

WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

and

CONGREGATIONS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES  
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND

## **CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

---

### **DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE**

Child abuse is the abuse of a relationship with a child. It involves a misuse of power and a betrayal of trust. It may include physical, sexual and emotional abuse, or neglect, as defined by law. A child's trust is usually given completely, without reservation. So if that trust is betrayed, it has a devastating impact on an unsuspecting young mind.

Sexual abuse occurs when someone uses a child to gratify his or her own sexual desires. It could include fondling of genitalia, sexual intercourse, oral or anal sex, or fondling of breasts.

---

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Children are a sacred trust, an "inheritance from Jehovah."  
(Psalm 127:3)

Therefore, the care and safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare is of the utmost concern and importance to the congregation. In recognition of this responsibility, our policy objectives are to ensure that if ever a matter requiring the protection of a child should arise within the congregation, it will be dealt with promptly and properly and that children in the congregation will be protected from avoidable harm. This policy is in harmony with the longstanding and widely published religious principles of Jehovah's Witnesses, as reflected in the articles that are set forth at the end of this Policy<sup>i</sup>.

**1**

All children have the right to be protected from abuse.

**2**

Safeguarding children is of the utmost importance. We abhor child abuse and consider it to be a serious sin and a crime.—Romans 12:9.

**3**

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not condone child abuse under any circumstances or endeavour to shield from the authorities those committing offences of this nature.—Romans 13:1-4.

**4**

We believe that parents have the primary responsibility for the protection and the safety of their children. Thus, we do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction.<sup>ii</sup> (Ephesians 6:4) Therefore, parents who are members of the congregation must be vigilant in exercising this responsibility at all times and are expected to:

**(a)**

have direct and active involvement in their children’s lives;

**(b)**

appropriately educate themselves and their children about child abuse; and

**(c)**

encourage, promote, and maintain regular communication with their children.—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 22:3.

To assist parents to fulfil these responsibilities, the congregation will make use of the abundant information and advice published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

**5**

The congregation does not and will not provide or sponsor any activities that fall within the scope of “Regulated Activity Relating to Children,” (as defined in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and equivalent legislation in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland) including such activities as Crèches, Playgroups, Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Clubs, Choirs, or Camps.

## 6

We believe that the interests of children are best served by encouraging, promoting, and maintaining good communication between members of the congregation and congregation elders based on trust, a shared respect for Bible principles, and a mutual interest in caring for and safeguarding children.—Galatians 6:5.

## 7

Conversations with congregation elders relating to spiritual counselling or assistance are confidential and will therefore not be shared with third parties other than other elders and the branch office, as the case may require, based on Jehovah's Witnesses' established religious procedures. However, should such conversations include information which indicates that a child may be at risk of harm then that information will be conveyed to the extent necessary to ensure that the policies and procedures herein expressed shall be properly followed so as to safeguard children.

## 8

The Branch Committee has appointed elders at the branch office to act as "Safeguarding Elders." These elders will receive initial and periodic training. The role of a Safeguarding Elder is to receive all reports, questions, or enquiries from elders or other members of congregations in the United Kingdom and Ireland in order to give guidance and direction on how to proceed in accordance with our *Child Safeguarding Policy*.

## 9

The coordinator of the congregation's body of elders is the primary contact in the congregation for matters pertaining to child abuse, although members of the congregation may contact any of the congregation's elders about such matters so as not to delay safeguarding children.

## 10

For the safeguarding of children and because child abuse is a serious sin, any congregation member who in any way learns of child abuse involving someone who associates with Jehovah's Witnesses should advise the coordinator of the congregation's body of elders or, in his absence, any other elder of the situation as soon as possible (Leviticus 5:1). Congregation elders will comply with any relevant laws.—Romans 13:1.

**11**

In the event a matter involving the abuse of a child is brought to the attention of congregation elders, the coordinator of the body of elders (who is also the designated coordinator for such matters), or in his absence another congregation elder, will arrange for contact to be made with a Safeguarding Elder at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses as soon as possible for guidance and direction. This will be done even if the allegation is unsupported.

**12**

Congregation elders will treat victims of child abuse with compassion, understanding, and kindness. (Colossians 3:12) As patient spiritual and confidential counselors, they will carefully listen with empathy and respect whenever such a victim desires to express himself or herself to them.—James 1:19; Proverbs 21:13.<sup>iii, iv</sup>

**13**

As soon as possible, the coordinator of the body of elders or, in his absence, another member of the Congregation Service Committee, will ensure that an alleged incident of child abuse is reported to (1) a parent, (2) a guardian, or (3) another holder of parental responsibility for the child (but in (1), (2), or (3) the report will be made only to a person who is not the alleged abuser). If a parent, guardian, or other person having appropriate parental responsibility for the child is not available, the congregation's coordinator of the body of elders or, in his absence, another member of the Congregation Service Committee, will again contact a Safeguarding Elder at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses to request situation-specific guidance and direction.

**14**

If any congregation elder learns of a case of child abuse in which a child may still be at risk of significant harm (as defined by law and decided cases)<sup>v</sup> the congregation elder together with the congregation coordinator of the body of elders, or in his absence another congregation elder, are required to contact a Safeguarding Elder at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses to request situation-specific guidance and direction. A report to the police or other appropriate authorities will be made immediately by the congregation elders if it is determined that a child is still at risk.<sup>vi</sup>

**15**

In the case of any discussion with a child abuse victim, an elder will not be alone with the child but will involve another elder and the child's parent, guardian, or another holder of parental responsibility for the child, other than a person who is the alleged abuser. If the child expresses to the elders discomfort in discussing the matter in the presence of a parent or guardian, and the parent or guardian agrees, then the child may be gently told that he or she may choose an adult companion other than a parent or guardian, with whom he or she feels comfortable speaking about the matter, to be present during the discussion.

**16**

One of Jehovah's Witnesses who is an unrepentant child abuser is expelled from the local congregation as well as from the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.—1 Corinthians 5:13.

**17**

A person known to have abused a child in the past, and who continues to pose a risk to children or is not irreprehensible, does not qualify to serve in a position of trust or responsibility in the congregation.—1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10; Titus 1:7.<sup>vii</sup>

**18**

While a person known to have abused a child may continue to be a member of the congregation if he is repentant and is under certain restrictions imposed for the protection of children in the congregation, he or she is specifically prohibited and admonished from being alone in the company of children, other than his own when he is legally entitled to do so.

**19**

If an incident of child abuse is reported to the congregation elders, any information that is kept is done so with a view to safeguarding children. Details retained will include the name of the accused, the date of the alleged abuse, the age of the alleged victim at the time of the alleged abuse and at the time the information is recorded, the date the incident first came to the attention of the elders, the names of elders involved in the discussion, and whether the accused was convicted in a secular court.

**20**

This policy applies to all charity Trustees, congregation elders, and other members of the congregation.

**21**

This policy is approved and endorsed by the board of Trustees (for the purposes of this policy, the term “board of Trustees” includes the body of elders of congregations that do not have charity trustees).

**22**

This policy will be monitored for compliance by the board of Trustees.

**23**

This policy will be reviewed by the board of Trustees at least once every three years.

**24**

This policy will be made available to any members of the congregation who make the request.

---

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Information may be found in the following publications, all published by Jehovah’s Witnesses:

*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1983, “Help for the Victims of Incest.”

*The Watchtower*, January 1, 1997, “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked.”

*Awake!*, October 8, 1991, “The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse,” “The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse,” and “A Time to Heal.”

*Awake!*, October 8, 1993, “Your Child Is in Danger!”, “How Can We Protect Our Children?”, and “Prevention in the Home.”

*Awake!*, October 2007, “A Danger That Concerns Every Parent,” “How to Protect Your Children,” and “Make Your Family a Safe Haven.”

*Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 1, chapter 32: “How Can I Protect Myself From Sexual Predators?”

<sup>ii</sup> *Learn From the Great Teacher*, pp. 57-61, 170-171, also published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

<sup>iii</sup> Prior to offering counselling assistance, it is recommended that elders review information such as that found in *Awake!*, October 8, 1993, “Consoling Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma.”

<sup>iv</sup> Elders can act as “a hiding place from the wind” to those in need, speaking consolingly and praying with them. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:14, 15) By reasoning on the Scriptures and strengthening the victim with words of comfort and encouragement, elders aim to help such troubled ones.—Job 16:5; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 4:6-9; 1 Peter 5:12.

<sup>v</sup> As defined in the Children Act 1989, Section 31, as amended, (and equivalent legislation in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland).

<sup>vi</sup> Helpful local telephone numbers include:

Police: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Authority Children’s Services: \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>vii</sup> *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1997, “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked.”

Many publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses on this subject can be read or downloaded on [www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org).

**[The articles referred to in these Notes are reprinted and attached to form part of this Policy.]**

**\*\*\* w83 10/1 pp. 27-31 Help for the Victims of Incest \*\*\***  
**Help for the Victims of Incest**

Incestuous child abuse is sexual abuse of children by an older relative. Usually, it is by a male relative—such as a father, stepfather, uncle or older brother. Sometimes, but much more rarely, it is by a female relative. According to the book *The Silent Children*, incestuous abuse can range from improper fondling to oral-genital contact to intercourse. Of course, affectionate physical contact between children and older people is proper. But when the older person finds these contacts arousing, or when he does things alone with the child that he would not do if the child's mother were present, this will likely lead to sexual abuse of the child.

“FOR most of her life Rachel has been ridden with guilt, convinced of her own worthlessness, and trapped in a sense of hopeless isolation.” What could so blemish the life of a British housewife and mother?

A 16-year-old girl from California said: “I now have a pain deep in my heart that will never go away, and it hurts, truly hurts.” What could cause her such anguish?

The answer in both cases is the same: incest. Both of these women were sexually abused by their fathers when they were children. Unhappily, there are many like them. Studies in the United States suggest that one in five girls and one in ten boys suffer sexual molestation before they grow up. In most cases, the crime is committed by someone the young victim knows, and in many cases it is incestuous. Reports from other countries tell a similar story.

As the world becomes more degenerate, this problem will likely get worse. Even now, many women coming into the Christian congregation have emotional difficulties because of incest committed against them when they were children. Some have gone to professional counselors and psychologists for help, but many turn to the congregation, looking to their Christian brothers and sisters for support. Is there any way mature ones in the congregation, even if they are not professionals in the field of mental health, can help them? Often there is.—1 Thessalonians 5:11.

If you have any doubt about the harm incest does, consider the expressions of some of its victims many years after the crime: “For 15 years I kept all those things in, so I was engulfed by years of guilt . . . How I hated men!”

“Almost worse than the actual molesting is the guilt.”

“I can truly say I think I would have killed myself by now because of the memories.”

“I don't want to get married because of the memory of sex. And I surely don't want any children.”

A study prepared by Doctors Bruce A. Woodling (of the University of Southern California School of Medicine) and Peter D. Kossoris (a deputy district attorney) confirms the above, stating: “Older women who were incestuously molested as children or adolescents are commonly depressed and neurotically anxious.” A University of Washington study published in *Medical Times* adds: “Problems reported include: feelings of guilt and depression; negative self-image; difficulties in interpersonal relationships



associated with an underlying mistrust of men, inadequate social skills, and sexual dysfunction.”

Why is incest so shattering? The magazine *Child Welfare* draws attention to the situation of a daughter molested by her father: “The daughter who has been molested is dependent on her father for protection and care. . . . She dares not express or even feel the depths of her anger at being used. She must comply with her father’s demands or risk losing the parental love that she needs.”

A former victim rightly insists that incest “is selfish and reprehensible . . . and a grotesque violation of a child’s trust and dependency.”

Some little girls who were victims of incest thought that the only way men would love them was sexually, so they behaved precociously toward other men besides the one victimizing them. Other victims, when they grew to be teenagers, were overly interested in sex, even promiscuous. Many have feelings of deep anger, worthlessness and, especially, guilt. They feel guilty because of what happened, guilty because they did not stop it, guilty because of the harmful emotions, guilty if they had any pleasurable feelings during the experience, and, if the incest affected the parents’ marriage, guilty because of that.

Is there any way they can be helped to handle such emotional turmoil?

### **It Does Not Help to Say . . .**

One woman who was having problems because she had been a victim of incest over many years went to the elders in the congregation to discuss her problem. “They told me to forget about it,” she reports. The well-intentioned reasoning behind that advice was doubtless that since the bad experiences were all in the past and nothing could be done about them now the best thing to do was to put them out of her mind and think good thoughts. (Philippians 4:8) Unhappily, it is not as simple as that.

Why not? Well, think of someone who has had an arm severely disabled in an accident. His friends visit him to help him. Would it help for them to say to him: ‘Oh, forget about it!’ Of course not. There is no way he can forget about it.

Similarly, many women who have been incestuously abused are unable just to forget about it. For some, it is stamped on their consciousness like an emotional scar. One victim wrote: “My grandfather assaulted me when I was seven years old, not just once but on a number of occasions. My naiveté left me defenseless. Now I feel the repercussions constantly. It’s been a living nightmare ever since. The memory can be pushed back for a while only to resurface and make me sick to my stomach. I feel ashamed and dirty, and I wasn’t even to blame.”

True, the emotional scars of incest (and other traumatic experiences) are not visible. But they are just as real as physical scars. So how can those be helped who have them? One way is to listen to the victim and encourage her to “talk it out.”

### **It Might Help to Say . . .**

The counselor should be helpful, not judgmental. The apostle Paul encouraged Christians: “Become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate.” (Ephesians 4:32) In counseling situations, these qualities are vital.

Thus, a woman who was victimized over many years by her father when she was a girl says: “Elders (or whoever else is approached) should be superkind.” Another who was also abused by her father says: “The main thing is not to be shocked. Be calm and understanding, not pushing for every detail but being willing to listen to whatever you are told. Try to understand the victim’s emotions.”

Being calm and understanding is not always easy. One woman admitted that she often spoke excitedly, even belligerently, when discussing her problem. Is such conduct disrespectful? Perhaps. But a “tenderly compassionate,” mature Christian will quickly realize that it is not meant personally. It is an expression of inner turmoil.—Philippians 2:1-4.

