave a significant mark on the victim. Untreated child sex abuse can cause numerous emotional and psychological problems as they become adults.

- It can cause low self-esteem; victims feel unworthy, inadequate, different, and dirty. The survivors carry a heavy burden of shame that should actually be placed on the offender.
- Child sexual abuse can cause unresolved anger that seems to regularly flare up out of nowhere.
- Child sexual abuse can cause depression and self-destructive behavior including substance abuse. Many teens and adolescents who have been sexually abused self-injure by cutting or burning themselves. (50% of all cutters have been sexually abused). Many who suffer from anorexia have been child sex abuse victims.
- Victims of child sexual abuse have issues with trust and often find it difficult to have intimate relationships (both sexual and non-sexual).

³ www.selfinjury.com

- Child sexual abuse causes risky behaviors leading the person to put themselves in situations that are dangerous.
- Promiscuity can often be linked to child sexual abuse, or the opposite can happen – a decreased libido.
- Some victims' lives are out of control, while others are driven to control every aspect in their life to the point of perfectionism.

Why is counseling and support for the victim important?

- Counseling for child victims gives them a head-start on addressing the abuse.
- It helps them understand that the shame they feel is undeserved, and should be on the offender.
- Counseling helps the victim recognize where their anger comes from, and helps them understand and deal with the feelings of worthlessness.
- It gives the child the ability to nurture and grow their self-esteem.

It is never too late for counseling. For adults who didn't receive counseling as children for their victimization, counseling can finally "connect the dots" of their behaviors, which they could never explain, address their issues in a safe environment, and allows them to rid themselves of unhealthy coping skills they developed as a child to survive the abuse. Counseling can also decrease the risk of revictimization or break the generational cycle of sexual abuse within the family. Counseling for children and adult victims of sexual abuse allows them to receive education and support, and also offers validation and normalization for their experience and feelings.

Do children lie about abuse? Statistics indicate that children rarely lie about child sexual abuse victimization. It is your duty as an adult to report any disclosure to the proper authorities regardless of whether you "think" the child is lying. It is the role of the professionals who are experienced in working with child sexual abuse victims to determine the credibility of the accusation. If a child has been coached, or is lying, the professionals will be able to determine the inconsistencies and get the proper help for the child. If a child lies about being sexually abused, that child needs immediate intervention because this indicates a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

Why don't children tell? Children are trusting and dependent. Sexual abuse is overwhelming to children, especially when an adult is involved. Most children are taught to trust adults and to not question authority. Abusers know this and take advantage of the vulnerabilities in children.

- **Abusers may blame the child.** Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so the child will keep the secret. Abusers may use statements like, “If you tell, people will think you are bad” or “If you tell our special secret, I will go to jail”.
- **Abusers may threaten the child.** The abuser may threaten the child with bodily harm, or threaten to hurt the parent or caregiver, or a pet. They may say that the child will be taken from the home if they tell about the abuse, or that if they tell, the family will be torn apart.
- **Some children may be too young to put what has happened into words.** Victims can be as young as infants with absolutely no way to communicate. Younger children cannot understand what has been done to them enough to even put it into words they know.
- **Children may fear that no one will believe them.** The abuser usually tells them no one will believe them. If the child has behavior problems the abuser has an even greater chance keeping them silent with this ploy. In most instances children do not lie about sexual abuse. It is not your job to determine if the child is telling a lie. Leave that job to the professionals who are skilled at interviewing victims of child sexual abuse.
- **Children may feel too ashamed or embarrassed to tell.** Children may feel ashamed about being involved in the experience, or they may be embarrassed by their bodies’ response. Human bodies are wired to respond to sexual touch, and even young children may experience pleasure when their bodies are touched sexually. This becomes very confusing for them and is an additional weapon for the offender to use against them.
- **Children may worry about getting into trouble or getting a loved one in trouble.** The abuser may convince the child that she/he consented to the abuse. There may be confusion in the child’s mind because they still love the abuser and they don’t want him/her to get in trouble.
- **Children often think they have told about the abuse,** but their vocabulary, communication, or judgment skills are different from adults, and an adult “may not get it’. For example, rather than telling exactly what happened, a child may instead say, “I don’t like him (or her)” or “He (or she) makes me feel sad” – and by saying this to an adult, a child may truly believe she/he has told.
- **Children may experience feelings of guilt** for willingly participating in what they may later realize was inappropriate conduct. For teens, if the abuser provided alcohol or drugs to them, and if he/she showed them

pornography, they feel trapped. Who can they tell? They were taking drugs, they were watching porn, and the abuser tells them they will get in trouble for what they were doing. Even though a child or teen is never responsible for being sexually abused, children who are taught personal safety information are more likely to tell a parent or a teacher if abuse has occurred. We know that the best prognosis for healing from sexual abuse comes when children/teens are believed and supported after they disclose the abuse.

How should I respond (or not respond) to a child if they disclose abuse to me?

