

Child Abuse Awareness 101 For Homeschoolers

Instructor Guide

By Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out



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How to Use This Curriculum

The goal of *Child Abuse Awareness 101 for Homeschoolers* is simple:

To empower and equip you and your homeschool community with the information necessary to recognizing and fighting child abuse.

After taking this class, your homeschooling community should be able to do the following:

- 1) Define the major types of child abuse and neglect
- 2) Recognize the main warning signs of each major type of child abuse
- 3) Identify the characteristics of the average child abuser
- 4) Report child abuse to the proper authorities
- 5) Start making families and homeschooling communities safer
- 6) Engage in continuing education about child abuse prevention issues

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Our awareness program begins with general issues — what the different types of child abuse are and the warning signs — and then looks at each major type of child abuse specifically: physical, sexual, neglect, and emotional. We also dedicate entire sections to sibling and institutional abuse. We believe that any adequate curriculum about child abuse prevention needs to shine a light on all abuse types, not just the most visible types of sexual or physical abuse. Since children will often experience more than one type of abuse at a time, a broad-based and interconnected approach to abuse prevention is absolutely necessary.

This curriculum is lecture- and discussion-based. Each section includes an exact and detailed script for you to read out loud to your event's attendees. This script corresponds to the attendee packets. (**Note:** For your convenience, words or phrases that fill in the blanks in the attendee's packet are **highlighted in yellow in this instructor's guide.**)

At the end of most sections are "Discussion Questions." You should ask these questions to the group and allow attendees to answer the questions and interact with one another. This way the entire group can participate more actively and better engage with the material.

You should be able to teach the entire curriculum in a time span of 2.5-3 hours, depending on how much group interaction you allow. We have timed each section's lecture text and give a suggestion at the beginning of each for how much time the section should take.

At the end of your group's awareness event, you should administer the *Child Abuse Awareness 101 for Homeschoolers Test*. This test is at the end of each attendee's packet and the answers are provided for you at the end of this instructor guide. Use this test to measure how much your session's attendees have learned.

Thank you very much for your interest in learning about child abuse and how we as homeschooling students, parents, and alumni can work together to prevent it. This is a vitally important issue to tackle. We appreciate your willingness to do so. And we hope that this curriculum contributes to making your homeschooling community a safer and more nurturing place for everyone.

If you have any concerns, questions, or suggestions for HARO, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our website is www.hareachingout.org. We'd love to hear from you.

Sincerely,

R.L. Stollar
Executive Director
Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out

Introduction: Why Homeschoolers Need to Take Child Abuse Seriously

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 10 minutes.

Child abuse happens within homeschooling.

This is a factual statement. But sometimes saying it publicly can make homeschoolers feel offended, defensive, or incredulous. So it's important to say upfront what this statement does not imply:

- It does not imply that homeschoolers are a bunch of child abusers.
- It does not imply that homeschooling is child abuse.
- It does not imply that homeschoolers, as a group of people, abuse their children any more than any other group of people.
- It does not imply that child abuse is non-existent in groups of people other than homeschoolers.
- It does not imply that we should ignore child abuse in other groups of people. We should never ignore child abuse, wherever it may happen.

What this statement implies — and what you need to understand — is simply this: Child abuse happens in homeschooling communities.

We don't know whether it happens more or less often than in other communities because no one has those numbers. What we do know — and maybe this is even a reason why some of you are homeschooling right now — is that abuse happens in public schools. We also know it happens in private schools. We know it happens in churches, in day care, at religious institutions — whether those institutions are Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, or Muslim. We know abuse happens in secular institutions, too. So we should know it is no great claim that abuse happens in homeschooling families and communities as well.

A website called Homeschooling's Invisible Children¹ has documented hundreds of cases of homeschooled children who were physically and/or sexually abused by their parents, caretakers, and/or homeschool teachers. The details vary from case to case, but as more and more cases are documented, some patterns emerge. One of these patterns is particularly significant: hardly anyone ever suspects the abusers.

¹ <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/>.

Sometimes when child abuse happens in homeschooling communities, it is in communities that are referred to as new religious movements, or “cults.” This doesn’t seem as surprising to us; these groups are “different,” and thus we are already suspicious of them.

But abuse isn’t just found in so-called cults. This is why what Homeschooling’s Invisible Children is doing is so important: It’s showing us — case by tragic case — that abuse can be found in families that seem normal, loving, even publicly outstanding. The stories on Homeschoolers Anonymous also reveal this.

One of the first long-form testimonies that we received for Homeschoolers Anonymous was by a young woman using the penname “Mary.” Mary was viciously beaten all over her body, she was forced to go without food for days, her parents made her drink ipecac as a punishment, and she was forced to throw her favorite childhood doll into a blazing backyard fire.

As we published each part of her ten-part story, people wondered, “How ‘fringe’ was her family? Surely Mary’s family lived in the middle of nowhere, isolated her from everyone. Surely the problem was that no one ever saw her.”

But that wasn’t the case. In her conclusion to her story, Mary says the following²:

“I can assure you that they were not the ‘fringe’ in homeschooling. My dad has an amazing job and they are very well off financially. Dad served as the president of the home schooling organization in our state for quite a few years. They have volunteered at church since I was little, helped out in AWANA, taught Sunday school, kept the nursery, volunteered at other church events, helped organize and plan the homeschool conference in our state every year, volunteered in debate, taught Good News Clubs, hosted homeschool events in their home and have generally kept their reputation about as squeaky clean as is possible... At church we were the model family. My siblings and I lived in utter terror of what would happen to us if we dared misbehave or say anything that they deemed inappropriate while at church or anywhere else out. Nearly a weekly lecture that we received on the way to church was that anything that happened in our household was not to be talked about and was not anyone else’s business. On Sundays, when we had been made to stay up the entire night before, they would force us to drink coffee so that no one would notice how tired we were... My parents did a masterful job of covering up and to this day are revered and treated as role models by church members that I grew up around.”

Mary’s statement illuminates a truth written by Boz Tchividjian, Billy Graham’s grandson

² <http://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2013/04/26/home-is-where-the-hurt-is-marys-story-conclusion/>.

and the founder and executive director of GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)³:

“It is time that the Christian community come to terms with the heartbreaking reality that those who pose the greatest risk to our children are within our families, churches, and circle of friends.”

Mary’s dad, who beat her senseless, served as the president of the home schooling organization in her state. Her family was in contact with an abundance of families — in church, at Sunday School, through homeschool debate and other homeschool activities.

Yet no one noticed the nightmare that her life was. No one reached out to her or her siblings. Because her parents seemed trustworthy and upstanding, even role models.

Mary isn’t alone.

Mary’s parents aren’t the only ones pretending to be something they are not.

If you go onto the website for Homeschooling’s Invisible Children, you will hear about people like Dwayne and Pamela Hardy⁴, who beat their children until they bled and were left with permanent scars — and yet friends described Dwayne and Pamela Hardy as “loving Christian parents.”

Or people like William Flynn Walker⁵, who was imprisoned for transporting three children out of Alabama and sexually abusing them. Walker was a founder of a prominent Christian homeschool umbrella school.

Or people like Michael and Sharon Gravelle⁶, who sexually abused a birth daughter and then forced their eleven adopted special needs children to sleep in stacked cages. The Gravelles *seemed* like such a nice couple in public that even an HSLDA attorney, Scott Somerville, described the father as a “hero.”⁷

³ Boz Tchividjian, Religion News Services, “Sex offenders, faith communities, and four common exploitations,” <http://boz.religionnews.com/2014/04/26/sex-offenders/>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

⁴ Homeschooling’s Invisible Children, <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/2013/05/08/2-children-of-dwayne-and-pamela-hardy/>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

⁵ Homeschooling’s Invisible Children, <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/2014/01/10/3-children-by-william-flynn-walker/>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

⁶ Homeschooling’s Invisible Children, <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/2013/05/05/11-children-of-michael-and-sharon-gravelle/>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

⁷ Akron Beacon Journal as cited by Pound Pup Legacy, “ADOPTION AGENCIES WILL FACE SCRUTINY,” <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/27254>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

We could go on and on with examples. But hopefully you see the trend here. Child abusers appear in our midst, even in the midst of homeschooling. And they could very well be our “heroes,” our “loving Christian parents,” even our “prominent” homeschool leaders.

“Those who pose the greatest risk to our children are within our families, churches, and circle of friends.”

This is the starting point for making homeschooling better and safer for future generations: the simple acknowledgement that child abuse happens in homeschooling communities.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the statement, “Abuse happens in homeschooling families,” make you feel defensive? Why or why not?



2. Off the top of your head, how would you define child abuse?

3. Billy Graham’s grandson Boz Tchividjian says “Those who pose the greatest risk to our children are within our families, churches, and circle of friends.” Prior to today, would you have said that’s true?

What is Child Abuse?

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 10 minutes.

The following information comes from the Child Welfare Information Gateway.⁸

Federal legislation lays the groundwork for State laws on child maltreatment by identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that define child abuse and neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)⁹, as amended and reauthorized by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:

“Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”

Most Federal and State child protection laws primarily refer to cases of harm to a child caused by parents or other caregivers; they generally do not include harm caused by other people, such as acquaintances or strangers. Some State laws also include a child’s witnessing of domestic violence as a form of abuse or neglect.

Major types of child abuse

Within the minimum standards set by CAPTA, each State is responsible for providing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. Most States recognize the four major types of maltreatment: **physical abuse**, **neglect**, **sexual abuse**, and **emotional abuse**. Signs and symptoms for each type of maltreatment are listed below. While these types of maltreatment may be found separately, they often occur in combination.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is **nonaccidental** physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the

⁸ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *What is child abuse and neglect? Recognizing the signs and symptoms*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

⁹ 42 U.S.C.A. §5106g.

caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as **spanking**, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Neglect

Neglect is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's **basic needs**. Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse includes activities by a parent or caregiver such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Sexual abuse is defined by **CAPTA** as "the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children."

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse (or **psychological abuse**) is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove, and therefore, child protective services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm or mental injury to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always **present** when other types of maltreatment are identified.

Discussion Questions

1. Besides the 4 types of abuse we just covered, what are some other types of abuse you have heard of?



2. How can you separate your own personal beliefs about raising children when you encounter behaviors that are reportable in the United States but perceived as acceptable in other cultures or families?

3. Since laws regarding what abuse is, how to report it, and what particular agencies are involved vary from state to state, how would you go about learning what laws apply and which agencies are involved in your state?

10 Warning Signs of Child Abuse

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 10 minutes.

It is important for anyone interacting with children — whether a parent, relative, or teacher — to become educated about warning signs of child abuse. Here are 10 signs you should look for:

1. Sudden changes in behavior

Abuse can cause many changes in a child's behavior. Extreme behaviors like withdrawal, aggression, regression, or depression may indicate abuse. Similarly, sudden changes in school or extra-curricular activity performance can be an indicator as well.

