

Your Child Is in DANGER!

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, prosti-

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.

tution, 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?

Awake!

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How Can We Protect OUR CHILDREN?

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.

"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."

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

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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 infor-

mation, 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

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

Common Misconceptions

Misconception: Child abusers are usually strangers, deranged misfits who abduct children and use physical force to abuse them.

In the vast majority of cases—from 85 to 90 percent by some estimates—the abuser is a person the child knows and trusts. Rather than using force, abusers often manipulate the child into sexual acts gradually, taking advantage of the child’s limited experience and reasoning ability. (Compare 1 Corinthians 13:11 and Proverbs 22:15.) These abusers are not the drooling loners of the stereotype. Many are quite religious, respected, and well liked in the community. According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “to assume that someone is not a pedophile simply because he is nice, goes to church, works hard, is kind to animals, and so on, is absurd.” Recent research suggests that it is also wrong to assume that all abusers are male or that all victims are female.

Misconception: Children fantasize or lie about sexual abuse.

Under normal circumstances children lack the experience or sophistication in sexual matters to invent explicit claims of abuse, although some small children may become confused about details. Even the most skeptical of researchers agree that most claims of abuse are valid. Consider the book *Sex Abuse Hysteria—Salem Witch Trials Revisited*, which focuses on false claims of abuse.* This book admits: “Genuine sex

abuse of children is widespread and the vast majority of sex abuse allegations of children . . . are likely to be justified (perhaps 95% or more).” Children find it enormously difficult to report abuse. When they do lie about abuse, it is most often to deny that it happened even though it actually did.

Misconception: Children are seductive and frequently bring the abuse on themselves by their conduct.

This notion is particularly warped, since, in effect, it blames the victim for the abuse. Children have no real concept of sexuality. They have no idea of what such activity implies or of how it will change them. They are therefore incapable of consenting to it in any meaningful way. It is the abuser, and the abuser alone, who bears the blame for the abuse.—Compare Luke 11:11, 12.

Misconception: When children disclose abuse, parents should teach them to refrain from talking about it and to ‘put it behind them.’

Who is best served if the child keeps silent about the abuse? Is it not *the abuser*? In fact, studies have shown that denial with emotional suppression may be the least effective way to deal with the trauma of abuse. Of the nine coping methods used by one group of adult survivors studied in England, the ones who denied, avoided, or suppressed the issue suffered the greater emotional maladjustment and distress in adult life. If you experienced a terrifying assault, would you want to be told not to talk about it? Why tell a child such a thing? Allowing the child the normal reaction to such a terrible event, such as grief, anger, mourning, will give him the opportunity eventually to put the abuse in the past.

* In some divorce cases, contending adults have been known to use an accusation of child abuse as a weapon.

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

* 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.

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.

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

* 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.

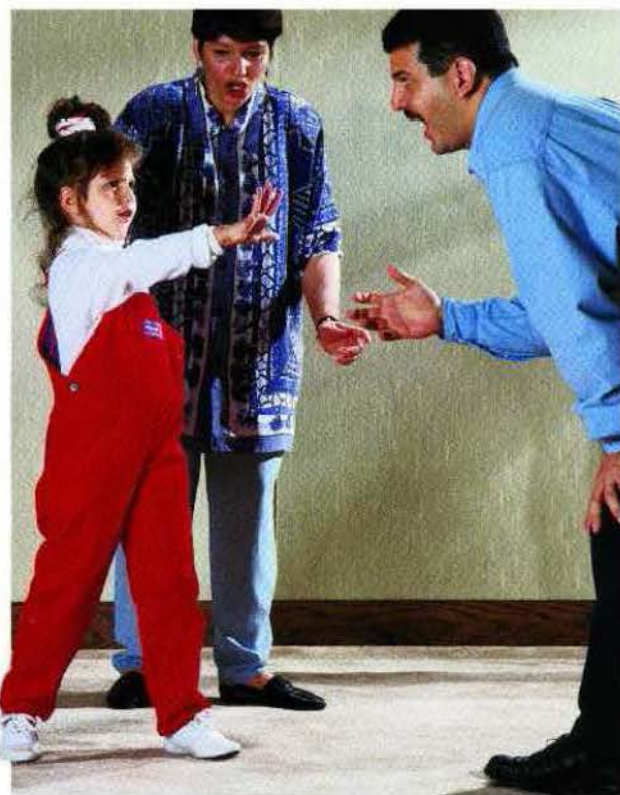
judgment in determining just how explicit the training should be. But be thorough.

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

Teach children to use words and clear, firm body language to resist improper advances

If Your Child Is Abused

TO STOP abuse, you must know it when you see it. In the numerous books on the subject, experts have listed dozens of telltale signs of abuse that parents can watch for. These include: complaints of pain while urinating or defecating, genital infections, abrasions or lesions in the genital area, the sudden onset of bed-wetting, appetite loss or other eating problems, precocious sexual behavior, a sudden fear of such places as school or parts of the house, periods of panic, an extreme fear of undressing, a fear of being alone with a familiar person, and self-mutilation.

However, be careful about jumping to conclusions. Most of these symptoms do not by themselves necessarily mean that a child has actually been sexually abused. Each could indicate some other problem. But if you see disturbing symptoms, gently broach the subject, perhaps with such a statement as: "If anyone ever touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, I want you to know that you can always tell me, and I'll do all I can to protect you. Has anything like that ever happened to you?"—Proverbs 20:5.

If your child discloses sexual abuse, you will no doubt feel shattered. But remember: Your reaction will play a major role in the child's recovery. Your child has been carrying an unbearable burden and needs you, with all your adult strength, to lift it from her or his shoulders. Praise the child for being so brave as to tell you what happened. Repeatedly reassure the child that you will do your best to provide protection; that the abuse was the abuser's fault, not the child's; that the child is not "bad"; that you love the child.

Some legal experts advise reporting the abuse

to the authorities as soon as possible. In some lands the legal system may require this. But in other places the legal system may offer little hope of successful prosecution.

What, though, when the abuser is one's own beloved mate? Sad to say, many women fail to take decisive action. To be sure, it is never easy to face the ugly reality of a mate who is a child abuser. Emotional ties, and even financial dependency, can be overwhelmingly strong. The wronged wife may also realize that taking action could cost her husband his family, his job, his reputation.* The hard truth is, though, that he may just be reaping what he has sown. (Galatians 6:7) Innocent children, on the other hand, stand to lose much more if they are not believed and protected. Their whole future is at stake. They do not have the resources that adults have. Trauma can scar and shape them adversely for life. They are the ones who need and deserve tender treatment.—Compare Genesis 33:13, 14.

Parents must therefore make every reasonable effort to protect their children! Many responsible parents choose to seek out professional help for an abused child. Just as you would with a medical doctor, make sure that any such professional will respect your religious views.[#] Help your child rebuild his or her shattered self-esteem through a steady outpouring of parental love.

* In reality, the molester is already in trouble and badly needs help. Even if the perpetrator claims to be sorry, the wronged mate may consider: Why didn't he confess before being exposed by his victim?

[#] For instance, when Jehovah's Witnesses are confronted with issues involving blood transfusion, they make sure that the doctor respects their religious beliefs.

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.

Prevention IN THE HOME

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

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.

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,

* 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 *pornei'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.

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 hus-

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?

bands. 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

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.

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, hand-holding, 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.

"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*.

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

* 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.



Children need plenty of warm, loving attention

—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.

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 broken-hearted" in these troubled times.—2 Corinthians 1:3; Isaiah 61:1.

* 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.