Additionally, those counseling incest victims need to listen, just as Jehovah God listens. (Psalm 69:33) They should not be quick to make comments or judgments. (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19) Does listening and giving comfort really help? Yes, indeed. One victim reports: “I was able to talk it over with a sister older than I, and what a relief I felt! I . . . wept with her.” Another said: “I think just having somebody to talk to was the thing that helped me most.”

If the victim is suffering from severe emotional turmoil, a more experienced counselor may be able to help her determine the reason for that turmoil and how she can deal with it. Questions such as the following may help to draw out hidden feelings: “Do you want to discuss what happened? How do you feel about yourself? How do you feel about your father [or uncle, or whoever the abuser was]? Do you blame yourself for what happened? Do you think it makes you worse than other people?” A loving counselor will show that he is not shocked by the answers. Rather, he will explain that such feelings are not uncommon. Some have felt better when they learned this.

What if the victim reveals that she feels worthless because of the experience? A young woman who was abused by her grandfather, father and stepfather, says: “They [the counselors] could help her realize she is worth a lot. I used to feel different from my friends at school. I felt dirty compared with them. Then as a teenager I got into trouble a few times. But now I know that Jehovah does not hold this experience against me. He views me as a worthwhile person.”—Psalm 25:8; 1 John 4:18, 19.

Victims often feel anger too. In her book *The Silent Children* Linda T. Sanford explains why, saying: “As the child grows older, she learns the real meaning of the sexual activity and becomes aware of the adult’s gross inappropriateness. Therefore she feels betrayed. She had looked up to and trusted this older person. She learns that his reassurances were monumental lies.”

Some of this anger—and some of the guilt feelings victims experience—may be defused if the abuser straightforwardly admits what he did and apologizes. One victim, whose father was arrested after the incest was exposed, said: “About three years ago, my father gave me a nice present and said: ‘I just want you to know I am really sorry for a lot of the things that happened between us.’ I knew what he meant and accepted his apology. Now I have a good relationship with him.”

Unhappily, however, many abusers flatly deny everything or admit to only a fraction of what they did. By the time a disturbed woman seeks help, the abuser may even be dead. But the anger may still be there. Those counseling may, nonetheless, be able to help her.

They can kindly point out that her anger is completely understandable. Even Jehovah remains angry at sinners who do not repent.—John 3:36.

However, they may tactfully point out the dangers of letting anger overwhelm a person. (Ephesians 4:26) They may help her to reason on this by gently asking questions such as, “Is your anger helping you or is it harming you? By letting anger affect you so much, are you still letting him influence your life? Do you *really* think he has got away with something? Is not Jehovah the Judge even of those who commit crimes in secret?”—Psalm 69:5; Luke 8:17; Romans 12:19.

Reasoning, but not in a lecturing tone, on Romans 12:21 may help. The purpose of the counsel is to help, not to discipline or apply pressure. Rather than telling the victim how she *should* feel, it is far more beneficial to listen and find out how she *does* feel, and, by gently probing with questions, to help her to see for herself why she feels that way.

If discussions reveal a deep feeling of guilt, it should be pointed out that incest committed against a young child is *never* the child’s fault. True, young children often act affectionately toward adults. But they have no idea about adult sex. As the book *The Silent Children* points out: “The child never intended the closeness and warmth to become sexual. Incest is an adult’s interpretation of the child’s wishes—an interpretation greatly colored by the adult’s own needs.”

Surely one who was sexually abused as a child can be certain of God’s understanding and loving acceptance. Why, Jehovah forgives even those who, unlike the abused child, commit gross sins—if they repent and change their course of action!—1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

### **A Realistic View**

Helping victims of emotional trauma is not easy. It cannot be handled in a few minutes in a crowded Kingdom Hall. It takes patience, love, kindness, repeated efforts and, especially, time. There are no miracle cures. It takes a lot of talking—and praying—before a disturbed victim achieves emotional stability. The bad experience is never forgotten. But the victim can learn to live with the memory.

Thus one victim said: “I still get feelings of worthlessness. But I tell myself it is not true. And in about a day, the feeling goes.” Another victim said: “I’ve learned from the Scriptures to be forgiving, to help others and not to feel sorry for myself.” Another added: “They helped me to see that Jehovah loves me still . . . I’m going to overcome all my problems with the help of Jehovah.”—Psalm 55:22.

### **The Permanent Solution**

While Jesus was on earth, he miraculously healed those who were physically scarred, the ‘lame and maimed.’ (Matthew 15:30) In the approaching New Order, that miracle will be repeated many times over as all physical sickness is removed.—Isaiah 33:24.

In the case of those suffering emotional scars, often the loving, patient help of mature Christian men and women applying the soothing influence of God’s Word can help them to handle their problems and still find joy in Jehovah’s service. (James 5:13-15) However, in the New Order, we are promised: “The former distresses will actually be forgotten.” (Isaiah 65:16) Thus, all servants of God look forward with confidence to the time when God “will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor

outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4) This will be the final healing of all sicknesses, including emotional ones.

**\*\*\* w97 1/1 pp. 26-29 Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked \*\*\***

**Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked**

JEHOVAH is a holy God. In ancient times he was “the Holy One of Israel,” and as such he demanded that Israel be clean, unsullied. (Psalm 89:18) He told his chosen people: “You must prove yourselves holy, because I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:45) Anyone who wanted to “ascend into the mountain of Jehovah” had to be “innocent in his hands and clean in heart.” (Psalm 24:3, 4) That meant more than merely avoiding sinful acts. It meant “the hating of bad.”—Proverbs 8:13.

Lovingly, Jehovah laid down detailed laws so that the nation of Israel could identify and avoid wrongdoing. (Romans 7:7, 12) These laws included strict guidelines on morality. Adultery, homosexual acts, incestuous relationships, and bestiality were all identified as unholy spiritual pollutants. (Leviticus 18:23; 20:10-17) Those guilty of such degraded acts were cut off from the nation of Israel.

When the congregation of anointed Christians became “the Israel of God,” similar moral standards were laid down for them. (Galatians 6:16) Christians too were to “abhor what is wicked.” (Romans 12:9) Jehovah’s words to Israel also applied to them: “You must be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15, 16) Such unholy practices as fornication, adultery, homosexual acts, bestiality, and incest were not to corrupt the Christian congregation. Those refusing to stop engaging in such things would be excluded from God’s Kingdom. (Romans 1:26, 27; 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Hebrews 13:4) In these “last days,” the same standards apply to the “other sheep.” (2 Timothy 3:1; John 10:16) As a result, anointed Christians and other sheep make up a clean and wholesome people, able to carry the name of their God as Jehovah’s Witnesses.—Isaiah 43:10.

**Keeping the Congregation Clean**

In contrast, the world condones all kinds of immorality. Although true Christians are different, they should not forget that many who now serve Jehovah were once in the world. There are many who, before they knew our holy God, saw no reason not to indulge the desires and fantasies of their fallen flesh, wallowing in a “low sink of debauchery.” (1 Peter 4:4) The apostle Paul, after describing the disgusting practices of degraded people of the nations, said: “That is what some of you were.” Still, he went on to say: “But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified, but you have been declared righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of our God.”—1 Corinthians 6:11.

What a comforting statement that is! Whatever a person did earlier in life, he changes when the glorious good news about the Christ has an effect on his heart. He exercises faith and dedicates himself to Jehovah God. From then on he lives a morally pure life, washed clean in God’s eyes. (Hebrews 9:14) The sins that he committed previously are pardoned, and he can ‘stretch forward to the things ahead.’—Philippians 3:13, 14; Romans 4:7, 8.

Jehovah forgave repentant David for murder and adultery, and He forgave repentant Manasseh for immoral idolatry and much bloodshed. (2 Samuel 12:9, 13; 2 Chronicles 33:2-6, 10-13) We can be truly grateful that he is prepared to forgive us too if we repent and approach him in sincerity and humility. Still, despite Jehovah’s forgiving David and Manasseh, these two men—and Israel with them—had to live with the consequences of their sinful acts. (2 Samuel 12:11, 12; Jeremiah 15:3-5) In a similar way, while Jehovah

forgives repentant sinners, there may be consequences of their actions that cannot be avoided.

### **Inevitable Consequences**

For example, a man who lives a life of immoral debauchery and contracts AIDS may accept the truth and turn his life around to the point of dedication and baptism. Now he is a spiritually clean Christian having a relationship with God and a wonderful hope for the future; but he still has AIDS. He may eventually die of the disease, a sad but inescapable consequence of his former conduct. For some Christians the effects of former gross immorality may persist in other ways. For years after their baptism, perhaps for the rest of their lives in this system of things, they may have to fight urges in their flesh to return to their previous immoral life-style. With the help of Jehovah's spirit, many succeed in resisting. But they have to wage a constant battle.—Galatians 5:16, 17.

Such ones do not sin as long as they control their urges. But if they are men, they may wisely decide not to 'reach out' for responsibility in the congregation while still having to struggle with powerful fleshly impulses. (1 Timothy 3:1) Why? Because they know the trust that the congregation puts in the elders. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; Hebrews 13:17) They realize that the elders are consulted on many intimate matters and have to handle sensitive situations. It would be neither loving, wise, nor reasonable for one waging a constant fight with unclean fleshly desires to reach out for such a responsible position.—Proverbs 14:16; John 15:12, 13; Romans 12:1.

For a man who was a child molester before he was baptized, there may be another consequence. When he learns the truth, he repents and turns around, not bringing that cruel sin into the congregation. He may thereafter make fine progress, completely overcome his wrong impulses, and even be inclined to 'reach out' for a responsible position in the congregation. What, though, if he still has to live down notoriety in the community as a former child molester? Would he "be irreprehensible, . . . have a fine testimony from people on the outside, . . . [be] free from accusation"? (1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10; Titus 1:7) No, he would not. Hence, he would not qualify for congregation privileges.

### **When a Dedicated Christian Sins**

Jehovah understands that we are weak and that even after baptism we may fall into sin. The apostle John wrote to Christians of his day: "I am writing you these things that you may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world's." (1 John 2:1, 2) Yes, on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, Jehovah will forgive baptized Christians who fall into sin—if they truly repent and abandon their wrong course.

An example of this was seen in the first-century congregation at Corinth. The apostle Paul heard of a case of incestuous fornication in that young congregation, and he gave instructions that the man involved be disfellowshipped. Later, the sinner repented, and Paul exhorted the congregation to reinstate him. (1 Corinthians 5:1, 13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-9) Thus, by the healing power of Jehovah's loving kindness and the great value of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, the man was cleansed of his sin. Similar things may happen today. Again, though, even if a baptized person who commits a serious sin repents and is forgiven in

Jehovah's eyes, there may still be ongoing consequences of his sin.—Proverbs 10:16, 17; Galatians 6:7.

For example, if a dedicated girl commits fornication, she may bitterly regret her act and eventually be restored to spiritual health with the help of the congregation. But what if she is pregnant because of her immorality? Then her whole life has been inescapably changed by what she did. A man who commits adultery may repent and not be disfellowshipped. But his innocent mate has Scriptural grounds to divorce him, and she may choose to do so. (Matthew 19:9) If she does, the man, although forgiven by Jehovah, will live the rest of his life with this grave consequence of his sin.—1 John 1:9.

What of a man who unlovingly divorces his wife in order to marry another woman? Perhaps he will eventually repent and be reinstated in the congregation. Over the years he may make progress and “press on to maturity.” (Hebrews 6:1) But as long as his first wife lives without a mate, he will not qualify to serve in a responsible position in the congregation. He is not “a husband of one wife” because he had no Scriptural right to divorce his first wife.—1 Timothy 3:2, 12.

Are these not powerful reasons why a Christian should cultivate an abhorrence of what is wicked?

### **What of a Child Molester?**

What if a baptized adult Christian sexually molests a child? Is the sinner so wicked that Jehovah will never forgive him? Not necessarily so. Jesus said that ‘blasphemy against the holy spirit’ was unforgivable. And Paul said that there is no sacrifice for sins left for one who *practices* sin willfully despite knowing the truth. (Luke 12:10; Hebrews 10:26, 27) But nowhere does the Bible say that an adult Christian who sexually abuses a child—whether incestuously or otherwise—cannot be forgiven. Indeed, his sins can be washed clean if he repents sincerely from the heart and turns his conduct around. However, he may still have to struggle with the wrong fleshly impulses he cultivated. (Ephesians 1:7) And there may be consequences that he cannot avoid.

Depending on the law of the land where he lives, the molester may well have to serve a prison term or face other sanctions from the State. The congregation will not protect him from this. Moreover, the man has revealed a serious weakness that henceforth will have to be taken into account. If he seems to be repentant, he will be encouraged to make spiritual progress, share in the field service, even have parts in the Theocratic Ministry School and nonteaching parts in the Service Meeting. This does not mean, though, that he will qualify to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation. What are the Scriptural reasons for this?

For one thing, an elder must be “self-controlled.” (Titus 1:8) True, none of us have perfect self-control. (Romans 7:21-25) But a dedicated adult Christian who falls into the sin of child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul's counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: “Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.” (1 Timothy 5:22) For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does

not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation. Moreover, he cannot be a pioneer or serve in any other special, full-time service.—Compare the principle at Exodus 21:28, 29.

Some may ask, ‘Have not some committed other types of sin and apparently repented, only to repeat their sin later?’ Yes, that has happened, but there are other factors to consider. If, for example, an individual makes immoral advances to another adult, the adult should be able to resist his or her advances. Children are much easier to deceive, confuse, or terrorize. The Bible speaks of a child’s lack of wisdom. (Proverbs 22:15; 1 Corinthians 13:11) Jesus used children as an example of humble innocence. (Matthew 18:4; Luke 18:16, 17) The innocence of a child includes a complete lack of experience. Most children are open, eager to please, and thus vulnerable to abuse by a scheming adult whom they know and trust. Therefore, the congregation has a responsibility before Jehovah to protect its children.