2. Fears of home or adults

Children experiencing abuse may express hesitation or worry about leaving a homeschool co-op or returning to the person abusing them. If a child seems excessively reluctant to hang out with someone, or goes out of the way to avoid home (by coming to a co-op class or other activities early, staying late, etc.), that could indicate abuse. Abused children may also shrink at the approach of adults.

3. Unexplained injuries

A child with unexplained injuries — such as burns or bruises in the shape of objects, or broken bones — may be experiencing abuse. Such a child might explain the injuries in inconsistent or unbelievable ways. If a child has noticeable yet fading bruises or other marks after an absence from school or social activities, that could indicate abuse.

4. Age-inappropriate sexual behaviors

Sexually abused children may demonstrate unusually sophisticated or mature sexual knowledge or behavior. This could include abnormal interest in sexual matters, overly sexualized behavior, and/or sexually explicit language.

5. Physical difficulties

Developmental delays (especially related to speech or motor skills), difficulties with

walking or sitting, or regressing to early behaviors like bed-wetting could all indicate emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

6. Changes in **eating**

Abuse causes immense anxiety and stress for children. Those can lead to noticeable changes in children's eating patterns and contribute to erratic weight gain or weight loss. Eating disorders (including either anorexia or bulimia) as well as chronic hunger or tiredness can also be caused by abuse. A child who begs or steals food (or money for food) may be experiencing neglect at home.

7. Lack of **personal care or resources**

Children experiencing abuse or neglect may appear uncared for. Signs to be on the look-out for include: uncleanliness, severe body odor, untreated conditions like sores or untreated injuries, squinting, lack of sufficient clothing (or dressed improperly for the current weather conditions), and lack of medical or dental care.

8. Assuming **adult** responsibilities

While homeschooled children are often noted to be mature for their age in a positive way, it is important to realize that excessive responsibility-taking and maturation can be a sign of physical neglect or sexual abuse. Children may want to appear older than they are and thus engage in high-risk activities (such as using drugs or alcohol), express age-inappropriate detachment from their parents, or act in inappropriately adult ways (always parenting other children, for example).

9. Habit **disorders**

Due to the anxiety and stress abuse causes, abused children may exhibit self-harming habits or nervous tics like biting objects, rocking back and forth, hitting themselves, or cutting. These habits or tics might become more pronounced when in the presence of an abuser.

10. Disclosing **abuse**

This may seem obvious, but if children disclose abuse, maltreatment, or neglect to you, *believe them*.

It is important to note that the above 10 warning signs are not *all* the potential signs of abuse or neglect. Any behavior a child exhibits that seems unusual or concerning should

be taken seriously by parents and teachers in your homeschool co-op or community. When it comes to preventing child abuse, it's always better to be safe than sorry.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some other warning signs for abuse that you can think of?



2. Why do you think some children might be afraid to share about their abuse?

3. What are some ways to help see the difference between children acting properly mature for their age and children acting mature in an age-inappropriate way because of abuse?

Understanding Physical Abuse

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 20 minutes.

Physical abuse is the **second** most common type of child abuse, second only to neglect.¹⁰

In 2012, according to the Children’s Bureau, an estimated 686,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect in the U.S.¹¹ 18.3 percent of those victims (over 125,000 children) suffered physical abuse. However, the actual number of physical abuse victims and survivors may be higher due to underreported or undetected problems.

Children with **disabilities** are particularly at risk of physical abuse. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has suggested that¹², “The rate of physical abuse is 2.1 times higher among children with disabilities than children without disabilities.” Considering that many homeschooling families specifically choose to homeschool because of children’s disabilities, this is a statistic all homeschooling communities should take to heart. It ought not provoke suspicion of families homeschooling children with disabilities (that would be entirely inappropriate and counter-productive), but it’s something to keep in mind when guiding support systems for people more likely to need them.

Like any other form of child abuse, physical abuse can have intense and long-term consequences. Physical abuse inflicts psychological trauma and thus, as the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) has noted, “Children who are physically abused can develop child traumatic stress.” NCTSN has also found that physical abuse may “impair the healthy development of the brain.”¹³ It also can alter how a child’s brain processes social interactions. According to the New York Times¹⁴, “Repeatedly exposed to the rage of unpredictable adults, abused children appear to develop an exquisite sensitivity to the emotional signals of anger.” This leads to future socialization problems because, “When the children move on to other settings, where the people around them behave more

¹⁰ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Physical Abuse,” <http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/physical-abuse>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

¹¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2014). *Child maltreatment 2012: Summary of key findings*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Dr. David Kolko, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Questions & Answers About Child Physical Abuse,” http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/qa_kolko_final.pdf, accessed on November 8, 2014.

¹⁴ New York Times, “Physically Abused Children Recognize the Face of Anger,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/18/health/physically-abused-children-recognize-the-face-of-anger.html>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

rationally, their perceptual systems fail to make the shift. Instead...they may see anger when it is not there, or spend so much time scanning for the signs of impending rage that they miss other important social clues.”

Of course, the most significant possible side effect of physical abuse is severe injury or death. Physical discipline gone too far, or intentional injuring of a child, can incapacitate or kill that child.

Defining physical abuse

One difficulty many people have when it comes to recognizing and reporting physical abuse is knowing what actions are exactly *abusive*. For example, at what point does spanking legally cross the line from legal physical discipline and become illegal child abuse? Many states’ laws on physical abuse include phrases like “reasonable discipline,” “risk of harm,” “substantial harm,” or “substantial risk” — but then do not further clarify those terms.

Whatever your beliefs may be about physical discipline, many testimonies of homeschool alumni demonstrate that, at the very least, how parents *intend* to physically discipline is not always how they actually do so. Furthermore, the messages they *intend* to communicate via physical discipline are not always the messages that children receive. For these and other reasons, HARO strongly recommends that parents learn alternatives to corporal punishment, such as gentle parenting.

In the U.S., the federal government considers child physical abuse to be “nonaccidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child.” Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Under federal standards, physical discipline (such as spanking or paddling) is currently **not** considered abuse.

Characteristics of physical abusers

Just like child sexual predators, perpetrators of physical abuse against children transcend any one **demographic** group. There are many stereotypes and myths about physical abusers — for example, that African-American parents in the U.S. are more abusive than white parents — but such stereotypes and myths are counter-productive, damaging, and misleading.

What *do* we know about the average physical abuser, then? Well, we know that with regards to child abuse in general, most perpetrators are parents or caretakers. According

to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)¹⁵, “In most cases, children are abused by parents, caretakers and other family members who live with the child.” The NSPCC also reports that having a **step-parent** increases the risk of a child being physically abused: “Researchers in the United States have argued that biological parents are less likely than step-parents to physically abuse their children (Daly and Wilson, 1999).”

Whereas child sexual abuse is more often perpetrated by males, the NSPCC has found that child *physical* abuse is more often perpetrated by **females**. The NSPCC reported that¹⁶, according to one study, “Female carers are more likely to physically abuse their children with 49% of incidents involving women compared to 40% involving men. This is partly due to the fact that women spend more time caring for children.” However, when it comes to *severe* physical abuse, males are more often the perpetrators: “Men were responsible for severe physical abuse in 72.9 per cent of cases involving 11–17-year old. A US study found that male carers were 3 times more likely to kill their children than female carers.” Another interesting data point is that *younger* mothers are more likely to be physically abusive than older mothers: “Younger mothers physically abuse their children more frequently than older mothers. The mother’s younger age has also been linked to other contributing factors such as lower economic status, lack of social support and higher stress levels.”

It is important to note that the fact that mothers are more likely to physically abuse their children than fathers does not apply to all cultures. For example, the World Health Organization found that, in Bahrain, “Fathers were the most common physical abusers (36%), followed by mothers (28%).” Interestingly, the WHO also noted that male perpetrators of physical abuse were more predominant “especially where **patriarchal** attitudes prevail.”¹⁷ This is relevant considering that many conservative Christian homeschooling communities adhere to teachings of patriarchy.

Warning signs of physical abuse

Unsurprisingly, physical abuse leaves the most *visible* warning signs of all types of child abuse. Physical signs that a child may be experiencing physical abuse include (but are not limited to):

- **Abdominal** injuries (such injuries may not show outward signs, but symptoms like

¹⁵ National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, “People who abuse children,” <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/research-briefing-people-who-abuse-children.pdf>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ World Health Organization, *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, “Child physical abuse in Bahrain: a 10-year study, 2000–2009,” <http://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-18-2012/issue-6/article-6.html>, accessed on November 8, 2014.

- vomiting or fever could indicate such injuries exist)
- Abnormal loss of **hair** (caused by hair being pulled out)
- Bruises and welts, especially when in **clusters** and/or of varying colors (in which case repeated abuse may be a factor)
- Burns and scalds that show the markings of items used to inflict them (such as a cigarette or iron)
- Fractures or swollen joints in children of 2 years or younger
- History of **repeated** injuries
- Injuries caused by shaking, such as brain or eye damage

There are also behavioral warning signs of physical abuse. These include (but are not limited to):

- Child does not register **emotion** when physically hurt
- Child offers bizarre explanations of physical injuries
- Child wears clothing **inappropriate** for the season (for example, long-sleeved shirts on warm days to hide injuries)
- Child displays unusual fear of physical interaction with adults
- Child becomes disruptive or destructive towards self and/or others
- Child **regresses** into age-inappropriate behavior, such as wetting the bed or sucking one's thumb
- Child becomes increasingly passive or withdrawn
- Child refuses to undress for necessary activities such as physical exercise activities or hospital physical exams

Finally, there are also behavioral warning signs for *parents who physically abuse*. These include (but are not limited to):

- Child's parent gives inadequate or unbelievable excuses for injuries such as "Child bruises easily" or "Child is prone to accidents"
- Child's parent does not seek, or delays seeking, **medical** treatment of child's injuries
- Child's parent continually switches what doctor or hospital the child is taken to
- Child's parent appears **unconcerned** about the child's injuries
- Child's parent constantly refers to child as "bad" or "evil"
- Child's parent is antagonistic or suspicious of social activities and other people

Preventing physical abuse

There are many steps that you as a fellow parent, homeschool leader, or homeschooling organization can take to prevent physical abuse in your community. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

First, make it a community habit to always report physical abuse.

This is of extra importance if you live in 1 of the 20 states where citizens who suspect abuse or neglect are required to report it.

Second, offer classes in your homeschooling community to help parents learn healthy parenting skills.

Parenting is a difficult task, and even more difficult once homeschool responsibilities get added to that task. Have your homeschool co-op or organization offer free parenting skills courses to new and struggling parents.

Third, encourage parents and families in your homeschooling community to learn alternatives to physical discipline.

There are many alternatives to harsh and punitive discipline methods like spanking or restraining a child. Seek out resources about those alternatives — gentle parenting is one example.

Fourth, create a no-shame environment where parents or families who are struggling can come forward and ask for assistance.