No matter how painful it is for you to hear about the abuse, you **MUST** try not to react with shock, anger or hurt. This kind of emotional response could make the child think they have done something wrong and stop the disclosure, or even cause the child to recant. Try to stay calm, but if you cry, you need to tell the child you are not mad at them, that you are sad because they were hurt.

- A sexually abused child needs safety, love, and support. The first thing you should say to them is **“I believe you”**, and it’s not your fault.
- I’m sorry that I didn’t know.
- I know it’s not your fault. You did nothing wrong.
- You were very brave to tell.
- I will take care of you.
- I am angry with the person who did this. I’m sad. You may see me cry and that’s all right, I’m not mad at you.
- Let them know it’s okay for them to cry or be mad.
- Don’t coach or pressure a child to talk about things. This could cause problems for prosecuting the case successfully. However, this also needs to be balanced with an atmosphere in which a child feels comfortable talking if they want to talk. If they feel like an adult is resistant to talking about the topic, they aren’t going to feel comfortable getting it out. It is important to remember that when responding to a child who has disclosed sexual abuse, it is not the details of the abuse that are important but their feelings and reactions to the abuse. If you do ask questions, never ask leading questions, just say, tell me more....
- You should **never** tell a child that you will not tell anyone. That is a promise you cannot keep. You should tell them that you are glad they

told, but that now you have to tell another adult who can work to keep them safe.

What is my legal responsibility if I suspect abuse?

It is the law that anyone who **SUSPECTS** abuse, **MUST** report it. Of course, abuse also must be reported if a child actually discloses. There is **NO** exemption for any profession, including ministers, priests, or counselors. If you suspect abuse and don't report it, and abuse is discovered, you can be prosecuted. Suspicion is the basis for reporting. Leave the investigation to the experts. If you report a suspicion, and abuse is not proven, you will not be held criminally or civilly liable if you made the report in good faith. Remember that offenders often target children with known behavioral problems. Even if a child that discloses abuse is known to be a "liar" or always in trouble, adults must report it. As noted earlier, children rarely lie about sexual abuse, and even if a child is lying, they need professional help. The best way to get help for the child is to report the disclosure.

How do I report suspected or disclosed child sex abuse and to whom?

- Report suspected or disclosed abuse to the Police Department or the Department of Children's Services 24-hour hotline, 1-877-237-0004.
- Never confront the person suspected of the abuse. This could give the offender a "heads up" and allow him/her to flee, or to make up a good story. Allow professional counselors or law enforcement personnel to handle the interrogation of the offender.

Risk Reduction for the Congregation

Know Those Who Work With Your Children

- Screen workers. Don't allow volunteers to work with children until you have known them for at least 6 months, or preferably longer.
- Every person who works around children should have a background check conducted. The minimal expense to have this done is an excellent investment for risk reduction.
- Develop an application and interview process that can be used with anyone who works with children at your congregation.
- Contact the last congregation the volunteer last attended to gain personal knowledge about the volunteer.
- Ask for and check the references of your volunteers.

Make Policies and Guidelines for Volunteers Who Work With Children and Youth

- Have a two-adult rule for supervision and working with children, especially for restrooms and nursery. This protects the child, and also protects the worker.
- Teenagers should never work with children without an adult present.
- Off premise and/or overnight events should be especially mindful of staffing an appropriate number of adult volunteers, and should never occur with inadequate staffing.
- Create a policy for mandatory child sexual abuse in-service (at least once a year) for volunteers and staff.
- Create a clear policy for reporting child sexual abuse, following the guidelines set out by law. Have the reporting number readily available for use.
- Create a policy for those who work with youth about respectful and appropriate boundaries. They should be informed in no uncertain terms that it is never appropriate to engage in romantic relationships with anyone they serve, as it would be a betrayal of trust and an abuse of power. And, depending on the age of the person, it could also be a crime.
- Have a written plan about what steps you would take if an offense were to happen in your church and if the offender was a church leader, or a prominent and beloved member of your congregation.
- Have clear actions steps of how to respond to the offender and their family, and how to respond appropriately to the victim and their family. Also, be mindful of how you would minister to the congregation who will also be suffering, especially those who have prior first hand experience of child sexual victimization. Keep your congregation in the loop. They need to know what is going on, and they need to know the leadership is not trying to “hide” anything.
- Respect the victim’s privacy. If your congregation does encounter a child sexual abuse case, it is inappropriate to discuss the personal information about the case. This could be retraumatizing to the victim and their family.

What If A Sex Offender is Discovered In Our Congregation?