Well-trained children learn to obey and honor their parents, the elders, and other adults. (Ephesians 6:1, 2; 1 Timothy 5:1, 2; Hebrews 13:7) It would be a shocking perversion if one of these authority figures were to misuse that child’s innocent trust so as to seduce or force him or her to submit to sexual acts. Those who have been sexually molested in this way often struggle for years to overcome the resulting emotional trauma. Hence, a child molester is subject to severe congregational discipline and restrictions. It is not his status as an authority figure that should be of concern but, rather, the unblemished purity of the congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Peter 3:14.

If a child molester sincerely repents, he will recognize the wisdom of applying Bible principles. If he truly learns to abhor what is wicked, he will despise what he did and struggle to avoid repeating his sin. (Proverbs 8:13; Romans 12:9) Further, he will surely thank Jehovah for the greatness of His love, as a result of which a repentant sinner, such as he is, can still worship our holy God and hope to be among “the upright” who will reside on earth forever.—Proverbs 2:21.

**[Footnote]**

See “Questions From Readers” in the May 1, 1996, issue of *The Watchtower*.



**\*\*\* g91 10/8 p. 3 The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse \*\*\***  
**The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse**

“I’M NEAR 40 now,” says Eilene. “And even though my problem is over 30 years old, it still haunts me. The anger, the guilt, the problems in my marriage! People try to understand, but they just can’t.” Eilene’s problem? She is a victim of childhood sexual abuse, and for her the effects have proved to be long lasting.

Eilene is far from alone. Surveys indicate that an alarming number of women—and men—have suffered such mistreatment. Far from being a rare act of deviant behavior, then, childhood sexual abuse is a widespread affliction, one that cuts across all social, economic, religious, and racial lines.

Fortunately, the vast majority of men and women would never even *think* of mistreating a child in this way. But a dangerous minority have this sick inclination. And contrary to stereotypes, few child abusers are drooling homicidal maniacs who lurk around playgrounds. The majority are persons who have cultivated a convincing veneer of normalcy. They satisfy their perverted lusts by targeting naive, trusting, defenseless children—usually their own daughters. Publicly, they may treat them kindly, tenderly. Privately, they subject them to threats, violence, and humiliating, degrading forms of sexual assault.

Admittedly, it is difficult to comprehend that such horrors could take place in so many seemingly respectable homes. Even in Bible times, though, children were used “for the momentary gratification of . . . sensual passion.” (*The International Critical Commentary*; compare Joel 3:3.) The Bible predicted: “But know this, that in the last days critical times hard to deal with will be here. For men will be lovers of themselves . . . having no natural affection . . . without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness.” Therefore, it should not surprise us that child abuse is taking place on a large scale today.—2 Timothy 3:1, 3, 13.

Childhood molestation may leave no physical scars. And not all adults who were victimized as children are visibly distressed. But as an ancient proverb observed: “Even in laughter the heart may be in pain.” (Proverbs 14:13) Yes, many victims have deep emotional scars—secret wounds that fester inside. Why, though, does childhood molestation wreak such havoc in some? Why does not the passage of time alone always heal its wounds? The magnitude of this distressing problem demands that we address it. True, some of what follows may be unpleasant to read—especially so if you have been a victim of childhood abuse. But be assured that there is hope, that you can recover.

**[Footnotes]**

All names have been changed.

Because definitions of sexual abuse and survey methods vary greatly, accurate statistics are nearly impossible to obtain.

Most victims are molested by their biological fathers or their stepfathers. Abuse also takes place at the hands of older siblings, uncles, grandfathers, adult acquaintances, and strangers. Since the vast majority of victims are female, we will generally refer to them in the feminine gender. For the most part, though, the information presented herein applies to both sexes.

**\*\*\* g91 10/8 pp. 4-6 The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse \*\*\***  
**The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse**

“I just *bate* myself. I keep thinking there’s something I should have done, should have said to stop it. I just feel so *dirty*.”—Ann.

“I feel alienated from people. I often deal with feelings of hopelessness and despair. Sometimes I want to die.”—Jill.

“CHILDHOOD sexual abuse is . . . an overwhelming, damaging, and humiliating assault on a child’s mind, soul, and body . . . The abuse invades every facet of one’s existence.” So says *The Right to Innocence*, by Beverly Engel.

Not all children react to abuse in the same way. Children have different personalities, coping skills, and emotional resources. Much also depends on the child’s relationship to the abuser, the severity of the abuse, how long the abuse lasted, the child’s age, and other factors. Furthermore, if the abuse is exposed and a child receives loving adult support, damage can often be minimized. However, many victims suffer deep emotional wounds.

### **Why It Devastates**

The Bible offers insight into why such damage occurs. Ecclesiastes 7:7 observes: “Mere oppression may make a wise one act crazy.” If this is true for an adult, imagine the effect of brutal oppression on a small child—*particularly* if the abuser is a trusted parent. After all, the first few years of life are critical to a child’s emotional and spiritual development. (2 Timothy 3:15) It is during those tender years that a youngster begins developing moral boundaries and a sense of personal worth. By bonding to her parents, a child also learns the meaning of love and trust.—Psalm 22:9.

“With abused children,” explains Dr. J. Patrick Gannon, “this process of trust building gets derailed.” The abuser betrays the child’s trust; he robs her of any semblance of safety, privacy, or self-respect and uses her as a mere object for his own self-gratification. Small children do not understand the significance of the immoral acts being forced upon them, but almost universally they find the experience upsetting, frightening, humiliating.

Childhood abuse has thus been called “the ultimate betrayal.” We are reminded of Jesus’ question: “Who is the man among you whom his son asks for bread—he will not hand him a stone, will he?” (Matthew 7:9) But the abuser gives a child, not love and affection, but the cruelest “stone” of all—sexual assault.

### **Why the Wounds Persist**

Proverbs 22:6 says: “Train up a boy according to the way for him; even when he grows old he will not turn aside from it.” Clearly, parental influence can last a lifetime. What, though, if a child is trained to believe that she is powerless to prevent sexual intrusion? Trained to perform perversions in exchange for “love”? Trained to view herself as worthless and dirty? Could not that lead to a lifetime of destructive behavior? Not that childhood abuse excuses later inappropriate adult conduct, but it can help *explain* why abuse victims may tend to act or feel a certain way.

Many abuse victims suffer an array of symptoms, including depression. Some also seethe with persistent and at times overwhelming feelings of guilt, shame, and rage. Other victims

may suffer emotional shutdown, an inability to express or even feel emotion. Low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness also afflict many. Sally, who was abused by her uncle, recalls: “Each time he molested me I felt powerless and frozen, numb, stiff, confused. Why was this happening?” Reports psychologist Cynthia Tower: “Studies show that often people who were abused as children will carry through life a perception of themselves as a victim.” They may marry an abusive man, project an air of vulnerability, or feel powerless to defend themselves when threatened.

Normally, children have 12 years or so to prepare for the emotions that awaken during puberty. But when lewd acts are forced upon a young child, she may be overwhelmed by the feelings aroused. As one study showed, this may later impede her ability to enjoy marital intimacies. Confesses a victim named Linda: “I find the sexual side of marriage to be the hardest thing in my life. I get the most dreadful sensation that it is my father there, and I get panicky.” Other victims may react in just the opposite way and develop compulsive immoral desires. “I led a promiscuous life and would end up having sexual relations with complete strangers,” admits Jill.

Abuse victims may also have difficulty in maintaining healthy relationships. Some simply cannot relate to men or to authority figures. Some will sabotage friendships and marriages by becoming abusive or controlling. Yet others tend to avoid close relationships entirely.

There are even victims who turn their destructive feelings on themselves. “I hated my body because it had responded to the stimulation of the abuse,” admits Reba. Tragically, eating disorders, workaholism, alcohol and drug abuse, are common among abuse victims—desperate attempts to bury their feelings. Some may also act out their self-hatred in more direct ways. “I have cut myself, dug my fingernails into my arms, burned myself,” adds Reba. “I felt I deserved to be abused.”

Do not jump to the conclusion, however, that anyone who feels or acts in such ways has necessarily been abused sexually. Other physical or emotional factors may be involved. For example, experts say that similar symptoms are common among adults raised in dysfunctional families—where their parents battered them, belittled and humiliated them, ignored their physical needs, or where the parents were drug or alcohol addicts.

### **Spiritual Damage**

The most insidious effect of all that childhood abuse can wreak is the potential spiritual damage. Molestation is a “defilement of flesh and spirit.” (2 Corinthians 7:1) By performing perverted acts on a child, by violating her physical and moral boundaries, by betraying her trust, an abuser contaminates a child’s spirit, or dominant mental inclination. This can later impede the victim’s moral and spiritual growth.

The book *Facing Codependence*, by Pia Mellody, further notes: “Any serious abuse . . . is also spiritual abuse, because it taints the child’s trust of a Higher Power.” For example, a Christian woman named Ellen asks: “How can I think of Jehovah as a Father when I have this concept of a cruel, raging man for an earthly father?” Says another victim, named Terry: “I never related to Jehovah as a Father. As God, Lord, Sovereign, Creator, yes! But as Father, no!”

Such individuals are not necessarily spiritually weak or lacking in faith. On the contrary, their persistent efforts to follow Bible principles give evidence of spiritual strength! But imagine how some might feel when they read a Bible text such as Psalm 103:13, which says:

“As a father shows mercy to his sons, Jehovah has shown mercy to those fearing him.” Some may grasp this intellectually. Yet, without a healthy concept of what a father is, it may be hard for them to respond to this text emotionally!

Some may also find it difficult to be “like a young child” before God—vulnerable, humble, trusting. They may hold back their true feelings from God when praying. (Mark 10:15) They may hesitate to apply to themselves the words of David at Psalm 62:7, 8: “Upon God are my salvation and my glory. My strong rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, O people. Before him pour out your heart. God is a refuge for us.” Feelings of guilt and unworthiness may even undermine their faith. One victim said: “I believe in Jehovah’s Kingdom very much. However, I don’t really feel I’m good enough to be there.”

Of course, not all victims are affected the same way. Some have been drawn to Jehovah as a loving Father and feel no obstacle at all in relating to him. Whatever the case, if you are a victim of childhood sexual abuse, you may find it of great value to discern how it has affected your life. Some may be content to let matters rest. However, if it appears to you that the damage is significant, take heart. Your wounds can be healed.

### **[Footnotes]**

Our discussion focuses on what the Bible calls *por·nei'a*, or fornication. (1 Corinthians 6:9; compare Leviticus 18:6-22.) This includes all forms of immoral intercourse. Other abusive acts, such as exhibitionism, voyeurism, and exposure to pornography, while not *por·nei'a*, may also damage a child emotionally.

Since children tend to trust adults, abuse by a trusted family member, older sibling, family friend, or even by a stranger also constitutes a devastating betrayal of trust.

See *Awake!* of December 22, 1990.

\*\*\* g91 10/8 pp. 7-11 “A Time to Heal” \*\*\*

## “A Time to Heal”

Ann was everyone’s shoulder to cry on; a rescuer of anyone with a problem. Poised and impeccable in appearance, she gave not even a hint of having secret emotional wounds, until one day she began to remember. “I was at work,” recalls Ann, “and I started getting pains and intense feelings of shame. I could hardly stand up! For days I suffered. Then a memory came back of my stepfather molesting me—really, it was rape. And it was not the only time.”

THERE is “a time to heal.” (Ecclesiastes 3:3) And for many victims of childhood abuse—like Ann—the emergence of long-buried memories is an important part of the healing process.

How, though, could anyone forget something as traumatic as sexual assault? Consider how helpless a child is against the advances of a father or of some other powerful adult. She cannot run. She dare not scream. And she dare not tell—*anyone!* Yet, she may have to face her abuser every day and act as if nothing happened. Maintaining such a pretense would be difficult for an adult; it is nearly impossible for a child. So she uses the tremendous imagination with which children are endowed and *escapes mentally!* She pretends the abuse didn’t happen, blanking it out or numbing her senses to it.

Actually, from time to time, all of us block out things we don’t want to see or hear. (Compare Jeremiah 5:21.) But abuse victims use this ability as a tool of survival. Some victims report: “I pretended it was happening to someone else and I was just a spectator.” “I pretended I was asleep.” “I did my math problems in my head.”—*Strong at the Broken Places*, by Linda T. Sanford.

Not surprisingly, then, the book *Surviving Child Sexual Abuse* claims: “It is estimated that up to 50 per cent of survivors of child sexual abuse are not aware of these experiences.” Some, though, may recall the abuse itself but block out the *feelings* connected with it—the pain, the rage, the shame.

### Repression—Tug-of-War in the Mind

Is it not best, then, that these things *stay* buried—that victims simply forget about them? Some may well choose to do so. Others simply cannot. It is as Job 9:27, 28 says: “If I smile and try to forget my pain, all my suffering comes back to haunt me.” (*Today’s English Version*) The repression of frightening memories is an exhausting mental effort, a ferocious game of tug-of-war that may even have serious health consequences.

As a victim gets older, the pressures of life often weaken her ability to repress the past. A whiff of cologne, a familiar-looking face, a startling sound, or even an examination by a doctor or a dentist may trigger a frightening onslaught of memories and feelings. Should she not simply try harder to forget? At this point many victims find relief in *trying to remember!* Says a woman named Jill: ‘Once the memories are brought out, they lose their power. To keep them in is more painful and dangerous than to dispose of them.’

### The Value of Acknowledging

Why so? For one thing, remembering allows a victim to grieve. Grief is a natural reaction to trauma; it helps us to put distressing events behind us. (Ecclesiastes 3:4; 7:1-3)

An abuse victim, though, has been denied her grief, forced to deny her horrifying experience, made to bottle up her pain. Such repression may result in what doctors call posttraumatic stress disorder—a numbed state virtually devoid of emotion.—Compare Psalm 143:3, 4.

