



REPORTING SEXUAL ABUSE: IT'S EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

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Sexual abuse is not just an East Coast problem. Make no mistake that the sexual abuse in Pennsylvania — and now a high profile case connected to Syracuse

University in New York — is a problem everywhere. It happens here. It takes a great deal of moral courage to report child sexual abuse or any kind of child abuse. We fear we will be identified to the

perpetrator or that our job might be in jeopardy if we report a colleague. If we know the perpetrator, we may doubt the validity of what we saw or what a child has told us. Having moral courage to do what is right is one of the toughest things facing us today.

For more than 443 northeast Indiana children, someone had the moral courage and took responsibility between January and October to report child sexual abuse. These courageous individuals decided a child's wellbeing was more important than their personal doubts or fears, that stopping the nightmare of sexual abuse for a child superseded their own qualms. They found the moral courage to be a child's protector.

Why report? First of all, we are all

substance abuse, depression and other mental illnesses. New research points to long-term physical consequences of child sexual abuse such as obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease and a weakened immune system. Teenagers who run away from home are often victims of sexual abuse.

Third, reporting sexual abuse can help ensure another child does not become a victim. Walking in on a child being

sexually assaulted by an adult is not

common. What is more common is

observing certain behaviors in the child or hearing the child talk about an adult who

has inappropriately touched him or her or shown other inappropriate sexual

behavior. Among signs child victims of sexual abuse may show: excessive fear of being left alone with a certain adult; a drop in grades; sudden change of attitude; torn, stained or bloody underclothing; pain, swelling or frequent urinary or yeast infections; difficulty walking or sitting; genital bruising, bleeding or itching; getting an STD; age-inappropriate, seductive behaviors or inappropriate sex play; premature understanding of sex; over-concern for siblings; weight change; suicide attempts, especially in



Listen to your child; when talking, avoid blaming phrases.

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A child victim of sexual abuse will not describe the incident(s) using adult words. They will describe being touched in their private parts or of an uncomfortable encounter with an adult through the story they tell you.

Take time to listen; listen quietly. Say supportive phrases such as: "It's good you told me. I will get you help." Hold back shocked looks and blaming phrases such as "Why didn't you tell me sooner?" or "Why would you let him do that to you?" Keep the child talking.

We will move past Penn State, Syracuse and other high profile cases. But they should stand as a reminder that each of us has the responsibility to be protectors of children. It is EVERYONE'S job to report child abuse of any kind or neglect of a child. The reporting individual can remain anonymous. State law requires the

To report child abuse or neglect, call the Indiana hotline at 1-800-800-5556 any time of day or night.

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