Appropriately respond to the offender if he/she is a part of your congregation

- Pray. Pray that God give the leadership of the congregation wisdom and insight for dealing with the offender.
- Pray that God send the leadership wisdom and insight in ministering to the victim and their family.
- Pray that nothing you say or do will further inflict additional pain on the victim.
- Pray for the family of the offender, because they are in a particularly painful situation because their trust has been betrayed too.
- Pray for the survivors who are in your congregation. You may not know who they are, but they are most certainly there. These survivors will have their wounds reopened from this occurrence, and they will be painfully reminded of their childhood suffering.
- Pray that God send His Spirit of healing to your entire congregation. Pray that God will bring blessings from this horrible experience.
- Invite a therapist or agency that specializes in child sexual abuse issues to come in to debrief with your congregation or church leadership if a child sexual abuse case occurs within your church congregation. It can often be helpful to have someone outside assist in processing this type of event.
- If the offender is a member of the congregation, **you must separate** your personal feelings for the offender during this time, and remember that sex offenders **always** lead double lives. There is a secret side to the person you know, love, and trust, one that has deviant behaviors he tried to conceal from the world and from you.
- The offender needs to be held legally accountable for his actions. Cooperate with the legal authorities. Do not withhold any information about the offender. It is their job to get to the truth, and they have the experience and expertise to do it. It is not your job to investigate the case, or to defend the offender.
- You cannot wait for the legal proceedings to be concluded for you to take action in your congregation, even if the offender claims to be innocent of the charge. Innocent until proven guilty is correct for the legal system, not the faith community. The victim and their family should be the primary concern of the church leadership. The safety and emotional

well being of your congregation should be next. Waiting to see how the legal consequences turn out could take years. The victim and the entire congregation need appropriate action.

- Offenders should **NEVER** be put in a position of trust where children are involved. **NEVER**.
- If the offender leaves your congregation, notify any congregation he may decide to attend, so the new congregation can be aware and take appropriate risk reduction measures to keep their congregation safe.

Develop and Teach a Response to Child Sexual Abuse From the Beliefs of the Faith Community.

This material is written from a Protestant Christian perspective. This is not done, in any way, to ignore or demean the belief systems of other faith traditions. The writers humbly admit they are unqualified to speak from the beliefs held by other faith traditions.

Pastoral Care is a Theological Issue

- The metaphor of “shepherds caring for sheep” is based upon God’s own relationship to His people (Psalm 23; 100.2). Christ saw Himself as a “Good Shepherd” who laid down His life for His sheep (John 10.15). Church leaders are to function as “shepherds” (Acts 20.28-30).
- Jeremiah 6.13-15 and Ezekiel 34 are but two Biblical passages where God’s voice speaks clearly about the failure of leaders to properly care for God’s people. Failure to “care” for the people is a failure of leadership.
- Allowing harmful conflict to remain unaddressed within the Church is a failure of leadership.
- Matthew 18.15-17; Luke 17.1-4; 1 Corinthians 5, taken together, provide both a process to be followed and imperative to be respected. Behaviors which degrade the life of the church can, and must, be thoughtfully confronted.

Forgiveness & Consequence: Enemies?

Christians are to be forgiving people. Some would hold forgiveness of the perpetrator involves accepting, on face value, statements of repentance and no further actions. The writers of this material respectfully disagree.

- **REPENTANCE.** Repentance, of necessity, requires complete honesty. The double life a perpetrator leads impairs the capacity for honesty. Often perpetrators have been involved in their faith community. Yet they were able to entirely separate their abusive behavior from the spiritual values

of their faith community. Repentance will involve genuine understanding and true remorse for the grave harm done.

- **CONFESSION.** Confession means complete honesty about the reality of what has been done. There can be no diminishing, justifying, rationalizing or neglect, in any way, by the perpetrator regarding his actions.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY.** The perpetrator has demonstrated by his double life that he has forfeited the right to a private spiritual life. He must be willing to submit his actions to scrutiny. This will involve acceptance of limitations about his contact with the church community. Further, this can also involve degrees of restitution: perhaps he can help to pay for the counseling of his victims; perhaps he can be required to pay for ongoing counseling for himself and submit his attendance and receipts to a spiritual advisor.
- **JUSTICE.** Amos 5 and Micah 6 are hallmark passages demanding the faith community to be a place of justice. Where the perpetrator is allowed to be showered with sympathy, and the victim is told to be quiet, there is an absence of justice. Without promoting justice neither the victim nor the congregation will believe their faith community is a safe place to draw close to God.

Should the Offender Be Allowed to Attend Church Services or Activities?

No. This “No” is not spoken out of punitive desire to harm the perpetrator, but because **there is no cure for sex offenders.** The only way to guarantee your congregation’s safety is to make sure he does not have access to children.

This “No” is spoken because of the reality of the long-lasting harm of sexual abuse.

- Allowing an offender to attend church activities will not be the kind of “holy struggle” where God moves a community towards a greater level of spiritual depth. This disruption will create an environment of profound suspicion and distrust.
- One of the consequences a perpetrator must face is the long-lasting damage he inflicted. He forfeited his right to be unequivocally trusted by his former faith community.
- If an offender wants to remain a part of the congregation, it might be appropriate for a group of men to minister to him at his home. This will only work if the offender is willing to be held accountable for his crimes.

- Moses was not allowed to see the Promise Land. David confessed, prayed and was forgiven for his sin with Bathsheba. Yet the consequences of his actions were long-lasting.

You Have the Power offers training for churches on child sexual abuse and other crime-related topics. For more information, please contact us at 615/292-7027.

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