As memories begin to return, the victim may virtually *relive* the abuse. Some victims even temporarily regress to a childlike state. “When a flashback is in progress,” recalls Jill, “I often have physical symptoms. Sometimes the memories are so oppressive, I feel I am being driven to madness.” Long-suppressed childhood rage may now come tumbling forth. “Remembering plunges me into depression and anger,” says Sheila. But under these unique circumstances, anger is appropriate. You are grieving, expressing pent-up *righteous* rage! You have a right to hate the wicked acts perpetrated against you.—Romans 12:9.

Says one abuse victim: “When I was able to *really* remember, I had a great sense of relief . . . At least now I knew what I was dealing with. As difficult as it was on me to remember, it did give me back a part of my life that had become scary because it was so unknown and mysterious.”—*The Right to Innocence*.

Remembering may also help a victim to get to the root of some of her problems. “I always knew I had deep self-hatred and anger but didn’t know why,” says one victim of incest. Remembering helps many to realize that what happened was not their fault, that they were victimized.

Of course, not all remember their abuse as dramatically or as vividly as others. And most counselors agree that it is not necessary to recall every detail of one’s abuse in order to heal from its effects. Simply acknowledging that abuse occurred can be a big step toward recovery.—See box on page 9.

### Getting Support

If you are a victim of childhood sexual abuse, do not ride out the storm of returning memories by yourself. It helps to talk out your feelings. (Compare Job 10:1; 32:20.) Some who are extremely distressed may decide to seek the help of a qualified physician, counselor, or mental-health professional. In any case, a trusted friend, a marriage mate, family members, or Christian overseers who will listen with empathy and respect can also be valuable allies. “My biggest help has been my best friend, Julie,” says Janet. “She’s allowed me to talk over and over again about a memory. She allows me to feel the emotions that result. She listens and responds with understanding.”

Trust is a risky business, and you may feel unworthy of receiving someone’s help—or be too ashamed to talk about your abuse. But a true friend is “born for when there is distress” and may very well rise to the occasion if you give him or her a chance. (Proverbs 17:17) Be selective, though, about whom you confide in. Learn to reveal your concerns gradually. If a friend proves to be sympathetic and discreet, *then* you might try disclosing more.

It also helps to take good care of yourself physically. Get sufficient rest. Exercise moderately. Maintain a healthy diet. If possible, simplify your life. Feel free to weep. The pain may seem never ending, but in time it will subside. Remember: You lived through the abuse as a helpless child—and survived! As an adult, you have resources and strengths you didn’t have back then. (Compare 1 Corinthians 13:11.) So face your painful memories and put them to rest. Rely on God for strength. Said the psalmist: “However great the anxiety of my heart, your consolations soothe me.”—Psalm 94:19, *The New Jerusalem Bible*.

## Getting Rid of the Guilt and Shame

Ending self-blame is another important task of recovery. “Even now it’s hard for me to think I was innocent,” says a victim named Reba. “I wonder, why didn’t I stop him?”

Bear in mind, though, that abusers employ the most diabolic means of coercion: authority (‘I’m your father!’), threats (‘I’ll kill you if you tell!’), brute physical force and even guilt (‘If you tell, Daddy will go to jail.’). Conversely, some use gentle persuasion or gifts and favors. Some misrepresent sexual activities as a game or as parental affection. “He said that this is what people do when they love each other,” recalls one victim. How could a little child resist such emotional blackmail and trickery? (Compare Ephesians 4:14.) Yes, the abuser coldly exploits the fact that children are helpless, vulnerable, “babes as to badness.”—1 Corinthians 14:20.

Perhaps, then, you need to remind yourself just how vulnerable and helpless you were as a child. You might try spending time with some small children or looking at childhood pictures of yourself. Supportive friends can also help by constantly reminding you that the abuse was not your fault.

Still, one woman says: “I get sick when I remember the feelings my father aroused in me.” Some victims (58 percent in one study) recall experiencing arousal during the molestation. Understandably, this causes them much shame. The book *Surviving Child Sexual Abuse* reminds us, however, that “physical arousal [is] simply the body’s automatic [response] to being touched or stimulated in certain ways” and that a child has “no control over this arousal.” The abuser alone thus bears full responsibility for what transpired. *IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT!*

Take comfort, too, in knowing that God views you as “blameless and innocent” in the matter. (Philippians 2:15) In time any urge to engage in self-destructive behavior may diminish, and you can learn to cherish your own flesh.—Compare Ephesians 5:29.

## Coming to Terms With Your Parents

This may prove to be one of the most difficult tasks of recovery. Some continue to be filled with anger, fantasies of revenge—or guilt. One abuse victim said: “I am depressed because I think Jehovah expects me to forgive my molester, and I can’t.” On the other hand, you may live in morbid fear of your abuser. Or you may have hostile feelings toward your mother if she closed her eyes to the abuse or reacted with denial or anger when abuse was revealed. “My mother told me that I’d have to make allowances for [my father],” recalls one woman bitterly.

It is only natural to feel angry when one has suffered abuse. Nevertheless, the ties that bind families can be strong, and you may not want to cut off all contact with your parents. You may even be willing to consider a reconciliation. Much, though, would depend on the circumstances. Victims are sometimes inclined to forgive their parents outright—not excusing the abuse, but refusing to be consumed with resentment or controlled by fear. Preferring to avoid an emotional confrontation, some are content to ‘have their say in their heart’ and let matters rest.—Psalm 4:4.

You may come to feel, however, that matters can be resolved only by confronting your parents with the abuse—in person, by phone, or by letter. (Compare Matthew 18:15.) If so, be sure you have recovered sufficiently—or at least have enough support—to withstand

the emotional storm that might erupt. Since little will be accomplished by a shouting match, try to be firm but *calm*. (Proverbs 29:11) You might proceed by stating (1) what took place, (2) how it has affected you, and (3) what you expect from them now (such as apologies, payment for doctor bills, or changes in conduct). At the very least, bringing matters out in the open may help dispel any lingering feelings that you are powerless. And it just might pave the way for a new relationship with your parents.

For example, your father might acknowledge the abuse, expressing deep remorse. He may also have made sincere efforts to change, perhaps by getting treatment for alcohol addiction or by pursuing a study of the Bible. Your mother may likewise beg your forgiveness for her having failed to protect you. Sometimes a full reconciliation may result. However, do not be surprised if you still feel ambivalent about your parents and prefer not to rush into a close relationship with them. At the very least, though, you may be able to resume reasonable family dealings.

On the other hand, the confrontation may trigger a torrent of denial and verbal abuse from the molester and other family members. Worse, you may discover that he is still a threat to you. Forgiveness may then be inappropriate, a close relationship impossible.—Compare Psalm 139:21.

In any event, it may take considerable time before your hurt feelings subside. You may need to remind yourself repeatedly that final justice belongs to God. (Romans 12:19) Talking things over with a supportive listener or even expressing your feelings in writing may likewise help you work out your anger. With God's help you can work through your anger. With the passage of time, hurtful feelings will no longer dominate your thinking.—Compare Psalm 119:133.

### **A Spiritual Recovery**

Space does not permit us to discuss all the emotional, behavioral, and spiritual issues involved. Suffice it to say that you can do much to facilitate your recovery by “making your mind over” with the help of God's Word. (Romans 12:2) ‘Stretch forward to the things ahead,’ filling your life with spiritual thoughts and activity.—Philippians 3:13; 4:8, 9.

For example, many abuse victims find much comfort simply by reading through the Psalms. Even greater benefits come, though, by diligently applying Bible principles. In time marital stress can ease. (Ephesians 5:21-33) Destructive behavior can cease. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Unhealthy sexual feelings can heal. (Proverbs 5:15-20; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5) You can also learn balance in your personal relationships and build solid moral boundaries.—Philippians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:11.

Make no mistake: Recovery requires real determination and supreme effort! Psalm 126:5, though, assures us: “Those sowing seed with tears will reap even with a joyful cry.” Remember, too, that the true God, Jehovah, is interested in your welfare. He is “near to those that are broken at heart; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.” (Psalm 34:18) Says one abuse victim: “When I finally realized that Jehovah was aware of every feeling I had and that he cared—*really cared*—then I finally felt peace inside.”

Our loving God, Jehovah, offers even more than peace of mind. He promises a new world of righteousness, where he will wipe out every memory of childhood pain. (Revelation 21:3, 4; see also Isaiah 65:17.) This hope can sustain and strengthen you as you travel the road toward full recovery.



## [Footnotes]

Some memories begin their emergence in the form of psychosomatic pains; others are in the form of hallucinations that may be mistaken for demonic activity—intruder sounds, such as doors opening; shadowy figures that move by doorways and windows; the feeling of an invisible presence in bed. Such distress generally ceases when the memories fully emerge.

Valuable information on helping abuse victims is found on pages 27-31 in the October 1, 1983, issue of our companion journal, *The Watchtower*. We recommend that all congregation elders refer back to that issue and pay careful attention to any cases referred to them.

## [Box on page 9]

### Ways to Recover

- Remembering and acknowledging the abuse
- Grieving over the abuse
- Talking out one's feelings with a supportive listener
- Overcoming feelings of guilt and shame
- Coming to terms with one's parents
- Applying Bible principles to change destructive behavior
- Healing unhealthy sexual feelings
- Developing healthy personal and moral boundaries
- Developing a close relationship with God and fellow Christians

## [Box on page 10]

### Releasing the Past

Memories are usually released over a period of weeks, months, or years, each emerging memory bringing on a temporary crisis. *The Right to Innocence* says that at times “you may feel like you are backsliding. You aren't. You are getting better. In actuality, you have gained the strength necessary to face deeper, even more painful feelings and awarenesses.” With good reason, though, recovering may temporarily become a person's all-consuming concern.—Proverbs 18:14.

Some victims find it beneficial to read or hear the expressions of other victims. Looking at family photos and childhood memorabilia, visiting childhood sites, and talking to supportive friends and family members may also stir up memories. Particularly effective are writing exercises. Some victims record all they remember of their trauma in a journal. Others pour out their feelings in a letter to their abuser—one that is *not sent*—which often triggers further memories. Prayer too is a powerful tool of recovery. Like the psalmist you can pray: “Examine me, and know my disquieting thoughts, and see whether there is in me any painful way, and lead me in the way of time indefinite.”—Psalm 139:23, 24.

**\*\*\* g93 10/8 pp. 3-4 Your Child Is in Danger! \*\*\***  
**Your Child Is in Danger!**

The molestation of children is an ugly reality in this sick world. Lear's magazine said: "It affects more of us than cancer, more of us than heart disease, more of us than AIDS." Awake! thus feels an obligation to try to alert its readers to this danger and what can be done about it.—Compare Ezekiel 3:17-21; Romans 13:11-13.

IN RECENT years a global outcry has arisen over the molestation of children. But the media attention, replete with celebrities who have publicly disclosed their own experiences of childhood abuse, has led to some popular misconceptions. Some believe that all this talk about attacks on children is simply the latest fad. In truth, though, there is little new about such sexual assault. It is nearly as old as human history itself.

### **An Ancient Problem**

Some 4,000 years ago, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were famous for depravity. Pedophilia was apparently among the region's many vices. Genesis 19:4 describes a sex-crazed mob of Sodomites ranging "from boy to old man" seeking to rape Lot's two male guests. Consider: Why would mere boys be inflamed with the idea of raping males? Clearly they had already been introduced to homosexual perversions.

Centuries later, the nation of Israel moved into the region of Canaan. So steeped was this land in incest, sodomy, bestiality, prostitution, and even the ritualized sacrifice of little children to demon gods that all these vile acts had to be expressly forbidden in the Mosaic Law. (Leviticus 18:6, 21-23; 19:29; Jeremiah 32:35) Despite divine warnings, rebellious Israelites, including some of their rulers, adopted these despicable practices.—Psalm 106:35-38.

Ancient Greece and Rome, however, were far worse than Israel in this regard. Infanticide was common to both, and in Greece it was a widely accepted practice for older men to have relations with young boys. Boy brothels flourished in every ancient Greek city. In the Roman Empire, child prostitution was so prevalent that special taxes and holidays were set up specifically for that trade. In the arenas, girls were raped and forced into acts of bestiality. Similar atrocities were prevalent in many other ancient nations.

What about modern times? Is mankind too civilized for such horrible sex acts to flourish today? Students of the Bible cannot accept this notion. They well know that the apostle Paul characterized our era as "critical times hard to deal with." He detailed the rampant self-love, the love of pleasure, and the disintegration of natural family love that overrun modern society and added: "Wicked men and impostors will advance from bad to worse." (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13; Revelation 12:7-12) Has child molestation, so often perpetrated by "wicked men and impostors," got worse?

### **An Urgent Problem**

Assaults on children are often cloaked in secrecy, so much so that they have been called perhaps the most unreported of crimes. Even so, such crimes have evidently spiraled upward in recent decades. In the United States, a survey on the subject was conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*. It found that 27 percent of the women and 16 percent of the men

had been sexually abused as children. Shocking as these statistics are, other careful estimates for the United States have run considerably higher.

In Malaysia, reports of child molestation have quadrupled over the past decade. In Thailand, some 75 percent of the men in one survey admitted to using child prostitutes. In Germany, officials estimate that as many as 300,000 children are sexually abused each year. According to South Africa's *Cape Times*, the number of reports of such assaults soared by 175 percent in a recent three-year period. In the Netherlands and Canada, researchers found that about one third of all women had been sexually abused as children. In Finland, 18 percent of the ninth-grade girls (15 or 16 years old) and 7 percent of the boys reported having had sexual contact with someone at least five years their senior.

In various countries disturbing reports have surfaced about religious cults that abuse children with sadistic sexual practices and torture. Often, those who report that they were victims of such crimes are treated with incredulity, not compassion.

So child molestation is neither new nor rare; it is a long-standing problem that is epidemic today. Its impact can be devastating. Many survivors suffer profound feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem. Experts in the field have listed some common aftereffects of incest on girls, such as running away, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, attempted suicide, delinquency, promiscuity, sleep disturbances, and learning problems. Long-range effects may include poor parenting skills, frigidity, distrust of men, marriage to a pedophile, lesbianism, prostitution, and child molestation itself.