There is an abundance of support available for families at risk of abuse through your local social services — whether those are from child protection agencies, mental health facilities, churches, etc. Child abuse doesn't just result from "evil" people; it can just as easily result from difficulty coping with stressful situations. Parents and families who are losing their ability to cope should be encouraged to admit they need help. Create a culture where connecting with support systems is welcomed.

Fifth, teach parents and families *how to cope with stress*.

As we just said, child abuse can result from difficulty coping with stressful situations. Hold training seminars for parents and families about how to gain stress management skills.

Sixth, educate your community about child abuse and neglect.

Preventing physical abuse in your homeschooling community requires that your community learns the warning signs of abuse as well as how to report abuse.

Seventh, teach your community the right way to respond to a child who comes forward with an abuse disclosure.

It is important that children feel safe and trusted when they come forward with abuse disclosures. Teach your community how to respond in the appropriate manner.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons you can think of for why mothers are more likely to be physically abusive towards their children than fathers?

2. Why do you think male perpetrators of physical abuse are more common in patriarchal societies?

3. What are some alternatives to spanking and other forms of physical discipline that you have found helpful and effective?



Neglect: A Quieter Abuse

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 15 minutes.

Neglect is the most **prevalent** form of child abuse in the United States.

According to Psychology Today, “More children suffer from neglect in the United States than from physical and sexual abuse combined.”¹⁸ In 2012, according to the Children’s Bureau report *Child Maltreatment*, 78.3 percent of victims suffered neglect. Compare that to 18.3 percent who were physically abused and 9.3 percent who were sexually abused. The 78.3 percent of victims who experienced neglect equals approximately 537,138 children.¹⁹

The effects of child neglect are significant. Psych Central explains these effects as “devastating and long-term”; they include a decrease in social skills, an increased risk for substance abuse, and a higher chance of developing “serious psychological problems including depression, post traumatic stress disorder, social anxiety, and personality disorders.”²⁰ Numerous studies have linked early childhood neglect with the **suppression** of necessary growth hormones. In its summary of one of these studies, Time Magazine noted that, “Without devoted, repeated acts of love, a child’s brain doesn’t make the growth hormone needed for proper mental and physical development and numerous other imbalances are also created.”²¹

Neglect can also cause death. According to the American Humane Association, “42.2 percent of child maltreatment fatalities in the United States in 2005 occurred as a result of neglect only” (emphasis added).²²

Unfortunately, the reality of child neglect and its devastating consequences are often overlooked. Most of the conversations around child abuse focus only on the abuses with

¹⁸ Psychology Today, “Child Neglect,” <http://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/child-neglect>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

¹⁹ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2014). *Child maltreatment 2012: Summary of key findings*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau.

²⁰ Psych Central, “Neglect: The Quieter Child Abuse,” <http://psychcentral.com/lib/neglect-the-quieter-child-abuse/0001383>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

²¹ Time Magazine, May 24, 2012, “Measure of a Mother’s Love: How Early Neglect Derails Child Development,” <http://healthland.time.com/2012/05/24/the-measure-of-a-mothers-love-how-early-deprivation-derails-child-development/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

²² American Humane Association, “Child Neglect,” <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-neglect.html>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

immediately visible impacts: physical and sexual abuse. Conversations about neglect usually only involve extreme or foreign neglect cases. When it comes to neglect right here in our communities — whether those communities are suburban, Christian, or homeschooling — we tend to consider neglect not as serious.

This is a problem that we must address.

Defining neglect

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) sets forth the groundwork and minimum requirements for state laws on child abuse. Within that framework, most States recognize four major types of maltreatment. Neglect is one of those four major types. (The others are physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.)

The Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG) defines neglect as “the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child’s basic needs.”²³ In general, most states and organizations agree neglect consists of 4 categories:

- Physical neglect
- Educational neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Medical neglect

Physical neglect

Physical neglect accounts for most cases of child maltreatment. This usually involves a parent or caretaker not providing a child with basic material necessities like sufficient food, clothing, or shelter. This is maltreatment because not providing such necessities puts a child’s development, health, and well-being in jeopardy. According to the American Humane Association, effects of physical neglect include: “failure to thrive; malnutrition; serious illness; physical harm in the form of cuts, bruises, burns or other injuries due to the lack of supervision; and a lifetime of low self-esteem.”²⁴

Cases of severe physical neglect make frequent appearances on Homeschooling’s Invisible Children (HIC).²⁵ HIC has documented over 100 cases of food deprivation²⁶ as well as over

²³ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *What is child abuse and neglect? Recognizing the signs and symptoms*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

²⁴ American Humane Association, “Child Neglect,” <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-neglect.html>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

²⁵ <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/>.

²⁶ <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/category/food-deprivation/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

100 cases of improper housing.²⁷ The highly publicized case of Hana Williams's death demonstrates that even seemingly upstanding Christian homeschool families are not immune to life-threatening neglect — which should be a wake-up call for all homeschoolers.

Educational neglect

Educational neglect occurs when a parent or caretaker fails to provide appropriate schooling (whether via public, private, or home schooling, or special education training) for a child. Not educating a child deprives that child of important and basic life skills and can lead to serious ramifications later in the child's life. Educational neglect is particularly significant when a child has special education needs.

Many homeschool alumni have also spoken up about their experiences of educational neglect. A recent and high-profile case was the story of Josh Powell covered by the *Washington Post*. Powell shared how, at the age of 16, he had never written an essay and couldn't do basic algebra.²⁸

Powell's experience is sadly shared by other alumni. In an interview with *WORLD Magazine*, Heather Doney mentioned that, at age 12, she couldn't multiply or divide.²⁹ Sarah Henderson wrote about entering public school for the first time at age 17 and that she had "no idea how to be a student," did not understand what "the relationship between decimals and fractions was," and had to learn "what an essay actually was and how to write one."³⁰

Educational neglect within homeschooling families can impact students of all genders. However, due to the stay-at-home-daughter movement popular within certain conservative Christian subcultures, there seems to be a preponderance of testimonies from female-assigned alumni who were denied an adequate education on the basis of gender.

²⁷ <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/category/imprisonment/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

²⁸ Washington Post, July 28, 2013, "Student's home-schooling highlights debate over Va. religious exemption law," http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/students-home-schooling-highlights-debate-over-va-religious-exemption-law/2013/07/28/ee2dbb1a-efbc-11e2-bed3-b9b6fe264871_story.html, accessed on November 10, 2014.

²⁹ World Magazine, August 22, 2014, "Homeschool debate," http://www.worldmag.com/2014/08/homeschool_debate_2, accessed on November 10, 2014.

³⁰ Sarah Henderson, October 29, 2013, "An Open Letter to My Former Highschool Teachers," Homeschoolers Anonymous, <http://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/an-open-letter-to-my-former-highschool-teachers-by-sarah-henderson/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

Emotional neglect

Emotional neglect is the failure of a parent or caretaker to provide necessary psychological care for a child. It can also include the infliction of emotional abuse. Examples of emotional neglect include (but are not limited to): creating climates of fear for a child as a form of punishment; forcing a child into social isolation and depriving the child from necessary socialization; consistently ignoring a child's need for encouragement, interaction, or nurturing; actively rejecting a child's need for affection; constantly putting a child down through belittling, name-calling, or other forms of verbal abuse. Emotional neglect can create a negative self-image, leading a child to self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse or even suicide. Also, as stated earlier, severe emotional neglect of an infant — such as ignoring that infant's need for love and nurturing — can lead to an infant's failure to thrive, even death.

Medical neglect

Medical neglect happens when a parent or caretaker fails to give appropriate health care for a child even though that parent or caretaker has the financial means to do so. Failing to take care of a child's health needs can place that child at a severe risk of disability or death. While most people understand the necessity of immediate health care when a child has an emergency or acute illness, it is important to understand that failing to get a child the proper help for a treatable chronic disease or disability can result in massive future complications for that child. Numerous homeschool alumni have spoken up about serious medical problems they suffer from today because their parents did not get them the needed treatments back when their problems were manageable or treatable. Also, for many alumni who grew up in conservative Christian homes, medical neglect has often taken the form of not receiving necessary *mental* health care.

While courts and child protective services make exceptions for medical neglect when families religiously object to modern medicine or treatments, HARO believes there is no moral excuse for making a child suffer medically or die because of religion. Children deserve better than that. Parents have a right to their religion, but children have a right to their lives and health, too.

It is also important to point out there is a difference between abusive medical neglect (caused when parents *can* afford medical care but *refuse* to) and neglect caused because of poverty. No family should be punished simply for being poor or lacking resources like transportation. Part of the fight against neglect is to be able to see when a family is truly trying their best but need community (or even government) support to make it through a difficult time.

Warning signs of neglect

As neglect is a form of child abuse, the warning signs of abuse in general include the warning signs of neglect specifically. It is important, nonetheless, to focus on neglect's specific warning signs. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway³¹, you should consider the possibility of neglect when a child:

- Is extremely **withdrawn** and/or passive
- Displays random, undisciplined activity
- Is frequently **absent** from school (in the case of homeschooling, your co-op or weekly homeschool park day)
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe **body odor**

You should also consider the possibility of neglect when a parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to a child
- Is unable to show **empathy** for a child's age-appropriate needs
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Has either an infantile or **narcissistic** personality
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs
- Has both a large family and few **resources** to meet that family's needs
- Displays either infrequent or predominantly negative communication with family
- Avoids being **involved** in church or other formal organizations that could be support systems
- Went through a recent and significantly life-upsetting loss of income (e.g., recent unemployment of the family's main income-earner)

³¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *What is child abuse and neglect? Recognizing the signs and symptoms*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think neglect has become the most prevalent form of child abuse in the U.S.?



2. Does the fact that children in public schools experience educational neglect mean it's ok that children in home schools experience educational neglect?

3. How can we balance parents' religious freedoms with children's rights to medical care?

Characteristics of Child Sexual Predators

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 20 minutes.

We like to think that we know what child abusers look like. That we can pick them out of the crowd based on their creepy mustaches, darkly-tinted cargo vans, or their giant, thick-rimmed glasses. But those stereotypes are just that: stereotypes. And like all stereotypes, they fall tragically short. The fact is, child abusers are not Others. They do not walk around with signs that say, “Monster.” They are able to violate our trust — and children’s lives and bodies and minds — because *we trust them*.

This section aims to equip you with information about the true and factual characteristics of child sexual predators. It may seem counterintuitive to what you assumed. But it is vital that homeschooling communities come to grasp with these characteristics. Otherwise we’ll just be wasting our time and energy on misinformation..

Myths about predators

Let’s begin with dispelling some myths about predators. Many of these myths you have likely heard before, as they are repeated on TV by news anchors, spread like wildfire throughout Christian homeschooling circles, and sometimes even featured on respectable organizations’ websites. After looking at these myths, we’ll turn to the actual facts regarding the average child sexual predator.

