

Three Mountain Retreat Child Abuse Prevention Training

Introduction

Child abuse has become a nationwide issue since about the mid-1980s. Schools, camps, churches and other youth organizations have come under intense scrutiny. We must be sensitive and well informed to avoid having potential difficulties in this area and for the well-being of the children and youth that are entrusted to our care.

Three Mountain Retreat is committed to providing a safe environment for campers. This training is designed to heighten the awareness of child sexual abuse and to offer information and guidelines to prevent sexual abuse while at camp and beyond. We must view the task of creating a safe environment for the campers as a team effort. Every parent, church leader and sponsor as well as Three Mountain Retreat staff has a part in being informed and carrying out their role in keeping children safe. **Every adult, employee or volunteer, who will be on campus and have opportunity to interact with the campers, is required to take this course and pass the accompanying exam with 70% accuracy.** A certificate for every adult attending camp verifying their participation in the course and passing the test must be turned in to a designated Three Mountain Retreat staff person before or upon arriving at camp.

Definition of sexual abuse and molestation

Child sexual abuse is any experience during childhood or adolescence that involves inappropriate sexual attention from another person. This person is usually an adult but can also be an older child or a teenager.

Child sexual abuse is not solely restricted to physical contact; such abuse could include non-contact abuse, such as exposure, voyeurism, and child pornography.

Effects of Abuse

Some fallacies regarding sexual abuse are that some people will say that sexually touching a child does no harm. Some adults will even tell boy victims to "act like a man" and "stop whining." Other adults are unsympathetic about the experiences of adult survivors. They will say, "no matter what happened in childhood that is the past. You're an adult now, so get over it."

The facts are that sexual abuse does harm the child and that the damage often carries over into the child's adult life. Studies show that this damage can include:

- difficulty in forming long-term relationships;
- sexual risk-taking that may lead to contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS;
- physical complaints and physical symptoms;
- depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide;

- links to failure of the immune system and to increases in illnesses, hospitalizations, and early deaths.

In addition to the tangible physical and emotional damage that sexual abuse does to the child, that terrible secret that is held so close by two or three family members can go on to tear at the fiber of the family in generation after generation.

Warning signs of sexual abuse

There may be a variety of signs of sexual abuse. They may include:

- Fear of a parent or fear of the person who's the perpetrator.
- Withdrawn or isolated.
- Overly compliant or cooperative when that's not typically the way that they often act.
- Sexually precocious, which is being involved in play that is intrusive or inappropriate, and the sense of being sexually inappropriate is more common with younger-aged children.



Dr. Anthony Urquiza, Psychologist
Child Protection Center
University of California

Nonspecific signs of sexual abuse

There may be some nonspecific types of signs. That might include things like:

- Shame or a sense of embarrassment
- Withdrawal or aggressive behavior
- Sleep disorders or nightmares or difficulty either going to sleep or maybe waking up sometime during the night.
- Avoidant types of behaviors or fears or phobias—some kind of concern about being in a particular place or a concern about being with a particular person
- Symptoms or signs of depression
- Change in their school performance that is noticeably different than the way they used to act; a change in the type of activities in which they've been involved in.
- Change in a pattern that they are typically involved in. That is, they might be very disruptive when they didn't used to be or very angry, acting out, defiant or oppositional.

“As we discuss the signs of abuse, it's important to note that very few of these findings are totally specific for abuse. That means that we can see these signs in a child who is not being abused. The converse is also true. A child can be a victim of abuse and show no outward signs.”



Dr. Janet Squires
Chairman of
General Pediatrics
Children's Medical
Center of Dallas

Characteristics of a child molester

“There are a lot of misleading ideas about who child molesters are. It used to be thought that they were easily spotted, dirty old men, deviants, and guys in raincoats. We know that that's not true. Very ordinary, very upstanding, very well respected individuals, people in positions of authority—all these kinds of individuals have been found to molest children—people who are relatives, people who are well known to the child. A child is more likely to be abused by somebody that they know or someone in their family than they are by a stranger.”



**David Finkelhor,
Ph.D.**
Director, Family
Research Laboratory
University of New
Hampshire

Older children as abusers

About one-third of all sexual abuse of children occurs at the hands of older children, primarily adolescents. And this is a problem that we've begun to recognize and are now paying much more attention to. Adolescents abuse for a whole variety of reasons: because they are isolated; because they think that they should be getting some kind of sexual experience; because they've been abused or victimized or suffered in some way. In the past, there has been a tendency just to sort of sweep this under the rug and say, "Well, he's just going through a phase." We know now that a person who is abusive when they're an adolescent, if they aren't treated at that time, is at a very high risk to continue that pattern of behavior into adulthood. So it's very important that we identify adolescents who are abusing children and get them help before the process goes on for too long.