These aftereffects are not inevitable for a victim; nor could anyone rightly excuse wrong conduct solely on the grounds of having been assaulted in the past. Abuse does not predestine its victims to be immoral or delinquent; nor does it dissolve all their personal responsibility for the choices they make later in life. But these common outcomes for victims are real dangers. They add urgency to the question, How can we protect children from molestation?

**\*\*\* g93 10/8 pp. 5-9 How Can We Protect Our Children? \*\*\***  
**How Can We Protect Our Children?**

“Don’t ever tell. It will be our secret.”

“No one would believe you.”

“If you tell, your parents will hate you. They’ll know it was your fault.”

“Don’t you want to be my special friend anymore?”

“You don’t want me to go to jail, do you?”

“I’ll kill your parents if you tell.”

AFTER using children to satisfy perverted lusts, after robbing them of their security and their sense of innocence, child molesters still want something else from their victims—SILENCE. To secure that silence, they use shame, secrecy, even outright terror. Children are thus robbed of their best weapon against abuse—the will to tell, to speak up and ask an adult for protection.

Tragically, adult society often unwittingly collaborates with child abusers. How so? By refusing to be aware of this danger, by fostering a hush-hush attitude about it, by believing oft-repeated myths. Ignorance, misinformation, and silence give safe haven to abusers, not their victims.

For example, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops concluded recently that it was a “general conspiracy of silence” that allowed gross child abuse to persist among the Catholic clergy for decades. *Time* magazine, in reporting on the widespread plague of incest, also cited a “conspiracy of silence” as a factor that “only helps perpetuate the tragedy” in families.

However, *Time* noted that this conspiracy is crumbling at last. Why? In a word, education. It is as *Asiaweek* magazine put it: “All experts agree that the best defence against child abuse is public awareness.” To defend their children, parents must understand the realities of the threat. Don’t be left in the dark by misconceptions that protect child abusers and not children.—See box below.

**Educate Your Child!**

Wise King Solomon told his son that knowledge, wisdom, and thinking ability could protect him “from the bad way, from the man speaking perverse things.” (Proverbs 2:10-12) Isn’t that just what children need? The FBI pamphlet *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis* says this under the heading “The Ideal Victim”: “For most children sex is a taboo subject about which they receive little accurate information, especially from their parents.” Don’t let your children be “ideal victims.” Educate them about sex. For example, no child should reach puberty unaware of how the body will change during this time. Ignorance will make them confused, ashamed—and vulnerable.

A woman we’ll call Janet was sexually abused as a child, and years later her own two children were sexually abused. She recalls: “The way we were brought up, we never talked about sex. So I grew up embarrassed about it. It was shameful. And when I had kids, it was the same. I could talk to other people’s kids but not to my own. I think that’s unhealthy because children are vulnerable if you don’t talk to them about these things.”

Abuse prevention can be taught early. When you teach children to name such body parts as the vagina, the breasts, the anus, the penis, tell them that these places are good, they are special—but they are private. “Other people are not allowed to handle them—not even Mommy or Daddy—and not even a doctor unless Mommy or Daddy is there or has said it is OK.” Ideally, such statements should come from *both parents or each adult guardian*.

In *The Safe Child Book*, Sherryll Kraizer notes that while children should feel free to ignore, scream at, or run from an abuser, many children who are abused explain later that they didn’t want to seem rude. Children thus need to know that some grown-ups do bad things and that not even a child has to obey *anyone* who tells him or her to do something wrong. At such times a child has a perfect right to say no, just as did Daniel and his companions to the Babylonian adults who wanted them to eat unclean food.—Daniel 1:4, 8; 3:16-18.

One widely recommended teaching tool is the “What if . . . ?” game. You might, for example, ask: “What if your teacher told you to hit another child? What would you do?” Or: “What if (Mommy, Daddy, a minister, a policeman) told you to jump off a tall building?” The child’s answer may be inadequate or simply wrong, but don’t correct harshly. The game need not include shock or scare tactics; in fact, experts recommend that it be played in a gentle, loving, even playful manner.

Next, teach children to fend off displays of affection that are inappropriate or that make them feel uncomfortable. Ask, for example, “What if a friend of Mommy and Daddy wanted to kiss you in a way that made you feel funny?” It is often best to encourage the child to act out what he or she would do, making it a “Let’s pretend” game.

In the same way, children can learn to resist other tactics of abusers. For example, you might ask: “What if someone says, ‘You know, you’re my favorite. Don’t you want to be my friend?’” When the child learns to resist such ploys, discuss others. You might ask: “If someone says, ‘You don’t want to hurt my feelings, do you?’ What will you say?” Show the child how to say no through words and clear, firm body language. Remember, abusers often test how children respond to subtle advances. So a child must be taught to resist firmly and say, “I’m telling on you.”

### **Be Thorough in Your Training**

Do not limit such training to a onetime talk. Children need much repetition. Use your own judgment in determining just how explicit the training should be. But be thorough.

Be sure, for example, to forestall any attempt by an abuser to create a secret pact. Children should know that it is *never* all right for an adult to ask them to keep a secret from either parent. Reassure them that it is *always* proper for them to tell—even if they had promised not to. (Compare Numbers 30:12, 16.) Some abusers blackmail the child if they know that the child has disobeyed some family rule. “I won’t tell on you if you won’t tell on me” is the message. So children should know that they will never get in trouble for telling—even under these circumstances. It is safe to tell.

Your training should also be threat-resistant. Some abusers have killed small animals in front of a child and threatened to do the same to the child’s parents. Others have warned their victim that they will abuse younger siblings. So teach children that they should *always* tell on an abuser, no matter what scary threats are made.

In this regard the Bible can be a helpful teaching tool. Because it so vividly stresses Jehovah's almighty power, it can take the bite out of abusers' threats. Children need to know that no matter what threats are made, Jehovah is able to help his people. (Daniel 3:8-30) Even when bad people hurt those Jehovah loves, he can always undo the damage afterward and make things better again. (Job, chapters 1, 2; 42:10-17; Isaiah 65:17) Assure them that Jehovah sees everything, including the people who do bad things and the good people who do their best to resist them.—Compare Hebrews 4:13.

### **Cautious as Serpents**

It is the rare pedophile who uses physical force to molest a child. They generally prefer to befriend children first. Jesus' advice to be "cautious as serpents" is thus appropriate. (Matthew 10:16) Close supervision by loving parents is one of the best safeguards against abuse. Some molesters look for a child alone in a public place and strike up a conversation to spark the child's curiosity. ("Do you like motorcycles?" "Come see the puppies out in my truck.") True, you cannot be with your children at all times. And child-care experts recognize that children need some freedom to move around. But wise parents are cautious about granting children too much freedom prematurely.

Make sure you get to know *well* any adults or older youths who are close to your children, using extra caution when deciding who should care for your children in your absence. Be wary of baby-sitters who make your children feel funny or ill at ease. Likewise, beware of teenagers who seem to have an excessive interest in younger children and have no friends their own age. Thoroughly check out day-care facilities and schools. Tour the entire premises and interview the staff, observing carefully how they interact with children. Ask if they mind if you drop in to check on your children at unexpected times; if this is not allowed, look elsewhere.—See *Awake!* of December 8, 1987, pages 3-11.

The sad truth is, however, that not even the best of parents can control everything that happens to their children.—Ecclesiastes 9:11.

If parents work together, there is one thing they *can* control: the home environment. And since the home is where most child abuse occurs, that will be the focus of the next article.

### **[Footnotes]**

See *Awake!* of February 22, 1992, pages 3-11, and July 8, 1992, page 30.

Of course, parents must bathe and change very little children, and at such times parents wash the private parts. But teach your children to bathe themselves early on; some child-care experts recommend that they learn to wash their own private parts by the age of three if possible.

Some experts caution that if you force your child to kiss or hug every person who asks for such displays of affection, you may undermine this training. Thus, some parents teach children to make polite excuses or substitutions when unwanted demands are made of them.

### **[Box on page 7]**

#### **He Cried Out for Help**

"PLEA to Jehovah Halts Molester's Attack on Youth," declared a headline in the U.S. newspaper *The Arizona Republic*, on May 5, 1993. The alleged molester abducted the 13-

year-old youth at gunpoint, taking him to the perpetrator's apartment. When the youth cried out, "Jehovah, help me!" the molester was shaken and let the boy go free. The police later apprehended the man.

While calling upon Jehovah's name is certainly appropriate under such circumstances, it does not mean that God's servants will be free from attack in these critical "last days." (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13) Christian parents must therefore train their children to be cautious with *all* strangers, regardless of apparent authority.

## Prevention in the Home

Monique was nine years old when he started abusing her. He began by spying on her as she undressed; then he started visiting her room at night and touching her private parts. When she resisted him, he was furious. Once he even attacked her with a hammer and threw her down a flight of stairs. “No one would believe me,” Monique recalls—not even her mother. The abuser was Monique’s stepfather.

IT IS NOT the stranger in a trench coat, the loner lurking in the bushes, who poses the greatest threat to children. It is a member of the family. The vast majority of sexual abuse occurs in the home. So how can the home be made more resistant to abuse?

In his book *Slaughter of the Innocents*, historian Dr. Sander J. Breiner examines the evidence of child abuse in five ancient societies—Egypt, China, Greece, Rome, and Israel. He concludes that while abuse did exist in Israel, it was relatively rare compared to the other four civilizations. Why? Unlike their neighbors, the people in Israel were taught to have respect for women and children—an enlightened view they owed to the Holy Scriptures. When the Israelites applied divine law to family life, they prevented child abuse. Today’s families need these clean, practical standards more than ever.

### Moral Laws

Does Bible law have an impact on your family? For instance, Leviticus 18:6 reads: “You people must not come near, any man of you, to any close fleshly relative of his to lay bare nakedness. I am Jehovah.” Similarly the Christian congregation today enforces strong laws against all forms of sexual abuse. Anyone who sexually abuses a child risks being disfellowshipped, put out of the congregation.—1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

All families should know and review such laws together. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 urges: “And these words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up.” Inculcating these laws means more than occasionally lecturing your children. It involves a regular give-and-take discussion. From time to time, both mother and father should reaffirm God’s laws on incest and the loving reasons for these laws.

You might also use such stories as that of Tamar and Amnon, David’s children, to show children that in sexual matters there are boundaries that no one—close relatives included—should ever cross.—Genesis 9:20-29; 2 Samuel 13:10-16.

Respect for these principles can be shown even in practical living arrangements. In one Oriental country, research has shown that much incest occurs in families where children sleep with parents even when there is no economic necessity for this. Similarly, it is generally unwise to have opposite-sex siblings share a bed or a room as they grow older, if this is at all avoidable. Even when cramped living conditions are a fact of life, parents should use good judgment in deciding on where each family member should sleep.



Bible law forbids drunkenness, suggesting that it can lead to perversion. (Proverbs 23:29-33) According to one study, some 60 to 70 percent of incest victims reported that their abusing parent had been drinking when the abuse started.

### **A Loving Family Head**

Researchers find that abuse is more common among families with domineering husbands. The widely held view that women exist merely to fulfill male needs is Scripturally wrong. Some men use this unchristian opinion to justify turning to a daughter for anything they cannot get from a wife. This type of oppression can cause women in these circumstances to lose their emotional balance. Many lose even the natural urge to protect their own children. (Compare Ecclesiastes 7:7.) One study, on the other hand, found that when workaholic fathers were largely absent from the home setting, sometimes mother-son sexual abuse has festered.

What about your family? Do you as husband take the role of head seriously, or do you abdicate it to your wife? (1 Corinthians 11:3) Do you treat your wife with love, honor, and respect? (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7) Do her views count? (Genesis 21:12; Proverbs 31:26, 28) And what about your children? Do you see them as precious? (Psalm 127:3) Or do you view them as mere burdens, readily exploitable? (Compare 2 Corinthians 12:14.) Eliminate warped, unscriptural views of family roles in your household, and you will make it more resistant to abuse.

### **An Emotionally Safe Place**

One young woman whom we'll call Sandi says: "My whole family was set up for abuse. It was isolated, and each member was isolated from the other." Isolation, rigidity, and obsessive secrecy—these unhealthy, unscriptural attitudes are trademarks of the abusive household. (Compare 2 Samuel 12:12; Proverbs 18:1; Philippians 4:5.) Create a home atmosphere that is emotionally safe for children. Home should be a place where they feel built up, where they feel free to open their hearts and speak freely.

Also, children have a great need for physical expressions of love—hugging, caressing, handholding, romping. Do not overreact to the dangers of sexual abuse by withholding these demonstrations of love. Teach children through open, warm affection and praise that they are *valued*. Sandi remembers: "My mom's view was that to give anyone any commendation for anything was wrong. It would give you a big head." Sandi suffered at least ten years of sexual abuse in silence. Children who are not secure in the knowledge that they are beloved, worthwhile individuals may be more susceptible to an abuser's praise, his "affection," or his threats to withdraw it.

A pedophile who sexually abused hundreds of boys over a 40-year period admitted that the boys who had an *emotional need* for a friend like him made the "best" victims. Don't create such a need in your child.

### **Break the Cycle of Abuse**

Under severe trial Job said: "My soul certainly feels a loathing toward my life. I will give vent to my concern about myself. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul!" (Job 10:1) Likewise, many parents have found that they can help their children by helping themselves. *The Harvard Mental Health Letter* noted recently: "Strong social sanctions against the expression of pain by men apparently perpetuate the cycle of abuse." It seems that men

who never get to express their pain about having been sexually abused are more likely to become abusers themselves. *The Safe Child Book* reports that most child molesters were themselves sexually abused as children but never got help to recover. They express their pain and anger by abusing other children.—See also Job 7:11; 32:20.

The risk to children may also be higher when mothers do not come to terms with past abuse. For example, researchers report that women who were sexually abused as girls often marry men who are child abusers. Furthermore, if a woman has not come to terms with past abuse, she may understandably find it difficult to discuss abuse with her children. If abuse occurs, she may be less able to discern it and take positive action. Then the children pay an awful price for the mother's inaction.