1. Myth: Predators are strangers with candy in white cargo vans.

Fact: “Stranger danger” is a red herring. People who sexually abuse children are statistically more likely to fixate on *specific* children in their personal networks. The Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute has noted that, “90% of child molesters target children in their network of family and friends.”³² Put another by G.R.A.C.E.’s Boz Tchividjian, “Only 10 percent of child molesters molest children that they don’t know.”³³

³² Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute as cited by the Southern Poverty Law Center, “10 Anti-Gay Myths Debunked,” <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/winter/10-myths>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

³³ Boz Tchividjian, Religion News Services, “Five common characteristics of child sexual offenders: Eliminating the edge,” June 13, 2014, <http://boz.religionnews.com/2014/06/13/five-basic-characteristics-child-sexual-offenders-eliminating-edge/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

2. Myth: Homosexuality is a warning sign for pedophilia.

Fact: Actually, people who sexually abuse children are more likely to be fixated on *children* than any given gender identity: “Many child molesters cannot be characterized as having an adult sexual orientation at all; they are fixated on children.”³⁴ And as we shall see later, people in opposite-sex relationships are more likely to abuse children than people in same-sex relationships.

3. Myth: Predators were all abused as kids.

Fact: The “cycle of abuse” is more myth than reality. While Child Help notes that it’s true “about 30% of abused and neglected children will later abuse their own children,”³⁵ it’s also important to note that means *70% of abuse survivors will not abuse their own children*. Insinuating that “abused people abuse people” only increases the stigma around disclosing and discussing personal experiences of abuse.

4. Myth: Predators aren’t Christians or homeschoolers.

Fact: Predators can definitely be Christians, homeschoolers, or even Christian homeschoolers. A prime example would be the recent revelations regarding the Jackson family from North Carolina.³⁶ The parents of this family hid and ignored child sexual abuse perpetrated by six of their sons for over a decade. Two of the brothers were members of Hope Baptist Church, pastored by Vision Forum colleague Scott Brown. Many instances of severe abuse and neglect documented on Homeschooling’s Invisible Children³⁷ also demonstrate this. As tragic as it is, child sexual abuse can definitely materialize in Christian homeschool communities.

5. Myth: Predators are easily identifiable because of their big glasses and mustaches.

Fact: Stereotypes about predators are just that: stereotypes. They actually fall extraordinarily short of the actual picture of the average predator, as we shall see shortly. And as we can see from the aforementioned example of the Jackson family, predators can look *just like* the people in our surrounding community. The Jackson brothers, who

³⁴ Dr. Gregory Herek, University of California at Davis, “Facts About Homosexuality and Child Molestation,” http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/faculty_sites/rainbow/html/facts_molestation.html, accessed on November 10, 2014.

³⁵ Child Help, “National Child Abuse Statistics,” <http://www.childhelp.org/pages/statistics>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

³⁶ R.L. Stollar, “This Is What Child Abusers Look Like in Homeschooling Communities,” Homeschoolers Anonymous, July 1, 2014, <http://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2014/07/01/this-is-what-child-abusers-look-like-in-homeschooling-communities/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

³⁷ <http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/>.

sexually abused their sister, appeared like model conservative Christian homeschool alumni. There is no magic formula, therefore, to identifying abusers by outward characteristics. As the Vermont Department for Children and Families states,

“It’s impossible to describe a typical abuser. They look and act in various ways, can be found in all areas of society, and are often well-respected members of our communities. They may appear to be kind, caring people who are great with kids. Abusers work hard to cultivate this image—so people will not suspect them of, and will not believe it if they are ever accused of, sexually abusing children.”³⁸

The average child sexual predator

If the above are myths, what *do* we know about the average child sexual predator?

We know that, contrary to popular stereotypes, predators resemble *the average American male* in outward characteristics. As the Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute says, “We know that child molesters are as equally married, educated, employed, and religious as any other Americans.”³⁹

Here some specific facts about predators:

1. Child sexual predators are more likely to be married or formerly married.

According to the Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study, 73% of the U.S. male population is married or formerly married. In contrast, 77% of child predators are married or formerly married.⁴⁰

2. The average child sexual predator is male.

Although females do sexually abuse children, the Child Advocacy Center reports that men are offenders 94 percent of the time in cases of child sexual abuse.⁴¹

³⁸ Vermont Department for Children and Families, “Who Sexually Abuses Children,” http://dcf.vermont.gov/stepup/educate/who_abuses, accessed on November 10, 2014.

³⁹ Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute, “Tell Others The Facts,” http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pages/tell_others_the_facts.html, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁴⁰ Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study, published in 2001 in *The Stop Child Molestation Book* by Gene G. Abel and Nora Harlow. Text revised in 2002. Accessed on November 10, 2014 online via <http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pdfs/study.pdf>.

⁴¹ Child Advocacy Center, “About Child Abuse,” <https://www.childadvocacycenter.org/about-child-abuse.php>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

3. In their day-to-day lives, child sexual predators are more likely to identify as heterosexual.

As stated previously, people who sexually abuse children are more likely to be fixated on *children* than any given gender identity. However, among child sexual abusers who *do* appear to have an adult sexual orientation, heterosexuality is far more common. How much more common? According to the Child Advocacy Center, “96 percent of the perpetrators are heterosexual.”⁴²

4. The average child sexual predator is more likely to molest girls.

The Abel Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study found that, out of a group of approximately 2,500 predators, about 1,600 molested girls exclusively and another 400 molested both boys and girls. “Many more men molested girls,” the study reports.⁴³

5. Child sexual predators with the most number of victims each are more likely to molest both boys and girls.

While it is true that many more male child sexual predators molest girls, it is also true that *number of victims* each predator is likely to have *increases* if that predator molests both boys and girls. According to the Abel Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study

*“Those who reported molesting only girls averaged 5.2 victims and 34.2 acts. Those who reported molesting only boys averaged 10.7 victims and 52 acts. Those who reported molesting both boys and girls averaged **27.3 victims and 120.9 acts**” (emphasis added).*⁴⁴

6. The average child sexual predator is religious.

The Abel Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study found that 90% of predators describe themselves as “religious.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, predators often target religious communities because they find them to be more vulnerable and trusting. Boz Tchividjian explains that,

“Abuse is no less prevalent within the faith community. In fact, there are studies that demonstrate that the faith community is even more vulnerable to abuse than secular environments... Other studies have found that sexual abusers within faith communities

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study, published in 2001 in *The Stop Child Molestation Book* by Gene G. Abel and Nora Harlow. Text revised in 2002. Accessed on November 10, 2014 online via <http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pdfs/study.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

have more victims and younger victims. This disturbing truth is perhaps best illustrated by the words of a convicted child molester who told Dr. Salter, 'I considered church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians. They tend to be better folks all around and seem to want to believe in the good that exists in people.'"⁴⁶

7. The average child sexual predator targets the children of their own families and friends.

Abuse in general — not just sexual abuse — is most often perpetrated by children's own parents. The American Humane Association notes that, "79.4 percent of perpetrators were parents and 6.8 percent were other relatives"; in fact, "In under 1 percent of child maltreatment cases the perpetrator was a foster parent, residential facility staff, the child's daycare provider, a legal guardian, friends or neighbors, or other professionals."⁴⁷

Child sexual predators are not as frequently children's own parents, but they are people who have gained trust within children's lives. The Vermont Department for Children and Families explains that, "Nearly all child sexual abuse is committed by people known to children and families, including: Family members such as parents, stepparents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins; and people in a family's circle of trust such as friends, neighbors, teachers, or coaches."⁴⁸ Statistics indicate that, "More than 90% of juvenile sexual abuse victims know their perpetrator in some way."⁴⁹

Behaviors to watch for

Child sexual predators use "grooming" to target their victims. Boz Tchividjian explains the grooming process as "the process which the offender gains access to the child in order to develop a trusting and/or authoritative relationship. Once such a relationship has been created, the perpetrator is often free to abuse."⁵⁰ Homeschooling parents, leaders, and teachers need to be on the look-out for predators who attempt to groom children.

⁴⁶ Boz Tchividjian, Religion News Services, "Five common characteristics of child sexual offenders: Eliminating the edge," June 13, 2014, <http://boz.religionnews.com/2014/06/13/five-basic-characteristics-child-sexual-offenders-eliminating-edge/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁴⁷ American Humane Association, "Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics," <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics.html>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁴⁸ Vermont Department for Children and Families, "Who Sexually Abuses Children," http://dcf.vermont.gov/stepup/educate/who_abuses, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁴⁹ Child Help, "National Child Abuse Statistics," <http://www.childhelp.org/pages/statistics>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁵⁰ Boz Tchividjian, Religion News Services, "Five common characteristics of child sexual offenders: Eliminating the edge," June 13, 2014, <http://boz.religionnews.com/2014/06/13/five-basic-characteristics-child-sexual-offenders-eliminating-edge/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

Potential warning signs for child sexual predators and grooming include, but are not limited to:

- Predators may appear inappropriately interested in the sexuality of particular children. This could include talking repeatedly about a child's body development or dating history.
- Predators may refuse to allow their own children to participate in social events.
- Predators may be domineering, rigid, or authoritarian in child discipline.
- Predators may often appear jealous of their children's friends or activities.
- Predators may accuse their children of "promiscuity" or appear personally "betrayed" by their children's romantic or sexual relationships with others.
- Predators may directly target children by becoming major parts of both their and their families' lives through church, family, and school events.
- Predators may go out of their way to get adults to trust them, despite children feeling noticeably uncomfortable around them.
- Predators may seem oblivious to personal space, making others uncomfortable by ignoring socially acceptable limits regarding emotional and physical boundaries.
- Predators may belittle or tease a child for feeling uncomfortable about the violation of that child's personal space or boundaries.
- Predators may insist on physical contact with a child — even when the child does not want the contact — such as: hugging, kissing, tickling, or wrestling.
- Predators may "accidentally" walk in on children or teenagers in the bathroom on a frequent basis.
- Predators may have "secret" interactions with children. These interactions may appear outright alarming, such as privately sharing alcohol or pornographic material. But they may also appear somewhat innocuous, such as repeated and private communication via email, phone, or text.
- Predators may insist on lengthy and/or uninterrupted time alone with children.
- Predators may go out of their way to appear "helpful" by frequently volunteering to babysit children for free or take them on unsupervised outings.
- Predators may frequently engage children in age-inappropriate sexual conversations (telling dirty jokes, sharing sexual material) or expose children to adult sexual interactions without appearing concerned about doing so.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it surprising to you to find out that child molesters are as equally married, educated, employed, and religious as any other Americans?



2. Why do you think sexual predators consider “church people” “easy to fool”?

3. What are some ways homeschooled children might be uniquely targeted for grooming by a sexual predator?

Why We Need To Take Emotional Abuse Seriously

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 15 minutes.

We've all heard the popular rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

That rhyme is popular, but it couldn't be farther from the truth. Words *do* hurt. And words used to guilt, control, or manipulate are a form of abuse — *emotional abuse*.

