

No Child Is Safe

Written by U.S Immigration News

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We would rather not talk about it, especially at this time of year when everything is joy and festivities, but we have to. The news of allegations of the cover-up of a prolonged sexual abuse of children coming from one of this nation's most revered institutions of higher learning has forced us to take pause. We need to look at this issue cautiously. The real concern here is not whether people got fired or whether the prestige of an institution is in jeopardy and its famed football program will lose its rank and multimillion dollar status. The real issue at hand here is that as a society we have become so obsessed with keeping up appearances, some for the sake of money and prestige, that we would rather sacrifice the innocence of children than confront and report predators. This is the reason why no child is safe until we set our priorities straight.

In more ways than one, many of us who may want to reprimand the officials at Penn State University and the police who were aware of the problem might have acted in the same careless manner. We suspect that something is going on; sometimes we know for a fact that a child is being preyed upon but we turn our backs. The question was asked if perhaps the alleged victims of the former Penn State University Coach, Jerry Sandusky, had been boys from wealthy families, would the reports of his inappropriate behavior been looked at more carefully? Possibly, however, there is no doubt that his having complete access to at-risk boys via the non-profit agency, The Second Mile, definitely gave him a large pool of victims to choose from. Sandusky and his wife adopted 10 children and were foster parents to several others. We shudder at the thought of how far reaching the devastating tentacles of abuse, in this particular case, have reached. However, experts confirm that one predator can abuse one hundred or more victims in his or her lifetime. This is perhaps the most devastating reality of this perversion. Sexual abusers can't just stop without professional intervention and recognition that he or she has a problem and needs help. As long as an abuser tries to justify or minimize his behavior, children are not safe around him or her.

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Sexual abuse is extremely harmful because it violates the spirit of its victims by shattering their sense of self. No child is safe in a world where adults because of politics, fame, money, friendship or kinship, are unwilling to stand up and protect them. The cold hard fact is that sexual perversions against minors are on a steady rise. Even more so is the accessibility and anonymity that the internet allows for access to child pornography.

The *American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry* reports that about 80,000 child sex-abuse cases are reported annually, but many more cases go unreported because children are afraid to tell anyone. Parents usually believe that telling their children to tell them if someone touches them inappropriately will be enough to safeguard them from predators. The truth is that this may not be enough. Pedophiles are experts at grooming children. They give children gifts, make them laugh, buy stuff for them, take them out on trips, they are skilled at making your child feel that they can be trusted. Once they have your child's confidence, and sometimes even your approval, they attack. Children are no match for experienced predators. They will terrorize your child, threaten to kill them or kill you and even make children believe that the abuse is their fault. Your child is no match for their manipulative and predatory skills.

Parents sometimes coach their children to watch out for strangers on the streets but child sexual abuse can take place within the family, by a parent, step-parent, sibling or other relatives; or outside the home, for example, by a friend, neighbor, child care giver, teacher, minister, or stranger. When sexual abuse occurs within the family, the child may fear the anger or shame of other family members, or be afraid the family will break up if the secret is told. So what should parents do? Is there any way of protecting our children against sexual predators?

Parents need to know their children and watch them carefully. It is not enough to ask your child questions, you need to watch your child's behavior. A sudden change in behavior is usually a red flag that something different is going on in your child's life. The child may become withdrawn and mistrustful of adults. Some other behavior symptoms displayed by a child who is been sexually abused include:

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- unusual interest in or and avoidance of all things of a sexual nature
- nightmares or problems sleeping
- withdrawal from friends or family or depression
- becoming seductive
- making statements that their bodies are dirty or damaged, or fearing that there is something wrong with them in the genital area
- refusing to go to school or showing fear, apprehension or distress at having to be with a certain person
- delinquency, behavioral problems
- secretiveness, unusual aggression or suicidal thoughts or behavior

It is said that a child will have to repeat his or her story of sexual abuse seven times before it is believed and reported or acted upon by adults. When a child first tells an adult that he or she has been sexually abused, many adults may feel uncomfortable and may not know what to say or do. Here are some ideas as to what you can say and what you can do:

What to Say --- If a child even hints in a vague way that sexual abuse has occurred, encourage him or her to talk freely. Don't make judgmental comments. Show that you understand and take seriously what the child is saying. Child and adolescent psychiatrists have found that children who are listened to and understood do much better than those who are not. The response to the disclosure of sexual abuse is critical to the child's ability to resolve and heal the trauma of sexual abuse. Assure the child that they did the right thing in telling. Tell the child that he or she is not to blame for the sexual abuse. Offer the child protection, and promise that you will promptly take steps to see that the abuse stops.

What to Do ----- Report any suspicion of child abuse. If the abuse is within the family, report it to the local Child Protection Agency. If the abuse is outside of the family, report it to the police.

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Individuals reporting in good faith are immune from prosecution. Parents should consult with their pediatrician or family physician, who may refer them to a physician who specializes in evaluating and treating sexual abuse. The examining doctor will evaluate the child's condition and treat any physical problem related to the abuse, gather evidence to help protect the child, and reassure the child that he or she is all right.

As we celebrate Christmas with our loved ones, let us remember that protecting our children, by any means necessary, should always be a priority.

Copyright © 2011 by **Norka Blackman-Richards**, is an educator, a writer and an empowerment speaker on women, education, diversity and generational issues. She is the Chief Editor of *Empowerment 4 Real Women* and the Founder of *4 Real Women International, Inc*. Norka is the Assistant Director and the Academic Coordinator for the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program of the City University of New York at Queens College.