Thus, abuse may pass from one generation to the next. Of course, many individuals who choose not to discuss their painful past seem able to cope well enough in life, and that is commendable. But in many the pain is deeper, and they do need to make a concerted effort—including, if necessary, seeking competent professional help—to heal such severe childhood wounds. Their goal is not to wallow in self-pity. They want to break this sick, hurtful cycle of child abuse affecting their family.—See *Awake!* of October 8, 1991, pages 3 to 11.

### **The End of Abuse**

Properly applied, the foregoing information can do much to reduce the chances of child abuse in your home. Remember, though, that abusers work in secrecy, they take advantage of trust, and they use adult tactics on innocent children. Inevitably, then, some of them do seem to get away with their disgusting crimes.

However, rest assured that God sees what they do. (Job 34:22) Unless they repent and change, he will not forget their vile acts. He will bring them out into the open in his due time. (Compare Matthew 10:26.) And he will exact justice. Jehovah God promises a time when all such treacherous people will be 'torn away from the earth,' and only the meek and gentle who love God and fellowman will be allowed to remain. (Proverbs 2:22; Psalm 37:10, 11, 29; 2 Peter 2:9-12) We have that marvelous hope of a new world thanks to the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 2:6) Then, and only then, will abuse end forever.

In the meantime we must do all we can to protect our children. They are so precious! Most parents will readily put their own safety at risk in order to protect their little children. (Compare John 15:13.) If we don't protect our children, the consequences can be horrible. If we do, we give them a wonderful gift—a childhood that feels innocent and free from calamity. They can feel just as the psalmist did, who wrote: "I will say to Jehovah: 'You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I will trust.'"—Psalm 91:2.

### **[Footnotes]**

Sexual abuse of a child occurs when someone uses a child to gratify his or her own sexual desires. It often involves what the Bible calls fornication, or *por-nei'a*, which could include fondling of genitalia, sexual intercourse, and oral or anal sex. Some abusive acts, such as the fondling of breasts, explicitly immoral proposals, showing pornography to a child, voyeurism, and indecent exposure, may amount to what the Bible condemns as "loose conduct."—Galatians 5:19-21; see *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1983, footnote on page 30.

While most child molesters were abused as children, this does not mean that abuse *makes* children become abusers. Less than a third of abused children become child molesters.

**[Box on page 11]**

One survivor of years of incest said: “Abuse kills children, it kills their trust, their right to feel innocent. That’s why children have to be protected. Because now I have to rebuild my whole life. Why make more children do that?”

Why indeed?

**[Box on page 11]**

**Listen to the Children!**

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, Canada, a recent study examined the careers of 30 child molesters. The results were chilling. The 30 individuals had, between them, abused 2,099 children. Fully half of them held positions of trust—teachers, ministers, administrators, and child-care workers. One molester, a 50-year-old dentist, had abused nearly 500 children over a 26-year period.

However, *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto notes: “In 80 per cent of cases, one or more sectors of the community (including friends or colleagues of the offender, families of victims, other children, some victims) denied or minimized the abuse.” Not surprisingly, “the report suggests that denial and disbelief allow abuse to continue.”

Some of the victims had told on the abusers. However, “parents of young victims were unwilling to accept what their children were telling them,” *The Globe and Mail* quotes the report as saying. Similarly, a government official in Germany recently cited a report that child victims of sexual abuse have to approach adults with their story as many as seven times before they are believed.

**[Box on page 12]**

**“Get Help Now”**

“IF YOU are a man and you are sexually involved with children, you may be saying to yourself, ‘She likes it,’ or ‘He asked for it,’ or ‘I’m teaching her about sex.’ You’re lying to yourself. Real men are not involved sexually with children. If there’s any part of you that really cares about that child, stop it. Get help now.”—A proposed public service announcement, quoted in the book *By Silence Betrayed*.

**\*\*\* g 10/07 p. 3 A Danger That Concerns Every Parent \*\*\***  
**A Danger That Concerns Every Parent**

HEATHER and Scott are a vivacious, happy couple, the parents of a bright, healthy three-year-old boy. They take good care of their son. In today's world, that is no easy job. It involves a wide array of worries and responsibilities. There are so many things that children need to be taught! Heather and Scott feel strongly about one responsibility in particular: They want to protect their child from the dangers of sexual abuse. Why?

"My father was a cold, angry drunk," Heather says. "He beat me terribly, and he molested me and my sisters." It is widely agreed that such abuse can inflict deep emotional scars. No wonder Heather is determined to protect her son! Scott feels the same about protecting him.

Many parents are concerned about child abuse. Perhaps you are as well. Unlike Scott and Heather, you may not have come face-to-face with abuse and its effects, but you have no doubt heard shocking reports about the prevalence of this disgusting practice. Around the world good parents are horrified to learn what is happening to children in their area.

Not surprisingly, one researcher in the field of sexual abuse called the rates of child abuse "one of the most discouraging discoveries of our era." That is certainly sad news, but are such developments surprising? Not to students of the Bible. God's Word explains that we are living in a troubled period of time called "the last days," a time marked by a prevalence of "fierce" behavior, when people would be "lovers of themselves" and would have "no natural affection."—2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Sexual abuse is a daunting issue. Indeed, some parents feel overwhelmed when they contemplate the sheer wickedness of the people who seek out children to abuse them sexually. However, is this problem too much for parents to handle? Or are there some practical steps that parents can take to keep their children safe? The following articles will address these questions.

**[Footnotes]**

Names in this series of articles have been changed.

Sexual abuse of a child occurs when an adult uses a child to gratify his or her own sexual desires. It often involves what the Bible calls fornication, or *por·nei'a*, which could include fondling of genitalia, sexual intercourse, and oral or anal sex. Some abusive acts—such as the fondling of breasts, explicitly immoral proposals, showing pornography to a child, voyeurism, and indecent exposure—may amount to what the Bible condemns as "loose conduct" or "uncleanness . . . with greediness."—Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:19.

**\*\*\* g 10/07 pp. 4-8 How to Protect Your Children \*\*\***  
**How to Protect Your Children**

FEW of us want to dwell on the subject of sexual abuse of children. Parents shudder at the very thought of it! Such abuse, however, is a frightening and unpleasant reality in today's world, and its effects on children can be devastating. Is the matter worth considering? Well, what would you be willing to give for the sake of your child's safety? Learning about the unpleasant realities of abuse is surely a small price to pay. Such knowledge can really make a difference.

Do not let the plague of abuse rob you of your courage. At the very least, you have power that your child does not have—strengths that it will take years, even decades, for your child to gain. The passing years have brought you a fund of knowledge, experience, and wisdom. The key is to enhance those strengths and put them to use in protecting your child. We will discuss three basic steps that every parent can take. They are as follows: (1) Become your child's first line of defense against abuse, (2) give your child some needed background education, and (3) equip your child with some basic protective tools.

**Are You the First Line of Defense?**

The primary responsibility for protecting children against abuse belongs to parents, not to children. So educating parents comes before educating children. If you are a parent, there are a few things you need to know about child abuse. You need to know who abuse children and how they go about it. Parents often think of molesters as strangers who lurk in the shadows, seeking ways to kidnap and rape children. Such monsters certainly do exist. The news media bring them to our attention very often. However, they are relatively rare. In about 90 percent of the cases of sexual abuse of a child, the perpetrator is someone the child already knows and trusts.

Naturally, you do not want to believe that an affable neighbor, teacher, health-care worker, coach, or relative could lust after your child. In truth, most people are not like that. There is no need to become suspicious of everybody around you. Still, you can protect your child by learning how the typical abuser operates.—See the box on page 6.

Knowing such tactics can make you, the parent, better prepared to act as the first line of defense. For instance, if someone who appears more interested in children than in adults singles out your child for special attention and gifts or offers free babysitting or private excursions with your child, what will you do? Decide that the person must be a molester? No. *Do not be quick to jump to conclusions.* Such behavior may be quite innocent. Nonetheless, it can put you on the alert. The Bible says: "Anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word, but the shrewd one considers his steps."—Proverbs 14:15.

Remember, any offer that sounds too good to be true may be just that. Carefully screen anyone who volunteers to spend time alone with your child. Let such an individual know that you are likely to check on your child at any time. Melissa and Brad, young parents of three boys, are cautious about leaving a child alone with an adult. When one son had music lessons at home, Melissa told the instructor: "I'll be in and out of the room while you're here." Such vigilance may sound extreme, but these parents would rather be safe than sorry.

Be actively involved in your child's activities, friendships, and schoolwork. Learn all the details about any planned excursion. One mental-health professional who spent 33 years working with cases of sexual abuse notes that he has seen countless cases that could have been prevented by simple vigilance on the parents' part. He quotes one convicted molester as saying: "Parents literally give us their children. . . . They sure made it easy for me." Remember, most molesters prefer easy targets. Parents who are actively involved in their children's lives make their children difficult targets.

Another way to act as your child's first line of defense is to be a good listener. Children will rarely disclose abuse directly; they are too ashamed and worried about the reaction. So listen carefully, even for subtle clues. If your child says something that concerns you, calmly use questions to draw him out. If he says that he does not want a certain babysitter to come back, ask why. If he says that an adult plays funny games with him, ask him: "What kind of game? What does he do?" If he complains that someone tickled him, ask him, "Where did he tickle you?" Do not be quick to dismiss a child's answers. Abusers tell a child that no one will believe him; all too often, that is true. And if a child has been abused, being believed and supported by a parent is a big step toward recovery.

### **Give Your Child Background Education**

One reference work on the subject of child abuse quotes a convicted molester as saying: "Give me a kid who knows nothing about sex, and you've given me my next victim." Those chilling words are a useful reminder to parents. Children who are ignorant about sex are much easier for molesters to fool. The Bible says that knowledge and wisdom can deliver us "from the man speaking perverse things." (Proverbs 2:10-12) Is that not what you want for your child? Then, as your second basic step in protecting him, do not hold back from teaching him about this important subject.

How, though, do you go about it? More than a few parents find the subject of sex a bit awkward to discuss with children. Your child may find the subject even more awkward, and he is not likely to bring it up with you. So take the initiative. Melissa says: "We started early, with naming the body parts. We used real words, not baby words, to show them that there is nothing funny or shameful about any part of their body." Instruction about abuse follows naturally. Many parents simply tell their children that the parts of their body that a bathing suit covers are private and special.

Says Heather, mentioned in the preceding article: "Scott and I told our son that his penis is private, personal, and not a toy. It's not for anyone to play with—not for Mommy, not for Daddy, not even for a doctor. When we take him to the doctor, I explain that he's only going to make sure everything is OK, and that's why he may touch there." Both parents take part in these little talks from time to time, and they assure the child that he can always come to them and tell them if anyone touches him in a way that's wrong or makes him feel uncomfortable. Experts in child care and abuse prevention recommend that all parents have similar talks with their children.

Many have found the book *Learn From the Great Teacher* to be a real help in teaching this subject. Chapter 32, "How Jesus Was Protected," has a direct yet comforting message for children on the dangers of abuse and the importance of staying safe. "The book has given us a perfect way to reinforce what we have told our children personally," says Melissa.

In today's world children need to know that there are some people who want to touch children or get children to touch them in ways that are wrong. These warnings need not fill children with fear or make them distrust all adults. "It's just a safety message," says Heather. "And it's one message among many others, most of them having nothing to do with abuse. It hasn't made my son fearful at all."

Your child's education should include a balanced view of obedience. Teaching a child to obey is an important and difficult lesson. (Colossians 3:20) However, such lessons can go too far. If a child is taught that he must *always* obey *any* adult, regardless of the circumstances, he is vulnerable to abuse. Molesters are quick to notice when children are overly compliant. Wise parents teach their children that obedience is relative. For Christians, that is not as complicated as it may sound. It simply means saying to them: "If anybody tells you to do something that Jehovah God says is wrong, you don't have to do it. Even Mommy or Daddy should never tell you to do something that Jehovah says is wrong. And you can always tell either Mommy or Daddy if someone tries to get you to do something wrong."

Finally, let your child know that no one should ask him to keep a secret from you. Tell him that if anyone asks him to keep any kind of secret from you, he should always come and let you know. No matter what he is told—even if scary threats are made or he has done something wrong himself—it is *always* OK to come to Mommy or Daddy and tell them all about it. Such instruction need not scare your child. You can reassure him that most people would never do such things—touch him where they shouldn't, ask him to disobey God, or ask him to keep a secret. Like a planned escape route in case of fire, these are just-in-case messages and will probably never be needed.

### **Equip Your Child With Some Basic Protective Tools**

The third step we will discuss is to give your child some simple actions to take in case someone tries to take advantage of him when you are not there. One method that is often recommended is like a game. Parents ask "What if . . . ?" and the child answers. You might say, "What if we were at the store together and we got separated? How would you find me?" The child's answer may not be exactly what you would hope for, but you can guide him along with further questions, such as "Can you think of anything you could do that would be safer?"

You can use similar questions to ask a child what the safest response would be if someone tried to touch him in a wrong way. If the child is easily alarmed by such questions, you might try telling a story about another child. For example: "A little girl is with a relative she likes, but then he tries to touch her where he shouldn't. What do you think she should do to stay safe?"

What should you teach your child to do in situations like the one above? Notes one author: "A firm 'No!' or 'Don't do that!' or 'Leave me alone!' does wonders to frighten the seductive offender into retreat and into rethinking his or her choice of victim." Help your child act out brief scenarios so that he feels confident to refuse loudly, get away quickly, and report to you whatever has happened. A child who seems to understand the training thoroughly may easily forget it within a few weeks or months. So repeat this training regularly.

All the child’s direct caregivers, including the males—whether father, stepfather, or other male relatives—should be part of these discussions. Why? Because all involved in such teaching are, in effect, promising the child that they will never commit such acts of abuse. Sadly, much sexual abuse occurs right within the confines of the family. The following article will discuss how you can make your family a safe haven in an abusive world.