In their article "The Staying Power of Emotional Abuse," Christianity Today has pointed out that, "A 'sticks and stones' mentality to abuse doesn't hold up: Words can hurt, especially because the damage isn't visible." In fact, "manipulation, control, and other forms of abuse [go] on to affect [a person's] identity in the long-term and their future relationships, just as we see sexual abuse and physical abuse having lasting influence."⁵¹ Despite this fact, a lot of people seem to have difficulty admitting the reality of emotional abuse. Perhaps it's because physical and sexual abuse can leave physical evidence as to their devastations. Or perhaps it's because we're unwilling to admit our words have consequences. Regardless, emotional abuse gets consistently **minimized**.

Minimizing emotional abuse

Homeschool alumni's accounts of emotional abuse often get mocked, belittled, or reduced to "complaining." This is tragic because emotional abuse is a real, tangible form of abuse that results in real, tangible harm to children and adults. According to the University of Illinois Counseling Center, "Emotional abuse is like brain washing in that it systematically wears away at the victim's self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in their own perceptions, and self-concept... Emotional abuse cuts to the very **core** of a person, creating scars that *may be far deeper and more lasting than physical ones*" (emphasis added).⁵²

In other words, it's just as real — and just as unfunny — as beating or molesting a child. Studies have well-documented that emotional abuse causes the same — and sometimes more — trauma to individuals as physical or sexual abuse. The American Academy of Pediatrics identified it as "the most challenging and **prevalent** form of child abuse and

⁵¹ Christianity Today, August 2014, "The Staying Power of Emotional Abuse," <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2014/august/staying-power-of-emotional-abuse.html?paging=off>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁵² University of Illinois Counseling Center, "Emotional Abuse," <http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/self-help-brochures/relationship-problems/emotional-abuse/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

neglect.”⁵³ Most recently in 2014, research conducted by Joseph Spinazzola of the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute found that “psychologically mistreated youth exhibited equivalent or greater baseline levels of behavioral problems, symptoms, and disorders compared with physically or sexually abused youth on most indicators.”⁵⁴

Emotional abuse can lead to appetite problems, mental illness, self-injury, poor physical health, and even suicide. In other words, this isn’t “abuse” — it *is* abuse. No scare quotes needed. Emotional abuse needs to be taken seriously. *Deadly* seriously. *It can literally cause death.*

Defining emotional abuse

One way the victims and survivors of emotional abuse get marginalized is through people questioning what this form of abuse actually is. The answer is honestly not that difficult to ascertain. Because, as we have already discussed, emotional abuse is *one of the four major types of child maltreatment legislatively defined by most of the U.S. states.*

Emotional or psychological abuse can be perpetrated against both children and adults. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence defines this type of abuse in the following way:

*“Psychological abuse is the systematic perpetration of malicious and explicit **nonphysical** acts against an intimate partner, child, or dependent adult. This can include threatening the physical health of the victim and the victim’s loved ones, controlling the victim’s freedom, and effectively acting to destabilize or isolate the victim. Psychological abuse frequently occurs prior to or concurrently with physical or sexual abuse. While psychological abuse increases the trauma of physical and sexual abuse, a number of studies have demonstrated that psychological abuse independently causes long-term damage to it’s victims’ mental health.”⁵⁵*

Types of emotional abuse

Examples of child emotional abuse include, but are not limited to:

- Deliberately trying to scare or **humiliate** a child

⁵³ American Academy of Pediatrics as cited by the Sandusky Register, “Psychological abuse is 'most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse',” October 23, 2014, <http://www.sanduskyregister.com/opinion/rachel-velishek/6263656>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁵⁴ Tom Jacobs, Pacific Standard, “The ‘Unseen Wounds’ of Child Emotional Abuse,” October 9, 2014, <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/health-and-behavior/unseen-wounds-child-emotional-psychological-abuse-92091/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁵⁵ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Psychological Abuse,” <http://www.ncadv.org/files/PsychologicalAbuse.pdf>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

- Deliberately ignoring a child
- **Threatening** to injure, disfigure, or kill a child
- Emotionally withdrawing from a child as a form of punishment
- Damaging a child's **property** (clothes, toys, school supplies, etc.)
- Preventing a child from having social interactions with friends
- **Preventing** a child from eating, drinking, or sleeping
- Threatening or physically harming a child's pet (or the family's pet)
- Treating an adult child like a **minor child**
- Making a child feel like the parent is always right and the child is always wrong
- Mocking a child's **intelligence** levels
- Treating a child not as a separate person but instead as an extension of one's self

Homeschooling and emotional abuse

Testimonies from homeschool alumni give evidence of just how devastating emotional abuse in Christian homeschool families can be. Here is an excerpt from Kierstyn King's story:

"I was taught that I was worthless, that I should never think well of myself, that I needed to be humble, I was never allowed to show any emotion that was not a plastic smile. Perfection was constantly demanded, and perfection is what I was incapable of... I internalized their words of my failures and believed that I was a failure, who didn't deserve any good... It's no wonder I shut down, became numb, stopped feeling, and felt robotic."⁵⁶

When alumni try to express how painful some of these "invisible" forms of emotional abuse have been, they are then further pained by additional emotional abuse. Their families or parents "gaslight", or act as if the abuse — because "invisible" — is not real. Thus alumni feel like they are making things up or are "crazy," only adding to their feelings of pain, guilt, and betrayal.

Whenever or wherever there is abuse, alumni deserve to have their feelings and experiences taken seriously. They deserve such respect regardless of what form that abuse takes and whether there are physical markings of the abuse. Otherwise we are silently giving assent to the idea that a form of abuse that can be just devastating, and potentially *more* so, as physical and sexual abuse is not worth our time. Christianity Today provides a good reminder about why this is not acceptable:

"Sexual abuse is horrific and needs to be taken seriously, but so do other forms of

⁵⁶ Kierstyn King, "Depression and Spiritual Abuse," October 16, 2013, Homeschoolers Anonymous, <http://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2013/10/16/depression-and-spiritual-abuse-by-kierstyn-king/>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

abuse. Both are dehumanizing. Both make you feel like an object. Any form of abuse, be it sexual, psychological, or physical, is abhorrent to us as people and as Christians because it is a crime against the dignity and worth of a human being.”⁵⁷

As homeschooling communities begin to wake up to the absolutely necessity of taking child sexual abuse seriously, we cannot afford to think that focusing on that alone is sufficient. We need to take all forms of abuse seriously, emotional abuse included.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think some people take emotional abuse less seriously than other forms of abuse?



2. What are some ways you might talk about emotional abuse that could feel minimizing to abuse survivors — and how can you change your language to feel more supportive?

3. Can you explain what “gaslighting” is and give some examples?

⁵⁷ Christianity Today, August 2014, “The Staying Power of Emotional Abuse,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2014/august/staying-power-of-emotional-abuse.html?paging=off>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

Sibling Abuse: The Unspoken Threat

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 20 minutes.

“The least recognized.” “A well-kept secret.” “Written off.”

These are but a few of the phrases used to describe violence perpetrated between siblings. This violence can take any and every form that one sees in parent-child abuse — including emotional, physical, and sexual. And as you can see from the phrases often used to describe it, it’s not something talked about much.

Sibling abuse is an unspoken threat — even (and sometimes especially) in homeschooling families.

Facts about sibling abuse

Despite the lack of attention it receives, sibling abuse is not only real but significant in both impact and scope. It is actually more common than parent-child abuse. According to the New York Times, “Nationwide, sibling violence is by far the most **common** form of family violence, occurring four to five times as frequently as spousal or parental child abuse.”⁵⁸ It is estimated by Social Work Today that “the rate of sibling incest may be **five** times the rate of parent-child sexual abuse.”⁵⁹ Psychology Today reports that other forms of sibling abuse are also common:

*“As many as 74 percent push or shove their brothers and sisters according to Murray Straus, Ph.D., author of *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family*. Dr. Straus also found that 42 percent go further—they kick, punch and bite their siblings. If we add verbal abuse, the number climbs to 85 percent who ‘engage in verbal aggression against siblings on a regular basis.’”⁶⁰*

Despite being so common, sibling abuse is not frequently studied nor does it get discussed on a large scale in the same way that parent-child abuse does. It is often excused or

⁵⁸ New York Times, “When The Bully Is a Sibling,” June 17, 2013, http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/17/when-the-bully-is-a-sibling/?_r=1, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁵⁹ Social Work Today, “Sibling Sexual Abuse — Uncovering the Secret,” November/December 2012, <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/111312p18.shtml>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁶⁰ Psychology Today, “The Dark Side of Siblings,” October 28, 2009, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/singletons/200910/the-dark-side-siblings>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

minimized with lines like, “They’re just kids” or “That’s something kids do.” Even sibling sexual abuse gets brushed aside, as Social Work Today points out: “Sibling sexual abuse has been dismissed as ‘child’s play’ in many cases and/or as a normal aspect of sexual development.”⁶¹

This is a problem because sibling abuse can cause the exact same damage as parent-child abuse. Even seemingly less impactful forms of sibling abuse, such as sibling emotional abuse, can be devastating: The New York Times has noted that, “New research suggests that even when there are no physical scars, aggression between siblings can inflict psychological wounds as damaging as the anguish caused by bullies at school or on the playground.”⁶² A study in Pediatrics by Corinna Jenkins Tucker found that sibling abuse was “associated with worse mental health” and the effects “often continue into adulthood.”⁶³

Sibling abuse and homeschooling

Sibling abuse can and has happened in many homeschooling families. Despite the fact that many homeschooling parents specifically withdraw their children from public school to avoid bullying, bullying is not unique to any particular **schooling** system. Sibling bullying is just as harmful as peer bullying.

Physical abuse

Many homeschooling families also face unique sibling abuse challenges due to some of their conservative Christian ethics. Due to the popularity of child training manuals such as Michael and Debi Pearl’s *To Train Up a Child* and Reb Bradley’s *Child Training Tips*, many families have adopted harsh and punitive corporal punishment tactics. While it is worth investigating whether such tactics are helpful or harmful, it is important to note that these discipline tactics are often forced by the parents onto their *children* to implement on *each other*. Many homeschool alumni have spoken up about either being forced to spank their siblings or being spanked by their siblings. This inappropriate transfer of power creates emotional chasms between siblings, perpetuating not only the impact of physical abuse but also the emotional damage of having a sibling or peer punish another. It ironically re-creates the exact same physical and emotional consequences as peer bullying in public schools.

Requiring a child — a young person who is still emotionally, physically, and

⁶¹ Social Work Today, “Sibling Sexual Abuse — Uncovering the Secret,” November/December 2012, <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/111312p18.shtml>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁶² New York Times, “When The Bully Is a Sibling,” June 17, 2013, http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/17/when-the-bully-is-a-sibling/?_r=1, accessed on November 10, 2014.

⁶³ Ibid.

psychologically developing — to inflict pain on a peer can create all sorts of problems. Children are not equipped, nor should they be, to handle such responsibilities. Forcing them to do so can create a plethora of unintended consequences. For example, it can encourage further sibling abuse, including **age-inappropriate** sexual behaviors. Furthermore, as children are still learning boundaries, requiring them to hit each other is physically dangerous. Sibling abuse can tragically result in the death of a sibling.