**David Finkelhor,
Ph.D.**
Director, Family
Research Laborato
University of New
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Strategies of Abusers



Molesters tend to use three basic strategies: seduction, trickery and force

Seduction

“Most often the molester is known to the child and is in a position to spend lots of time with the child. The molester engages in a process called grooming, where the initial overtures are nonsexual and gradually grow more intrusive. The molester is usually very patient during this process.



Detective Mike Johnson
Juvenile Division
Plano, TX Police
Department

Force

“There's usually very little a child can do to resist force.

There are unquestionably some occasions when strangers just accost children or snatch them or get them by some means into a car or whatever, abduct, and have sex with them. But that's a relatively infrequent kind of act compared with what I just described of what basically is a process of developing friendship and seduction.”



Detective Mike Johnson
Juvenile Division
Plano, TX Police
Department

Trickery and Secrecy

Molesters take great pain not to be caught. Some of the ways they maintain the secrets are:

- **Bribery.** They'll actually give gifts or other favors to that interested child.
- **Blame.** The child molester tells a child it's their fault the molestation took place.
- **Embarrassment.** During the molestation, the children realize that what is taking place is wrong.



Dr. David Chadwick, M.D. (retired)
Center for Child
Protection
San Diego Children's
Hospital

- **Loss of affection.** Ninety-eight percent of the time, the molester is a wonderful person in a child's life. It's that 2 percent of the time that he is molesting the child.
- **Displaced responsibility.** In this case, the child blames themselves for the molestation or the acts that are taking place.

And then the molester may actually threaten the child, whether physical harm to the child or someone in the child's family.

Abusive feelings and normal curiosity

“Adolescence can be very sexually confusing. But if we're talking about something sexual between somebody who is older and someone who is younger by even a couple of years, we are getting into the realm of things that can be abuse. If we're talking about someone who is in a position of authority as a baby sitter or as an older brother or as a big brother, those kinds of situations are going to be abusive. I don't think older children recognize the kind of power and authority that they have and the fact that the younger people in these relationships don't have the capacity to really assert themselves in the face of that kind of authority.”



**David Finkelhor,
Ph.D.**
Director, Family
Research Laboratory
University of New
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Section Summary

- A child is more likely to be abused by somebody that they know or someone in their family than by a stranger.
- Molesters tend to use three basic strategies: seduction, trickery and force, combined with an overall goal of secrecy. The aim of the molester is to isolate the child from supervision and any other kind of protection.
- Probably a third of all sexual abuse of children occurs at the hands of other children, primarily adolescents.

Three Mountain Retreat On-site Protection and Prevention Policies

Three Mountain Retreat has adopted the following policies to provide additional security for our campers. These policies are primarily for the protection of the campers; however, they also serve to protect our adult leaders from false accusations of abuse.

1. **Avoid One-on-One Contact.**
 - a. **Adult to Camper:** Adult leaders should use extreme care in avoiding one-on-one encounters with campers. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting is to be conducted in view of other adults and campers. If a camper approaches you when you are alone, move quickly to an area where there are others or ask the camper to meet you somewhere else (in a public area) in a few minutes.
 - b. **Camper to Camper:** Care should also be taken to minimize one-on-one encounters between campers.
2. **Respect Campers' Privacy.** Adult leaders must respect the privacy of campers in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers at camp, and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. Adults must respect their own privacy in similar situations.
3. **Constructive Discipline.** Discipline used at camp should be positive and constructive. Corporal punishment is not permitted. If behavioral problems escalate, involve another adult (church leader or group leader) as soon as possible in the process.
4. **Hazing Prohibited.** Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of camp activity.
5. **Camper's Responsibilities.** All campers are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the principles set forth in the Camp Guidelines. Physical violence, hazing, bullying, theft, verbal insults, and drugs and alcohol have no place at camp and may result in the removal of a camper from camp.

Responding to and Reporting Abuse

If a child discloses abuse to you

“You want to keep your cool by not panicking or overreacting. Don't criticize the child. Be careful to avoid making him feel guilty by your very line of questioning such as, "Why didn't you tell me earlier?" "Why didn't you say no?" "Why didn't you do this or that?"

Remember to respect the child's privacy. They're not going to feel comfortable discussing this in large groups with a lot of people milling around. Assure the child that he or she is not to blame, that they are the child, they are the victim, and that what was done to them is wrong and the abuser is the guilty party. And last, listen to the child carefully. Be patient. They'll eventually tell you what you need to know.”



Jim Chavis
School Social Worker
Pittsburgh, PA

“Listen. And listen. And listen. And be supportive. Allow the child to thoroughly express whatever he or she wishes to. Get it all out as much as possible. But, unless you have had prior experience in interviewing sexually abused children, I recommend that people not try to elicit a lot more information than what is coming spontaneously. I think it's a good idea that after the conversation has ended to make a note or two on a piece of paper so that you've recorded what has happened. You've got documentation later if it's needed. And then proceed along with reporting procedures, leaving the detailed interviewing of the child to people who have been trained to do that.”