### **[Footnotes]**

Experts note that many abused children give nonverbal clues that something is wrong. For example, if a child suddenly regresses to behavior he had outgrown some time earlier, such as bed-wetting, clinginess, or fear of being alone, he may be sending a signal that something serious is upsetting him. Such symptoms should not be taken as definite proof of abuse. Calmly draw out your child to learn the cause of the distress so that you can offer comfort, reassurance, and protection.

For the sake of simplicity, both the abuser and the victim are referred to here as males. Regardless of gender, though, the same principles apply.

Published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

### **[Box on page 4]**

#### **SEXUAL ABUSE—A GLOBAL PROBLEM**

In 2006 the secretary-general of the United Nations transmitted to the UN General Assembly a world report on violence against children that had been compiled by an independent expert for the UN. During a recent year, according to the report, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years of age experienced “forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence.” Those numbers are staggering, but the report notes: “This is certainly an underestimate.” A review of studies from 21 countries suggested that in some places as many as 36 percent of women and 29 percent of men had been subjected to some form of sexual victimization in childhood. The majority of the perpetrators were relatives!

### **[Box on page 6]**

#### **A PATTERN OF SEDUCTION**

An abuser is likely to be too clever to use force on his victims. Rather, he may prefer to seduce children gradually. He begins by selecting a target, often a child who seems vulnerable and trusting, thus relatively easy to control. Next, he singles out that child for special attention. He may also try to win the trust of the child’s parents. Molesters are often expert at pretending to be sincerely interested in the child and the family.

In time, the molester will begin grooming the child for abuse. He gradually becomes more physical with the child through innocent-looking displays of affection, playful wrestling, and tickling. He may give generous gifts and begin to separate the child from friends, siblings, and parents, in order to spend time alone with the child. At some point he may ask the child to keep some minor secret from the parents—perhaps a gift or plans for some future excursion. Such tactics set the stage for seduction. When the abuser has won the child’s trust and that of the parents, he is ready to make his move.

Again, he is likely to be subtle about it rather than violent or forceful. He may exploit the child’s natural curiosity about sex, offering to act as a “teacher,” or he may suggest that they play a “special game” together that only they will know about. He may try exposing the child to pornography in order to make such behavior seem normal.



If he succeeds in molesting the child, he is now eager to ensure that the child does not tell anyone about it. He may use a variety of tactics, including threats, blackmail, and blame, or perhaps a combination of these. For example, he may say: "It's your fault. You didn't tell me to stop." He may add: "If you tell your parents, they'll call the police and send me to jail forever." Or he may say: "It's our secret. If you tell, no one will believe you. If your parents ever do find out, I will hurt them." There is no end to the devious and malicious tactics such individuals will try.

**\*\*\* g 10/07 pp. 9-11 Make Your Family a Safe Haven \*\*\***  
**Make Your Family a Safe Haven**

“HAVING no natural affection.” With those sad words, the Bible describes many people of our time, a period called “the last days.” (2 Timothy 3:1, 3, 4) The epidemic of child abuse in the family furnishes vivid proof of the truth of that prophecy. In fact, the original Greek word *a'stor·gos*, rendered in English “having no natural affection,” suggested a lack of the love that should exist among family members, especially between parents and children. And all too often that is the setting in which child abuse occurs.

Some researchers say that the most common perpetrator of sexual abuse is the male parent figure. Other male relatives also commonly molest. While most victims are girls, many boys are abused as well. Female perpetrators are not as rare as you might assume. Perhaps the most underreported form of abuse is sibling incest, where an older or more powerful child bullies or seduces a younger or weaker brother or sister into sexual acts. As a parent, you surely find all such acts repugnant.

How can you keep these problems from arising in your family? Clearly, every member of every family needs to learn and to value some principles that rule out abusive conduct. The best place to find that kind of guidance is in God’s Word, the Bible.

### **God’s Word and Physical Relations**

To be safe, every family needs to embrace the Bible’s standard of morality. The Bible is not prudish when it comes to discussing sex. It is dignified, yet frank and to the point. It shows that God designed sexual intimacy to be a real blessing to husband and wife. (Proverbs 5:15-20) However, it condemns sexual conduct outside that arrangement. For instance, the Bible speaks openly against incest. In Leviticus chapter 18, a wide variety of incestuous relationships are forbidden. Note these words in particular: “You people must not come near, any man of you, to *any close fleshly relative of his* to lay bare nakedness [to have sexual intercourse]. I am Jehovah.”—Leviticus 18:6.

Jehovah listed acts of incest among the “detestable things” punishable by death. (Leviticus 18:26, 29) Clearly, the Creator has very high standards on this matter. Today, many governments take a similar view, outlawing the sexual abuse of children within the family. Often, the law holds that a child who is subjected to sexual relations by an adult has been raped. Why use that strong word if physical force was not involved?

Many authorities have come to recognize what the Bible has said all along about children—that they tend to be unable to reason in the way that adults do. For example, Proverbs 22:15 says: “Foolishness is tied up with the heart of a boy.” And the apostle Paul was inspired to write: “When I was a babe, I used to . . . think as a babe, to reason as a babe; but now that I have become a man, I have done away with the traits of a babe.”—1 Corinthians 13:11.

A child cannot understand the full meaning of sexual acts, nor can a child imagine the consequences that will follow over the years. Hence, it is widely agreed that children cannot give any meaningful consent to engage in sexual relations. In other words, if an adult (or significantly older youth) has relations with a child, the older person cannot excuse the act by saying that the child did not object or that the child asked for it. The adult is guilty of

rape. This is a crime, often punishable by a prison sentence. The responsibility for the rape belongs with the rapist, not the unwilling victim.

Sadly, though, most of such crimes go unpunished by authorities today. In Australia, for example, it has been estimated that only 10 percent of offenders are prosecuted, and few are convicted. Other lands have had a similar record. While governments may be able to do little to protect the Christian family, the application of Bible principles can do far more.

True Christians realize that the God who had those principles recorded in his Word has not changed. He sees every deed we carry out, even those that are hidden to most humans. The Bible says: “All things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have an accounting.”—Hebrews 4:13.

God holds us accountable if we violate his commands and hurt others. On the other hand, he blesses us for adhering to his positive commands regarding family life. What are some of these?

### **A Family United by Love**

“Love,” the Bible tells us, “is a perfect bond of union.” (Colossians 3:14) As described in the Bible, love is not simply a feeling. It is defined by the way it motivates—by the conduct it prompts and the deeds it forbids. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) In the family, showing love means treating each member with dignity, respect, and kindness. It means living in harmony with God’s view of each family member. God gives each one an honorable and important role.

As the family head, the father is to take the lead in showing love. He understands that a Christian father is not given license to be a tyrant, abusing his power over his wife or children. Rather, he looks to Christ as his example in headship. (Ephesians 5:23, 25) So he is tender and loving with his wife and patient and gentle with his children. He loyally protects them and gives his all to prevent anything from happening that might rob them of their peace, their innocence, or their sense of trust and safety.

Likewise, the wife and mother has a role of vital importance and dignity. The Bible uses the protective instincts of mothers in the animal kingdom to illustrate how protective Jehovah and Jesus can be. (Matthew 23:37) A human mother should likewise be staunchly protective of her children. Lovingly, she is quick to put their safety and well-being ahead of her own. The parents do not allow abuse of power, bullying, or intimidation to enter into their dealings with each other or with their children; nor do they allow their children to use such tactics on one another.

As each family member treats the others with respect and dignity, good communication thrives. Notes author William Prendergast: “All parents should have daily, constant, close communication with their children or adolescents.” He adds: “This appears to be the best solution to the problem of sexual abuse.” Indeed, the Bible recommends just such constant and loving communication. (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7) When that direction is applied, the home is a place where each member can freely and safely speak from the heart.

Granted, we live in a wicked world and not all abuse can be prevented. Even so, a safe home can make a world of difference. If some member of the family is hurt outside the home, he or she knows just where to run for comfort and sympathy. Such a home is truly a

refuge, a safe haven in a troubled world. May God bless your efforts to make your family just like that!

**[Footnote]**

This ancient Greek word has been defined: “Hard-hearted towards kindred.” One Bible translation thus renders this verse: “They will . . . lack normal affection for their families.”

**[Box/Picture on page 10]**

**TIPS FOR A SAFE HOME**

**Internet:** If your children have access to the Internet, they need instructions on how to use it safely. There are countless pornographic sites as well as chat rooms and other social networks where pedophiles seek out and seduce children. It is wise to keep the computer in an open area where parents can more easily monitor its use. Without parental supervision children should never give out personal information or arrange to see anyone they have met over the Internet.—Psalm 26:4.

**Alcoholic Beverages:** In many cases of sexual abuse of a child, alcohol has played a role. Experience shows that adults who overindulge tend to lower their inhibitions; some give in to desires they might otherwise have suppressed. At any rate, this danger adds another reason to heed the Bible’s counsel to avoid drunkenness and overdrinking.—Proverbs 20:1; 23:20, 31-33; 1 Peter 4:3.

**Privacy:** One woman recalls: “After Mom died, my father was the only one in the house who had curtains on his windows or a door into his bedroom. He gave us no privacy—even in the bathroom.” This man molested all his daughters. Every family member needs to understand the importance of privacy. As parents need privacy from their children at certain times, so they need to give children an appropriate measure of privacy as they mature. Wise parents treat others as they themselves want to be treated.—Matthew 7:12.

## Chapter 32

### How Can I Protect Myself From Sexual Predators?

Each year, millions of people are raped or otherwise sexually abused, and research shows that young people are a prime target. For example, it's estimated that in the United States, about half of all rape victims are under 18 years of age. Because of the prevalence of abuse, it is vital that you consider this topic.

“He grabbed me and threw me down before I knew what was happening. I tried everything I could to fight him off. I pulled out a can of pepper spray, but he knocked it away. I tried to scream, but only air escaped my lungs. I pushed, kicked, punched, and scratched. And that's when I felt a knife pierce my skin. I went completely limp.”—Annette.

SEXUAL predators run rampant today, and young people are often the target of their attack. Some youths, like Annette, are assaulted by a stranger. Others are attacked by a neighbor. Such was the case with Natalie, who at just 10 years of age was sexually abused by a teenager who lived near her home. “I was so scared and ashamed that at first I didn't tell anyone,” she says.

Many youths have been molested by a family member. “Between the ages of 5 and 12, I was sexually abused by my father,” says a woman named Carmen. “I finally confronted him about it when I was 20. He said he was sorry, but a few months later, he kicked me out of the house.”

Sexual abuse at the hands of a neighbor, friend, or family member is disturbingly common today. But the exploitation of young people is nothing new. Such deplorable conduct took place even in the days when the Bible was written. (Joel 3:3; Matthew 2:16) Today we live in critical times. Many people lack “natural affection,” and it's common for girls (and even boys) to be taken advantage of sexually. (2 Timothy 3:1-3) While no precaution *guarantees* your safety, there is much you can do to protect yourself. Consider the following tips:

**Be alert.** As you walk outdoors, know what is happening ahead of you, behind you, and on both sides. Some areas are known to be dangerous, especially at night. To the extent possible, either avoid those areas or at least make sure you're not alone.—Proverbs 27:12.

**Don't send mixed messages.** Avoid flirting or dressing provocatively. Such actions may send the message that you're interested in getting physical—or at least that you wouldn't object to it.—1 Timothy 2:9, 10.

**Talk about boundaries.** If you're dating, discuss with the other person what conduct is and is not appropriate. Once you have set boundaries, do not put yourself in compromising situations in which you could be abused.—Proverbs 13:10.

**Be willing to speak up.** There's nothing wrong with firmly stating, “Don't do that!” or “Take your hand off me!” Don't hold back out of fear that you'll lose your boyfriend. If he breaks up with you over this issue, he's not worth keeping! After all, you deserve a real man, one who respects your body and your principles.

**Be cautious while online.** Never give out personal information or post photos that identify your whereabouts. If you receive a sexually explicit message, usually the best reply is *no* reply. A wall of silence renders most online predators powerless.

The preceding steps can make you less vulnerable to attack. (Proverbs 22:3) Realistically, though, you may not always be in full control of your circumstances. For instance, you might not always be able to have a traveling companion or to avoid dangerous areas. You may even *live* in a dangerous area.

Perhaps you know through bitter experience that bad things can happen despite your efforts to avoid trouble. Like Annette, quoted at the outset, you may have been caught unawares and been overpowered. Or like Carmen, you may have been victimized as a child and, as such, were powerless to control the situation—or even to understand fully what was happening. How can you deal with the guilt that often torments those who have been sexually abused?

### **Coping With Guilt**

Annette still struggles with guilt over what occurred. “I’m my own worst enemy,” she says. “I keep playing that night over and over again in my head. I feel as though I should have tried harder to fight him off. The fact is, after being stabbed, I was paralyzed with fear. I couldn’t do anything more, but I feel that I *should* have.”

Natalie also struggles with guilt. “I shouldn’t have been so trusting,” she says. “My parents had a rule that my sister and I had to stay together when we played outside, but I didn’t listen. So I feel I gave my neighbor the opportunity to hurt me. What happened affected my family, and I feel responsible for causing them so much pain. I struggle with that the most.”

If your feelings are similar to those of Annette or Natalie, how can you cope with guilt? First, try to keep foremost in mind that if you were raped, *you were not a willing participant*. Some people trivialize the issue, using the excuse that “boys will be boys” and that victims of rape were asking for it. But no one deserves to be raped. If you were the victim of such a heinous act, *you are not to blame!*

Of course, reading the statement “you are not to blame” is easy; believing it may be much more difficult. Some keep what happened bottled up inside and are racked with guilt and other negative emotions. However, who is best served by silence—you or the abuser? You owe it to yourself to consider another option.

### **Telling Your Story**

The Bible tells us that in the height of his personal turmoil, the righteous man Job said: “I will give vent to my concern about myself. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul!” (Job 10:1) You will benefit from doing the same. Talking to a trusted confidant about what happened can in time help you to come to terms with the rape and gain relief from your distressing emotions.