Sexual abuse

Sibling abuse is by no means limited to physical abuse. In fact, the recent and high profile case involving the Jackson family from North Carolina shows that sexual abuse by siblings does occur. The six Jackson brothers — all homeschooled — repeatedly raped and sexually abused their younger sister for a decade. The parents knew about the abuse and did nothing to stop it.

Experiences of incest appear to be a tragically frequent occurrence in homeschooling families. These experiences can be perpetrated by a brother against his sisters, as in the case of the Jackson brothers. However, while sibling sexual abuse is more commonly perpetrated by a **brother** against a sister, it must be noted that siblings of the same gender can also abuse each other.

As is the case with parent-child abuse, what homeschooling communities desperately need to do is take a sober look at what's going on and not minimize. Abuse can and does occur within homeschooling families and we need to face the facts, not make excuses for them. This is especially important in cases of sibling abuse, since those cases are more prone to being swept under the rug or ignored.

Warning signs of sibling abuse

The warning signs of sibling abuse can be similar to or the same as the warning signs of child abuse in general. Sibling abuse also has some unique warning signs, including (but not limited to) the ones listed here:

If a sibling is being abused

- Child avoids **interactions** with sibling(s)
- Child fears being left alone with sibling(s)
- Child doesn't want to be at or go home
- Child acts out **abuse** in play
- Child has unexplained bruises, scrapes, or other injuries after hanging out with sibling(s)
- Child is overly compliant or withdrawn when interacting with sibling(s)
- Child's relationship with sibling(s) is entirely **negative**

If a sibling is an abuser

- Child always assumes the role of an **aggressor** during playtime with sibling(s)
- Child seeks inappropriate sexual contact with sibling(s)
- Child demonstrates age-inappropriate **sexual** awareness and/or curiosity
- Child takes younger children or siblings to “secret” places or plays “special” games with them
- Child displays increasingly **rough** behavior during playtime
- Child becomes violent towards pets or toys
- Child frequently seeks out the company of **younger** children or siblings rather than peers
- Child intentionally ignores boundaries of other children or siblings, even when other children or siblings express dismay or resist
- Child views sexual images of other children on the Internet (or other places)
- Child **“rewards”** other children or siblings with attention or prizes in exchange for sexual contact

Responding to sibling abuse as a parent or caretaker

As the parent or caretaker of either a child who has been abused by a sibling or a child who has abused a sibling (or both), it is vital that you immediately take every step possible to protect the abused child and seek help for the abusive one.

First, protect the **abused child.**

Take whatever immediate steps you need to ensure that the child is protected from future emotional, physical, and sexual injury. If this requires relocating the child temporarily until the abusive sibling can learn to behave differently, or whatever you need to do, make sure your child is safe.

Second, if the abuse is a criminal action, **report it.**

This can be a difficult step as a parent. Having to report your own child for abusing another child is heartbreaking. But it is absolutely necessary for the safety of other children as well as the future wellbeing of the abusive child.

Third, get a **professional counselor involved.**

If you know or suspect that a child of yours is being abused by a sibling, make an intervention. Contact a professional who specializes in whatever form of abuse is occurring. Especially in the case of sexual abuse, children need immediate help both to recover from it (as a victim) and get help to stop (as a perpetrator). Sibling abuse is not

“just a phase” or something people “grow out of.” Sibling abuse needs to be taken seriously and requires professional involvement.

Fourth, consider where the child may have learned the problematic behavior.

Especially in the case of sibling sexual abuse, it is important to ask if the child learned the sexually abusive behavior from someone else — an older child, relative, or parent. In many instances of sibling sexual abuse shared with Homeschoolers Anonymous, the perpetrators were themselves victims of abuse.

Fifth, make a safety plan.

It is important to ensure that other children and siblings are safe from an abusive child. Thus you need to make a safety plan for your family that is clearly communicated to everyone, including the abusive child. Stop It Now! offers the following advice for such safety plans:

“While you’re setting up therapy, safety planning is an equally important priority. It is very important that your son’s opportunities to further sexually harm another be limited. He needs to take responsibility in planning with you and his father guidelines such as not being alone with any younger peers at any time. He should always be in eyesight of other adults when children are present, and should not be allowed to be in a room alone with a child with the door closed.”⁶⁴

Sixth, communicate with other parents.

As heartbreaking, stressful, and embarrassing as it is, if you know your child has abused other children or siblings, you need to contact any and every family that your child could possibly have also hurt. Let them know what is going on. Be transparent and open. Inform them of the exact steps you are taking to remedy the situation. Tell them about your safety plan. Encourage them to adopt the same safety plan around your child. Have them talk to their children and make sure they are safe.

Be proactive in protecting other children — by doing so, you are also helping the abusive child.

Seventh, do research.

You don’t have to go through the pain of sibling abuse alone. Go to the library or get online

⁶⁴ Stop It Now!, “My 16 year old son sexually abused my friend's younger daughter,” <http://www.stopitnow.org/advice-column/behaviors-between-children/my-16-year-old-son-sexually-abused-my-friends-younger-daugh>, accessed on November 10, 2014.

and research how you can help your family and other families recover from sibling abuse — as well as prevent further abuse.

Eighth, consider how you can make your family healthier.

Cases of physical violence between children often occur when children feel unable to express themselves. If your child has been acting out violently, talk to that child and figure out how to encourage the child to express anger and frustration in healthier ways. Don't just lash out and model the same inappropriate behavior. Punishing children for abuse *with other forms of abuse* is counter-productive. The same goes for punishments involving humiliation. Acknowledge the incident (never ignore sibling abuse!), remain calm, and approach your children as rational human beings who can and must understand why abuse is not appropriate.

Other ideas for making your family healthier include:

- Intervene in sibling disputes way before they escalate into potentially abusive situations.
- Ease up on the responsibilities forced onto older siblings. Certain homeschooling subcultures actively promote giving older siblings an excessive amount of responsibility. However, this is counter-productive and damaging, as too much responsibility for, or power over, a younger child can create resentment and directly foster sibling abuse.
- Set time aside each day to talk to each of your children individually so that if they have problems with other siblings they can feel safe telling you.
- Teach your children about sexuality, good touch versus bad touch, and why it's essential that they respect other children's bodies and why consent is important.

Most importantly, always trust a child who comes to you with a story about abuse. The chance of such a story being false is extremely low.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons for why children would be hesitant or scared to report abuse by their siblings?



2. Why do you think society in general talks so little about sibling abuse?

3. How can parents learn to distinguish between normal child development and behavior and abnormal, abusive behavior among siblings?

Understanding Institutional Abuse

Instructor note: Read out loud the following section. Time estimate: 15 minutes.

Like sibling abuse, institutional abuse can take the form of any other type of child maltreatment: emotional, physical, sexual, or neglect. What makes institutional abuse unique is that *it is perpetrated by institutions entrusted with the care of children*. Sadly, these institutions could very well be popular and respected programs within homeschooling communities. The Washington, D.C. Child and Family Services Agency defines institutional abuse as, “any form of abuse or neglect...while a child is in the care of an institution. If the maltreatment is caused by employees of the institution, it is classified as institutional abuse.”⁶⁵

Examples of such institutions include (but are not limited to):

- Medical care facilities
- Foster care homes
- Runaway shelters
- Youth groups
- Churches
- Teen camps
- Missions organizations
- “Troubled youth” ministries

In cases of intentional harm caused to children (such as physical violence or rape), the cause of the harm is obvious. But there are also less obvious causes of harm (especially when the harm is unintended but nonetheless damaging). In the formal setting of an institution, child abuse could be caused by factors such as:

- A “closed” culture within an organization where transparency is discouraged
- Failure to properly check the backgrounds and interview staff
- Inadequate training of staff
- Lack of child protection policies
- Lack of support of staff by management
- Poor communication skills
- Poor supervision of staff and children

⁶⁵ Washington, D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, “Mandatory Reporter Training,” <https://dc.mandatedreporter.org/pages/Welcome.action>, accessed on November 12, 2014.

Types of institutional abuse

Institutional abuse is usually divided into 3 categories⁶⁶:

- Overt abuse
- Program abuse
- System abuse

Overt abuse is similar to parent- or sibling-based child abuse. It is any overt emotional, physical, or sexual abuse perpetrated by the employee of an institution against a child entrusted to that institution — for example, a staff member at a homeschool convention or a church counselor.

Program abuse is when an institution specifically operates its ministry or program below acceptable conditions or misuses its power or responsibility in order to modify the behavior of a child. Forcing a child into a traumatic situation in order to create a certain emotional reaction would be an example of program abuse.

System abuse is caused when an institution becomes stretched beyond its capacity and thus causes neglect through inadequate care or resources. For example, if an institution knowingly assumes parental responsibilities for young adults who have mental health problems, but has no time to fulfill those responsibilities by taking care of those adults' mental health, that would be an example of system abuse.

Examples of institutional abuse

The following are all examples of institutional abuse:

- Failure to respect or support a child's right to choice, dignity or independence
- Providing no flexibility in bed times
- Forcefully and startlingly waking a child up
- Inappropriate confinement or restraint of a child
- Depriving a child of personal clothing or possessions
- Forcing a child into stark living areas
- Not providing a child with a choice in food or forcing a child to eat food that child is allergic to
- Forcing a child into traumatic situations
- Unnecessary staff or management involvement in a child's personal finances

⁶⁶ Government of South Australia, Commissioner for Victim's Rights, "Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse," October 11, 2013, <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/fc2561f4-95c5-4305-b39d-7315e2b3708f/30-Commissioner-for-Victims-Rights-SA>, accessed on November 12, 2014.

- Inappropriate use of nursing or medical procedures, e.g. using un-prescribed medication enemas
- Inappropriate use of power or control
- Depriving or discouraging a child from necessary medical care
- Failing to report the sexual abuse of a child under the institution's care

Warning signs of institutional abuse

The warning signs of institutional abuse can include the warning signs of child abuse and neglect in general. However, institutional abuse also has unique warning signs. These include (but are not limited to):

- The institution and/or its staff members have received **multiple** allegations or complaints about abuse or neglect.
- The institution and/or its staff members isolate people from their family or community.
- The institution and/or its staff members restrict peer contact.
- The institution and/or its staff members always **blame** the children or young adults in their care rather than examine institutional shortcomings.
- Children or young adults in the care of an institution exhibit signs of increased stress or trauma (such as eating disorders, self-injury, suicidal urges, etc.)
- The institution and/or its staff members treat adults like they are **children**.
- The institution and/or its staff members treat children in harsh, startling, or punitive ways.
- The institution and/or its staff members frequently make **arbitrary** decisions.
- The institution and/or its staff members employ unreasonably strict or regimented schedules for daily activities such as meal times, bathroom use, and bathing/showering.
- The institution and/or its staff members show a lack of **privacy**, dignity, choice, or respect for those entrusted to their care.
- The institution and/or its staff members create an unsafe or unhygienic environment.
- The institution and/or its staff members refuse to respect individuals' cultural, dietary, or religious backgrounds.