**Dr. David Chadwick
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Center for Child
Protection
San Diego Children's
Hospital

A. For a child abused at camp

1. **If the suspected abuse occurs at the youth camp, the suspected abuse must be reported to the Texas Department of Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC) utilizing the online form at https://wafers.hhsc.state.tx.us/Abuse_Fraud_Reporting_IR.asp Local authorities should also be contacted about the suspected abuse.**
2. If child abuse is suspected, the Three Mountain Retreat Director or his assistant, the Group Leader and the Church Leader of the persons involved must be informed at once.
3. To the extent possible, the name of the informant should be kept confidential.
4. The child should be removed from ALL contact with the accused.
5. The Three Mountain Retreat Director or his assistant, Group Leader and Church Leader will confront the suspected child abuser.
6. Once the above-mentioned persons have reason to believe that any child abuse has or will occur, they shall report him or her to the proper authorities.
7. The parents will be contacted to inform them of the situation.

B. For a child abused before coming to camp

If a child is determined to be an abused child, either by observation or through confiding in a sponsor, staff member, or other leader that he/she has been abused, the following steps should be taken:

1. The sponsor of leader should counsel the child according to the guidelines set forth in “Helping a Victim of Child Abuse.” (See copy below)
2. The sponsor or leader should inform only the Three Mountain Retreat Director or his assistant, Group Leader and the child’s church leader of the situation.
3. The above-mentioned persons will then contact the proper authorities such as the Department of Health and Human Services Commission or the County Sheriff’s department.

C. Helping a Victim of Child Abuse

After it has been disclosed that a child has been abused, certain steps should be taken to help the child.

1. **Listen** – don't panic or overreact. Give the child permission to talk about the abuse to you. Listen carefully to everything the child says, and note his or her behavior. Don't fill in words for them. Don't ask leading questions. Have another adult present when you talk to the child.
2. **Believe** – Never criticize the child or claim that the child has misunderstood what happened. Support the child for disclosing. It is not your responsibility to determine whether the allegation is true. Children seldom lie about abuse.
3. **Protect** – Along with the Church Leader, Group Leader or other trusted adult, take the child to a private place. Discuss the situation only with these individuals. Try to avoid repeated interviews about the incident. Never promise that everything will be okay. You can promise that you will do what you can to help.
4. **Affirm** – Children who have been victimized may feel sad, angry, fearful, anxious, and depressed. Accept and understand the child's feelings. Avoid telling the child how he or she "should feel." Rather, emphasize that the child is not to blame for what happened. Praise him/her for courage and honesty, and promise you will get help.
5. **Refer** – DO NOT attempt to handle the problem alone. This is important for the well being of the child as well as for your own protection. As a child care custodian, you are mandated by the law to report child abuse.

Reporting Responsibilities

If you suspect abuse or a child discloses abuse to you, contact the Three Mountain Retreat Director if the abuse has occurred at camp. In Texas, you are also required to report your suspicions to or the local authorities or the Texas Department of Human Services. If the abuse occurred before camp, call the local authorities or the Texas Department of Human Services.

"I think if anybody suspects a child is being seriously abused, they have a moral, and in many states a legal responsibility in fact to report that abuse to the authorities so that a proper investigation can be done so that the child can get help and the family can get help."



Dr. Anne Cohn Donnelly, D.P.H.
Senior Visiting Scholar in non-profit
studies
Kellogg School

Reasonable Suspicion

For reporting child abuse, all the state requires is that you have reasonable suspicion that abuse occurred. And any person who has knowledge of physical or sexual abuse is required to report this to their local law enforcement agency or to the Department of Human Services. These reporters are protected civilly if their reports are based on factual information. When a report is received, an investigation will be carried out by the proper official agency. It is not the camp's responsibility to investigate these allegations.

The intention of this training is that we want to create an environment where both adults and children are aware of the abuse and ready to stop it by recognizing it and reporting it to the proper authorities. We want you to care about the welfare of children and realize it is not up to you, Three Mountain Retreat, or the church, to investigate, but to report to the proper authorities that are trained in this area. You don't have to make any decisions about it. All you have to have is reasonable suspicion.

Section Summary

You have completed this section of the course. In this section, you learned:

- If a child discloses to you that he or she has been abused, you should respond by remaining calm, listening to the child, and reassuring the child that he or she is not to blame for the abuse. Then report the child's disclosure only to the proper authorities.
- If you suspect abuse or a child discloses abuse to you, contact the Retreat Center Director or his assistant, Group Leader and Church Leader if the abuse has occurred at camp. If the abuse occurred outside of camp, call your local authorities or the Department of Human Services.
- The goal of this training is to create an environment in which both adults and children are prepared to recognize abuse and report it to the proper authorities.

**Curriculum from "Riverbend Retreat Center Child Abuse Prevention Training."
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Thanks to Riverbend Retreat Center, Glen Rose, Texas, for compiling this information for use by youth camps.

Permission is granted for other organizations to utilize this material. Names and other non-essential information may be changed.