In fact, if you are a Christian, it is important that you speak to a congregation elder about what happened. The comforting words of a loving shepherd can assure you that as a victim of rape, you have not been defiled by someone else’s sin. That’s what Annette found. She says: “I talked to a close friend, and she urged me to speak with a couple of Christian elders in my congregation. I’m glad I did. They sat down with me on several occasions and told me exactly what I needed to hear—that what happened was not my fault. *None* of it was my fault.”

Talking about what happened and expressing your feelings can keep you from becoming consumed with anger and resentment. (Psalm 37:8) It may also help you to gain relief, perhaps for the first time in years. After she told her parents about the abuse, Natalie found that to be true. “They supported me,” she says. “They encouraged me to talk about it, and that helped me not to be so sad and angry inside.” Natalie also found comfort in prayer. “Talking to God helped me,” she says, “especially at those times when I felt that I couldn’t open up to another human. When I pray, I can speak freely. It gives me a real sense of peace and calm.”

You too can find that there is “a time to heal.” (Ecclesiastes 3:3) Rely on supportive friends who are like the elders described as being similar to “a hiding place from the wind and a place of concealment from the rainstorm.” (Isaiah 32:2) Take care of yourself physically and emotionally. Get needed rest. And most of all, rely on the God of all comfort, Jehovah, who will soon bring about a new world in which “evildoers themselves will be cut off, but those hoping in Jehovah are the ones that will possess the earth.”—Psalm 37:9.

**[Footnotes]**

Some cases involve date rape, in which a girl is either forced to have sex or is drugged into compliance.

For more information, see Volume 2, Chapter 4.

Of course, that advice also applies if a girl pressures a boy for sex.

For more information, see Volume 2, Chapter 11.

Sometimes victims of abuse are subject to severe depression. In such a case, it might be wise to consult a physician. For more information on coping with distressing feelings, see Chapters 13 and 14 of this book.

**KEY SCRIPTURE**

“In the last days critical times hard to deal with will be here. For men will be lovers of themselves, . . . having no natural affection, . . . without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness.”—2 Timothy 3:1-3.

**TIP**

If you have been the victim of sexual abuse, keep a list of scriptures that can comfort you. These might include Psalm 37:28; 46:1; 118:5-9; Proverbs 17:17; and Philippians 4:6, 7.

**DID YOU KNOW . . . ?**

In the United States, more than 90 percent of juvenile victims of sexual assault know their attacker.

**ACTION PLAN!**

When I feel guilty about what happened, I will .....

What I would like to ask my parent(s) about this subject is .....

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

- What are the benefits of speaking up about abuse?
- What could happen—to you and to others—if you keep silent?

**[Blurb on page 232]**

“It’s very hard to speak up about the abuse, but it’s the best thing you can do. Speaking up helps you to let go of your sadness and anger and to regain your power.”—Natalie

**[Box on page 230]**

**“If You Love Me . . .”**

One type of sexual predator doesn’t force himself on girls but cleverly plays on their emotions. How? By saying such things as, “Everyone else has sex,” “No one will ever find out,” or, as mentioned in Chapter 24 of this book, “If you love me, you’ll do this.” Don’t be conned by a boy who tries to make you believe that sex equals love. The fact is, anyone who thinks that way is only looking out for his own gratification. He is *not* thinking of you or your welfare. In contrast, a real man will put your interests above his own and will show that he has the strength to uphold God’s moral standards. (1 Corinthians 10:24) A real man won’t treat girls as sex objects. Instead, he will view “younger women as sisters with all chasteness.”—1 Timothy 5:1, 2.



**\*\*\* 1r chap. 10 pp. 57-61 Jesus' Power Over the Demons \*\*\***

**Chapter 10  
Jesus' Power Over the Demons**

DO YOU remember why one of God's angels became Satan the Devil?— It was his selfish desire to be worshiped that caused him to turn against God. Did other angels become followers of Satan?— Yes, they did. The Bible calls them 'Satan's angels,' or demons.—Revelation 12:9.

Do these bad angels, or demons, believe in God?— 'The demons believe God exists,' the Bible says. (James 2:19) But now they are afraid. This is because they know that God will punish them for the bad things they have done. What have they done wrong?—

The Bible says that those angels left their own proper home in heaven and came to earth to live as men. They did this because they wanted to have sex relations with the pretty women on earth. (Genesis 6:1, 2; Jude 6) What do you know about sex relations?—

Sex relations are when a man and a woman become close in a very special way. Afterward, a baby can grow inside the mother. But for angels to have sex relations is wrong. God wants only a man and a woman who are married to each other to have sex relations. That way if a baby is born, the husband and wife can take care of it.

When angels took human bodies and had sex with women on earth, their babies grew up to become giants. They were very mean, and they would hurt people. So God brought a great flood to destroy the giants and all the bad people. But he had Noah build an ark, or big boat, to save the few people who did what was right. The Great Teacher said that what happened at the Flood is important to remember.—Genesis 6:3, 4, 13, 14; Luke 17:26, 27.

When the Flood came, do you know what happened to the bad angels?— They stopped using the human bodies they had made, and they went back to heaven. But they could no longer be God's angels, so they became angels of Satan, or demons. And what happened to their children, the giants?— They died in the Flood. And so did all the other people who did not obey God.

Since the time of the Flood, God has not let the demons become like humans anymore. But even though we cannot see them, the demons still try to get people to do very bad things. They are causing more trouble than ever before. This is because they have been thrown out of heaven down to the earth.

Do you know why we cannot see the demons?— It is because they are invisible. But we can be sure that they are alive. The Bible says that Satan is 'misleading people in all the world,' and his demons are helping him.—Revelation 12:9, 12.

Can the Devil and his demons mislead, or fool, us too?— Yes, they can if we are not careful. But we do not need to be afraid. The Great Teacher said: 'The Devil has no hold on me.' If we keep close to God, he will protect us from the Devil and his demons.—John 14:30.

It is important that we know what bad things the demons will try to get us to do. So think about it. What bad things did the demons do when they came to earth?— Before the Flood, they had sex relations with women, something that was not right for angels to do.

Today the demons like it when people do not obey God's law about sex relations. Let me ask you, Who only should have sex relations?— You are right, only married people.

Today some young boys and girls have sex relations, but this is wrong for them. The Bible talks about the male "genital organ," or penis. (Leviticus 15:1-3) The female genital parts are called the vulva. Jehovah created these parts of the body for a special purpose that should be enjoyed only by married people. It makes the demons happy when people do things that are forbidden by Jehovah. For example, the demons like it when a boy and a girl play with each other's penis or vulva. We don't want to make the demons happy, do we?—

There is something else that the demons like but Jehovah hates. Do you know what it is?— Violence. (Psalm 11:5) Violence is when people are mean and hurt others. Remember, that is what the giants, the sons of the demons, did.

The demons also like to scare people. Sometimes they pretend to be people who have died. They may even imitate voices of those who have died. In this way the demons fool many into believing that dead people are alive and can talk with the living. Yes, the demons cause many people to believe in ghosts.

So we must be on guard that Satan and his demons do not fool us. The Bible warns: 'Satan tries to make himself look like a good angel, and his servants do the same.' (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15) But, really, the demons are bad. Let's see how they may try to get us to be like them.

Where do people learn a lot about violence and improper sex and spirits and ghosts?— Isn't it from watching certain television shows and movies, playing computer and video games, going on the Internet, and reading comic books? Does doing these things bring us closer to God or closer to the Devil and his demons? What do you think?—

Who do you think wants us to listen to and watch bad things?— Yes, Satan and his demons do. So, what do you and I need to do?— We need to read, listen to, and watch things that are good for us and that will help us to serve Jehovah. Can you think of some of these good things that we can do?—

If we do what is good, there is no reason to be afraid of the demons. Jesus is stronger than they are, and they are afraid of him. One day the demons cried out to Jesus: "Did you come to destroy us?" (Mark 1:24) Won't we be happy when the time comes for Jesus to destroy Satan and his demons?— In the meantime, we can be sure that Jesus will protect us from the demons if we keep close to him and his heavenly Father.

Let's read about what we need to do, at 1 Peter 5:8, 9 and James 4:7, 8.

**\*\*\* 1<sup>st</sup> chap. 32 pp. 170-171 How Jesus Was Protected \*\*\***

Do you remember from Chapter 10 of this book what the Devil and his demons try to get us to do?— Yes, they try to get us to have the kind of sex relations that God says is wrong. But who only should have sex relations?— Yes, two grown people of the opposite sex who are married to each other.

However, sad to say, some grown-ups like to have sex with children. When they do, boys and girls may begin to do bad things that they have learned from these grown-ups. They also begin to use their sex organs in a wrong way. That is what happened a long time ago in the city of Sodom. The Bible says that people there, “*from boy to old man,*” tried to have sex with men who had come to visit Lot.—Genesis 19:4, 5.

So just as Jesus needed protection, you also need to be protected from grown-ups—and even from other children—who may try to have sex with you. Usually, these people will pretend to be your friends. They may even offer you something if you will promise not to tell others about what they want to do with you. But these people are selfish, like Satan and his demons, and they only want to get pleasure for themselves. And they try to get this pleasure by having sex with children. *This is very wrong!*

Do you know what they may do to get pleasure for themselves?— Well, they may try to rub your sex organs. Or they will even rub their sex organs against yours. But you should never let anybody play with your penis or vulva. Not even your own brother or sister or your mother or father. *These parts of your body are private.*

How can you protect your body from people who do bad things like this?— First of all, do not let anybody play with your sex organs. If someone tries to do this, say firmly in a loud voice: “*Stop that! I’m going to tell on you!*” And if that person says that what happened is your fault, don’t believe that. It is not true. Just go and tell on him no matter who it is! You should do so even if he says that what you are doing together is a secret just between you and him. Even if that person promises you nice presents or makes scary threats, you should get away from him and tell on him anyway.

You do not have to be afraid, but you do need to be careful. When your parents warn you about people or places that could be a danger to you, you need to listen to them. If you do, you take away a bad person’s chance to hurt you.

Read about protecting yourself from wrong sex acts, at Genesis 39:7-12;  
Proverbs 4:14-16; 14:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 6:18; and 2 Peter 2:14.

**\*\*\* g93 10/8 p. 14 Consoling Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma \*\*\***  
**Consoling Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma**

THEY were an outgoing young couple, highly respected in the congregation. But his tone was urgent when he asked if the elder would call on them, and she had tears in her eyes. She was suffering from episodes of severe depression and self-hatred, even thoughts of suicide. She had been sexually abused as a youngster. Thankful that Jehovah's organization has provided direction on how to help the victims of such crimes, the elder studied the Society's letters to elders as well as the October 8, 1991, *Awake!* articles and the October 1, 1983, *Watchtower* article that dealt with this subject. Here are a few useful points derived from these sources.

**1. Listen, listen, listen.** When a child skins his knee, his first impulse is to run to Mommy or Daddy for comfort. But an abused child may never even have had that option. So as an adult, he still has that same need—to tell, to talk it out, to be comforted by a sympathetic listener. (Compare Job 10:1; 32:20.) When the elder visited the couple mentioned above, the husband was surprised by how little the elder spoke and how much he listened. The husband, a very practical, helpful man, found that he had been trying to fix the problem by answering emotion with logic, trying to correct feelings that seemed irrational to him. He learned that his wife needed empathy more than answers. (Compare Romans 12:15.) She needed to hear that she had valid reasons for feeling the way she did.

**2. Expose the lies.** Abuse teaches children that they are dirty, unlovable, worthless. Like false religious doctrines, these ideas can make a healthy relationship with Jehovah very difficult. So expose the lies, and replace them with the truth—gently, repeatedly, patiently. Reason from the Scriptures. (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5) For example: “I understand that you feel dirty. But how does Jehovah feel about you? If he allowed his Son to die and provide a ransom for you, doesn't that mean he loves you? [John 3:16] In His eyes, did the abuse make *you* dirty, or did it make the *abuser* dirty? Remember, Jesus said: ‘There is nothing from outside a man that passes into him that can defile him; but the things that issue forth out of a man are the things that defile a man.’ [Mark 7:15] Did the abuse really issue forth out of *you*, a little child? Or did the abuser purpose it in his own mind?”

**3. Speak consolingly.** Each individual is unique, so Paul's counsel to “speak consolingly to the depressed souls” applies differently in each case. (1 Thessalonians 5:14) Simplistic talk, however, rarely seems to console. For instance, merely telling an abuse survivor to read the Bible more, preach more, or ‘just throw your burden on Jehovah’—helpful though these suggestions are at times—may not produce results. (Psalm 55:22; compare Galatians 6:2.) Many are already doing these things as best they can and berate themselves mercilessly for not doing better.—Compare 1 John 3:19, 20.

Similarly, telling abuse survivors simply to forget the past may do more harm than good. If they could do so, likely they would have—and would not have needed help to arrive at such a simple solution. Remember, theirs is a severe emotional trauma. For comparison's sake, just imagine coming upon a car crash victim lying moaning amid the wreckage. Would you just tell him not to think about the pain? Clearly, more is needed.

If you are not sure that what you are saying is consoling and helpful, why not ask the depressed one? After all, even counsel that is true and Scriptural needs to be timely and appropriate as well.—Compare Proverbs 25:11.

After a few visits, the sister began to see some improvement in her outlook, and her husband was better able to help her through the hard times. Both have since been able to speak consolingly to others who have been through similar traumas. How faith-strengthening to see Jehovah, “the God of all comfort,” working through his Word and his people to “bind up the brokenhearted” in these troubled times.—2 Corinthians 1:3; Isaiah 61:1.

### **[Footnotes]**

True, the apostle Paul did counsel Christians to ‘forget the things behind.’ But Paul was here referring to his former prestige and worldly success, which were now “a lot of refuse” to him. He was not referring to his past tribulations, of which he spoke freely.—Philippians 3:4-6, 8, 13; compare 2 Corinthians 11:23-27.