Preventing institutional abuse

There are many steps that you as a fellow parent, homeschool leader, or homeschooling organization can take to prevent child neglect in your community. These include:

First, **research the organizations and institutions you are entrusting your children to *before you trust them.***

As a parent living in the 21st century, you have the immense advantage of the Internet. Conduct an internet search of whatever organizations or institutions you are thinking about sending your children to. Add the words “abuse” or “neglect” to your search — e.g., search for the phrase “*Teen Mania*” AND “*abuse*”. While we should all understand that just because something is said on the Internet doesn’t mean it’s true, we should also understand that when multiple people are observing the exact same abusive patterns, that should give us pause.

Second, always stay in touch with your child when your child is in the institution’s care.

Make sure you stay in regular contact with any child you entrust to an institution, no matter what type of institution it is. In cases of medical or mental health treatment, you don’t want to invade your child’s privacy. But you should make sure your child is ok, feels safe and comfortable, and isn’t experiencing trauma.

Third, never trust an organization or institution that does *not* let you stay in touch with your child.

This should be a no-brainer, but many institutions — even Christian ones, like some of Bill Gothard’s “troubled youth” ministries — try to keep children from contacting their parents and vice-versa. This should set off your parental alarms.

Fourth, know the warning signs of institutional abuse (listed above) as well as the warning signs of child abuse and neglect in general.

Fifth, make sure the institutions understand abuse and neglect.

Do the research to find out if the institutions or organizations your children are involved with are following proper child protection procedures. Are they conducting background checks? Do they have a child protection policy in place? Are you sure they do not handle abuse “in house”? Do they have mandatory reporters on staff? If you don’t know, *ask*.

Sixth, if you become aware of child abuse in an institution, report it to the proper authorities.

Seventh, if you become aware of child neglect in an institution, speak up.

Don’t risk other parents unknowingly sending their children to an abusive organization as well.

Discussion Questions

1. What are questions you could (or should) ask organizations to make sure they will take proper care of your children?

2. What should you do if you find out an organization is not taking proper care of your children (or other children)?

3. Why do you think a “closed” culture within an organization (where transparency is discouraged) can lead to child abuse and neglect?



Reporting Abuse

Instructor note: You have come to the end of the sections you need to read aloud. The remaining sections are simply further resources for you and your group. However, do point out to attendees that this section will tell them where they can report abuse to in their local area.

To conclude your education session: Test your attendees' knowledge of child abuse by administering the "Child Abuse Awareness 101 for Homeschoolers Test." Have your attendees take it (closed-book style) and then go over the correct answers as a group. After taking the test, the session is complete. Be sure to thank everyone for attending.

Anyone and everyone is able to report suspected abuse or neglect. Doing so can not only save a child's life, but also get help for a family in need. There is a stigma in some homeschooling circles about social workers and child protective services, but these individuals and organizations exist to *help*. They can connect a well-meaning but neglectful family with resources to improve their parenting skills or economic situation; they can also rescue a child from cruel and horrible circumstances.

If you need help or counseling prior to reporting abuse, Childhelp is a national organization that can assist you. It offers crisis intervention, information, literature, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls to them are confidential. You can call Childhelp at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) or visit their website at <http://www.childhelp.org/pages/hotline-home>.

If you are prepared and ready to report abuse, the following are websites and/or toll-free numbers for each U.S. state's specific agencies designated to receive and investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect:

Alabama

http://dhr.alabama.gov/services/Child_Protective_Services/Abuse_Neglect_Reporting.aspx

Alaska

Toll-Free:	(800) 478-4444
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<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/default.htm>

Arizona

Toll-Free:	(888) SOS-CHILD (888-767-2445)
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<https://www.azdes.gov/dcyf/cps/reporting.asp>

Arkansas

Toll-Free:	(800) 482-5964
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<http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dcfs/Pages/ChildProtectiveServices.aspx#Child>

California

<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/PG20.htm>

Colorado

Local (toll):	(303) 866-5932
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<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDHS-Main/CBON/1251633944381>

Connecticut

TDD:	(800) 624-5518
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Toll-Free:	(800) 842-2288
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<http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2556&Q=314388>

Delaware

Toll-Free:	(800) 292-9582
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<http://kids.delaware.gov/services/crisis.shtml>

District of Columbia

Local (toll):	(202) 671-SAFE (202-671-7233)
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<http://cfsa.dc.gov/service/report-child-abuse-and-neglect>

Florida

Toll-Free:	(800) 96-ABUSE (800-962-2873)
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<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/>

Georgia

<http://dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/child-abuse-neglect>

Hawaii

Local (toll):	(808) 832-5300
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<http://humanservices.hawaii.gov/ssd/home/child-welfare-services/>

Idaho

TDD:	(208) 332-7205
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Toll-Free:	(800) 926-2588
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<http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Children/AbuseNeglect/ChildProtectionContactPhoneNumbers/tabid/475/Default.aspx>

Illinois

Toll-Free:	(800) 252-2873
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Local (toll):	(217) 524-2606
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<http://www.state.il.us/dcf/child/index.shtml>

Indiana

Toll-Free:	(800) 800-5556
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<http://www.in.gov/dcs/2398.htm>

Iowa

Toll-Free:	(800) 362-2178
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<http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/Consumers/Test/ProtectiveServices.html>

Kansas

Toll-Free:	(800) 922-5330
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<http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Pages/Report-Abuse-or-Neglect.aspx>

Kentucky

Toll-Free:	(877) 597-2331
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<http://chfs.ky.gov/dcb/dpp/childsafety.htm>

Louisiana

Toll-Free:	(855) 452-5437
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<http://dss.louisiana.gov/index.cfm?md=pagebuilder&tmp=home&pid=109>

Maine

TTY:	(800) 963-9490
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Toll-Free:	(800) 452-1999
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<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/hotlines.htm>

Maryland

http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?page_id=3973

Massachusetts

Toll-Free:	(800) 792-5200
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<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dcf/child-abuse-neglect/>

Michigan

Fax:	(616) 977-1154
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	(616) 977-1158
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Toll-Free:	(855) 444-3911
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http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5452_7119--,00.html

Minnesota

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestRelease&d&dDocName=id_000152

Mississippi

Toll-Free:	(800) 222-8000
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Local (toll):	(601) 359-4991
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http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us/fcs_prot.html

Missouri

Toll-Free:	(800) 392-3738
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<http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/rptcan.htm>

Montana

Toll-Free:	(866) 820-5437
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<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/cfsd/index.shtml>

Nebraska

Toll-Free:	(800) 652-1999
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http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/Pages/children_family_services.aspx

Nevada

Toll-Free:	(800) 992-5757
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http://dcfs.state.nv.us/DCFS_ReportSuspectedChildAbuse.htm

New Hampshire

Toll-Free:	(800) 894-5533
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Local (toll):	(603) 271-6556
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<http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dcyf/cps/contact.htm>

New Jersey

TDD:	(800) 835-5510
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TTY:	(800) 835-5510
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Toll-Free:	(877) 652-2873
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<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/reporting/how/index.html>

New Mexico

Toll-Free:	(855) 333-7233
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<http://cyfd.org/child-abuse-neglect>

New York

TDD:	(800) 369-2437
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Toll-Free:	(800) 342-3720
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Local (toll):	(518) 474-8740
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<http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cps/>

North Carolina

<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/cps/index.htm>

North Dakota

<http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/cps/#reporting>

Ohio

Toll-Free:	(855) 642-4453
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<http://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/reportchildabuseandneglect.stm>

Oklahoma

Toll-Free:	(800) 522-3511
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<http://www.okdhs.org/programsandservices/cps/default.htm>

Oregon

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/children/abuse/cps/report.shtml>

Pennsylvania

TDD:	(866) 872-1677
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Toll-Free:	(800) 932-0313
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<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/forchildren/childwelfareservices/calltoreportchildabuse!/index.htm>

Puerto Rico

Toll-Free:	(800) 981-8333
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Local (toll):	(787) 749-1333
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Spanish: <http://www2.pr.gov/agencias/adfan/Pages/AdministracionAuxiliardeProteccionSocial.aspx>

Rhode Island

Toll-Free:	(800) RI-CHILD (800-742-4453)
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http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/child_welfare/index.php

South Carolina

Local (toll):	(803) 898-7318
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<http://dss.sc.gov/content/customers/protection/cps/index.aspx>

South Dakota

<http://dss.sd.gov/cps/protective/reporting.asp>

Tennessee

Toll-Free:	(877) 237-0004
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<https://reportabuse.state.tn.us/>

Texas

Department of Family and Protective Services

Toll-Free:	(800) 252-5400
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https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Contact_Us/report_abuse.asp

Spanish: <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Espanol/default.asp>

Utah

Toll-Free:	(855) 323-3237
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<http://www.hsddfs.utah.gov>

Vermont

After hours:	(800) 649-5285
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http://www.dcf.state.vt.us/fsd/reporting_child_abuse

Virginia

Toll-Free:	(800) 552-7096
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Local (toll):	(804) 786-8536
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<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/index.html>

Washington

TTY:	(800) 624-6186
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Toll-Free:	(800) 562-5624
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	(866) END-HARM (866-363-4276)
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<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/safety/abuseReport.asp?2>

West Virginia

Toll-Free:	(800) 352-6513
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http://www.wvdhhr.org/bcf/children_adult/cps/report.asp

Wisconsin

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/CPS/cpswimap.HTM>

Wyoming

<https://sites.google.com/a/wyo.gov/dfsweb/social-services/child-protective-services>

The above list of state child abuse reporting numbers is courtesy of the Child Welfare Information Gateway.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=W-00082, accessed on November 10, 2014.

10 Child Abuse Prevention Steps Your Homeschool Group Can Take Today

Child abuse is a serious issue that can occur in any group or culture. Whether it's a public school, private school, or homeschool, or whether it's a Christian, atheist, or Buddhist group — child abuse can be found everywhere. This tragedy is no respecter of demographic differences. It is important, therefore, that homeschool groups equip and empower themselves with the right information and tools to be able to fight abuse. Homeschool groups also need to equip and empower their members.

To this end, here are 10 steps your homeschool group can take *today* to make children and families safer:

1. Ask your homeschool group if it has a child protection policy.

Whether it's your national organization, state support group, or local co-op, any and every organization that works with, for, and around children should have a child protection policy. So ask your homeschool group(s) if it does.

If it does: Ask to review it. You have a responsibility to make sure that the groups to which you entrust your kids have such a policy in place. Don't just assume they do. *Ask.* Children deserve a safe, nurturing environment for their education. Make sure your group's policy is appropriate, sufficient, and up-to-date. If you're not sure if it is, do some research.

If it does not: Ask that one is made. Be firm about this. Child protection policies are essential to keeping children safe as well as protecting the integrity of your organization.

2. Plan an awareness event.

Organize an all-parent, mandatory meeting for your homeschool group or organization. (If you need help doing so, here is a step-by-step planning guide.) It doesn't have to be long — even an hour or two will suffice in the beginning. During this event, explain to your group's members the seriousness of child abuse, why homeschoolers cannot tolerate child abuse, what child abuse is, and the responsibility of every member and family to report abuse to the proper authorities. At this event, introduce to your members any new action steps your group is taking, such as a child protection policy, special speaking events, a resource library, etc. Make this awareness event a regular occurrence every 6-12 months. Consider planning a longer event (such as an entire day) where multiple professionals can present important information on the topic.

3. Invite a child abuse prevention expert to speak to your homeschool group.

There are many organizations dedicated to preventing child abuse. These organizations have significant knowledge and expertise. They also have dedicated individuals who are eager to speak to community groups about child abuse prevention. Contact one of these organizations and ask to have a speaker present to your homeschool group. Examples of organizations whose local chapters you could contact are RAINN, Prevent Child Abuse, and G.R.A.C.E. We at HARO are also willing to speak to any homeschool group.

4. Invite a child welfare or social work professional to speak to your homeschool group.

Myths and paranoia about the child welfare system often discourage or prevent many homeschool parents from reporting known child abuse. So while educating yourself and your community about child abuse is important, you also need to overcome stigma about the system in place to help those who are being abused. To this end, consider inviting a child welfare or social work professional to speak to your homeschool co-op or organization. Ask them to explain what they do, what happens when someone makes an anonymous tip, and how they work to protect children and families. Getting to know such a professional on a personal level — and letting them get to know you — can go a long way in overcoming myths and paranoia that keep children from receiving the help they need.

5. Do some research.

Go to the library or get on your computer and start researching! Learn about what child abuse is, what the warning signs are, how to report child abuse, common characteristics of child sexual offenders, how sexual offenders attempt to discredit child witnesses, — and that's just the beginning! Knowledge is power. Equip yourself with that power so you can keep the children in your communities safe.

6. Ask that background checks be done on anyone working professionally with children in your homeschool group.

Many homeschool co-ops and organizations hire outside help to teach certain classes that parents feel inadequate teaching. Many also offer childcare for younger children while parents teach older children. For anyone in your group that volunteers or is being paid to work with children, require that they go through a vigorous screening process. This process should involve a professional background check.

7. Ask that anyone who is a leader or works professionally with children in your homeschool group takes a mandatory reporting class.

There are an abundance of free classes online (here is an example) that you can take to learn what a mandatory reporter is required to report. While “mandatory reporter” is a term defined by law, it behooves anyone working professionally with children to understand the dynamics of child abuse and what should be reported when (and to whom). Encourage your group’s leaders, teachers, and volunteers to take one of these classes so their knowledge about child abuse prevention goes above and beyond.

8. Establish best practices in your homeschool group for reporting abuse.

The *best* practice for reporting abuse is, of course, *to report abuse as soon as you become aware of it*.

But it is important that your homeschool co-op or organization, as part of Step #1 (Create a child protection policy), establishes “best practices” for who reports abuse, how to report it, and who the abuse gets reported to. You do not want a situation where multiple people are told about a case of child abuse but no one reports it because they think someone else did. Your group should have a clearly written policy about the exact steps to take, who takes them, and how to follow-up to make sure those steps *were* taken. There are numerous places where you can get information about child abuse prevention best practices; the National Children’s Advocacy Center is a good place to start.

9. Proactively encourage your group’s members to teach children accurate sex education and information about child abuse.

Encourage your homeschool group’s members to educate their children about sexual abuse. Parents need to teach their children what abuse is and empower them to say, “No!” This means, of course, that they need to teach them about *sex* — which they might not be comfortable hearing. But this is a great example of exactly why sex education is vitally important. Children need to know the proper names for their body parts, they need to know what is good touch versus bad touch, they need to know their bodies belong to them and no adult should make them do anything that makes them uncomfortable, and they need to have the words to use to express themselves to you if they experience abuse.

10. Put together a library of resources about child abuse, prevention, and recovery that is publicly accessible to your homeschool group’s members.

Ask your homeschool group or organization to start assembling a library of resources about child abuse, prevention, and recovery. There are many helpful books available on all of these topics. Allow your group’s members and families to access these resources for free.

The above 10 steps are of course not the only things your homeschool group can do to help prevent child abuse. But they are all important and are easy, simple steps you can take *today*. Child abuse is a serious issue in homeschooling and we need to start treating it as such.

Additional Steps To Make Your Community Safer

There are many steps that you as a fellow parent, homeschool leader, or homeschooling organization can take to make your community safer from child abuse and neglect. These steps can be divided into 2 categories: *proactive* steps and *preventive* steps.

Proactive steps

Proactive steps are steps you can start taking today to just make your families and communities healthier and safer in general. The following six protective factors have been linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect:

First, nurturing and attachment: When children and their caretakers have positive and reaffirming feelings for one another, children develop trust that those caretakers will provide the resources necessary to thrive.

Second, knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development: Parents and caretakers who understand child development and growth can provide an environment where kids can live up to their full potential.

Third, parental resilience: Parents and caretakers who have positive attitudes and can creatively problem solve are able to more effectively embrace challenges — and less likely to direct anger at their kids.

Fourth, social connections: Raising a family and homeschooling are both difficult tasks. Having trustworthy and loving family friends make those tasks more manageable as well as enjoyable.

Fifth, concrete supports for parents: Families need basic resources like food, clothing, housing, and transportation, as well as access to services like child or mental health care. (Sadly, many families lack these.)

Sixth, social and emotional competence: Children need to learn how to express their emotions in healthy ways, positively interact with others, and self-regulate their behaviors. Learning how to do so can lower their risk of abuse.

Ask yourself — and your fellow homeschooling families and leaders — how your community can promote and inspire others to embrace the above six factors. Whether that involves holding free classes about child development, encouraging social events, or taking care of the struggling or low-income families in your homeschooling community, create an environment where no child is lacking the means to excel and thrive at life.

Preventative steps

No matter how proactive you are in ensuring your communities and families are safe, abuse will still happen. So the following are preventative steps you can take to help you be able to prevent neglect as soon as you become aware of it:

First, get to know everyone in your community. As you build relationships, you can better identify problems as soon as they arise.

Second, make it a habit to help every family under stress. Have your community offer to babysit, help with chores and errands, or suggest resources in the community that can help.

Third, reach out to children in your community. You never know how much a random smile or word of encouragement can mean. You also are communicating you are a safe person to talk to if a child doesn't feel safe at home.

Fourth, learn how to recognize and report signs of child abuse and neglect. And if and when you have concerns, be sure to report those concerns to the proper authorities.

Fifth, teach others how to recognize and report signs of child abuse and neglect. The more that everyone in your community knows how to identify neglect, the better equipped you'll be to address it if and when it arises.

Sixth, establish a system of home visitations for your homeschool community or group. Or even just a system of phone calls. This doesn't need to be nosy or annoying. But in the event that, for example, a family hasn't been to the weekly park day for several weeks and no one knows what happened to the family, have a system in place where someone takes note and makes a point to check in on that family to make sure they are ok.

As you take both these proactive and preventative steps, remember that child abuse and neglect is not necessarily the result of intentionally abusive parenting. They can be caused by circumstances completely outside the control of a good and loving parent. When parents are trying their best but simply lack the necessary resources, they should be reached out to and surrounded with support. However, when parents are simply abusing or neglecting their children out of anger, apathy, or substance abuse, it is important to get the necessary help to the children.

When in doubt, always make a report to the proper authorities.

Websites and Resources for Further Information

General organizations

American Humane Association: <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/>

Child Abuse Prevention Center: <http://www.thecapcenter.org/>

ChildHelp: <http://www.childhelp.org/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/>

National Children's Advocacy Center: <http://www.nationalcac.org/>

National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect: <http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/>

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network: <https://www.rainn.org/>

Safe Horizon: <http://www.safehorizon.org/>

Stop It Now!: <http://www.stopitnow.org/>

Tennyson Center for Children: <http://www.childabuse.org/>

Religious organizations

Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments: <http://netgrace.org/>

Organizations that provide child abuse prevention training

Child Abuse Prevention Center: <http://www.thecapcenter.org/>

Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments: <http://netgrace.org/>

National Children's Advocacy Center: <http://www.nationalcac.org/>

Stop It Now!: <http://www.stopitnow.org/>

Christian-Specific Books

Basyle Tchividjian, *Protecting Children from Abuse in the Church: Steps to Prevent and*

Respond

Diane Langberg, *On the Threshold of Hope*

Elizabeth Esther, *Girl at the End of the World: My Escape from Fundamentalism in Search of Faith with a Future*

Janet Heimlich, *Breaking Their Will: Shedding Light on Religious Child Maltreatment*

Jeff Crippen and Anna Wood, *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church*

General Books

Charles L. Whitfield, *Healing The Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families*

Gregory L. Jantz and Ann McMurray, *Healing the Scars of Emotional Abuse*

Kathryn Brohl, *When Your Child Has Been Molested: A Parents' Guide to Healing and Recovery*

Laura Davis, *Allies in Healing: When the Person You Love Was Sexually Abused as a Child*

Mari McCaig and Edward S. Kubany, *Healing the Trauma of Domestic Violence: A Workbook for Women*

Meg Kennedy Dugan and Roger R. Hock, *It's My Life Now: Starting Over After an Abusive Relationship or Domestic Violence*

Mike Lew, *Victims No Longer: The Classic Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse*

Mike Lew and Richard Hoffman, *Leaping Upon the Mountains: Men Proclaiming Victory over Sexual Child Abuse*

Wendy Maltz, *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*

Child Abuse Awareness 101 for Homeschoolers Test and Answer Key

1. What are the four major types of child maltreatment?

Answer:

- a. physical abuse
- b. neglect
- c. sexual abuse
- d. emotional abuse

2. Is accidental physical injury of a child considered physical abuse?

Yes

No

Answer: No

3. Fill in the blank: Sudden changes in _____ and unexplained _____ are both warning signs of child abuse.

Answer: Behavior, injuries

4. True or false? "Children with disabilities are particularly at risk of physical abuse."

Answer: True

5. Do younger or older mothers physically abuse their children more frequently?

Answer: Younger

6. Which is the most prevalent form of child abuse in the United States?

- a. physical abuse
- b. neglect
- c. sexual abuse
- d. emotional abuse

Answer: Neglect

7. True or false? "People in same-sex relationships are more likely to abuse children than

people in opposite-sex relationships.”

Answer: False

8. What percentage of juvenile sexual abuse victims know their perpetrator in some way?

- a. 90%
- b. 0%
- c. 100%
- d. 25%

Answer: 90%

9. Fill in the blank: the rate of sibling incest may be _____ times the rate of parent-child sexual abuse.

Answer: Five

10. Should you always trust a child who comes to you with a story about abuse?

Answer: Yes