



Stop It Now![®]

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

Speak Out with Sample Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are a great way to influence the conversations around hot topics in the media – or bring attention to an issue you care deeply about, like protecting children from sexual abuse.

With the trial of Jerry Sandusky underway, the Prevention Committee of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers ([ATSA](#)) and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center ([NSVRC](#)) have developed three sample letters to the editor that anyone can use to speak out about preventing child sexual abuse. Stop It Now! has developed two additional letters that focus on [adult responsibility for preventing abuse](#), and how to be [the adult that takes action](#) to keep children safe.

We encourage you to choose a letter, make any changes you'd like and then send it to your local paper – or use it as a blog post.

As ATSA/NSVRC wrote, “If you have never sent in a letter to the editor of your local paper, now is the time!”

Read our [tips for submitting a letter](#) and always follow your paper's guidelines. And when your letter is printed or posted, don't forget to let us know!

Sample Letters to the Editor – Stop It Now!

Sample letter - What adults can do to prevent child sexual abuse

(222 words)

[DATE]

Dear Editor:

I'm writing to encourage our community to use the child sexual abuse trial of Jerry Sandusky as a call to action. As parents and as members of this community we need to ask ourselves what we can do to prevent even one more child from being sexually abused.

Teaching our kids about scary strangers and just focusing on people on the sex offender registry won't keep kids safe. Research shows that we adults know that children are most likely to be abused by someone they know, trust and often love and admire.

But in our own lives it is still hard for most of us to recognize when someone we know could also be sexually inappropriate or abusive towards children. So we ignore that gut feeling we get. After all, we don't have "proof" that someone has harmed a child and we don't want to offend an adult by asking about his or her behavior.

Meanwhile, too many children are harmed by sexual abuse because we – as individuals, organizations, and communities - are afraid to be wrong and don't know what to do. Most of us don't know how to even raise the issue or with whom we'd even talk about it.

As a member of this community, I urge each of us to decide for ourselves what is okay and not okay around children. Then, decide what words you'll say to protect a child's boundaries. Finally, look up who you can call to talk about your concerns.

Because when we act early, we can prevent child sexual abuse – before a child is harmed in the first place.

Sincerely,

[Put Your Name and Contact info Here]

For resources on recognizing and responding to concerning behaviors towards children, visit www.StopItNow.org. Stop It Now! (the Child Sex Abuse Prevention and Protection Center)

Sample letter – Adults taking action: from blaming to learning to prevent

(225 words)

Date:

Dear Editor:

As the Jerry Sandusky trial gets underway, I'm preparing myself to hear a lot of stories focused on who is to blame. We seem to want someone to blame for this tragic story. I, for one, am ready to move beyond blame and focus on what needs to change to prevent another child from being sexually abused. Here are my thoughts.

All children need adults in their lives who are knowledgeable about the behaviors and situations that may indicate an increased risk of someone abusing a child. All children

need adults who are knowledgeable about healthy sexual development and age appropriate sexual behavior. Children need these adults in their families and in the programs, schools, and faith communities that are part of their community.

All children need adults who are willing to “Be that adult.” The adult who is there for children and young people. The adult who learns to recognize warning signs. The adult who is not afraid to speak up about concerning behaviors towards children. The adult who is like a broken record until their concerns are taken seriously.

I’m not saying this will be easy. There can be risks – friendships lost, family support withdrawn, uncomfortable questions about your motives and even more. But isn’t it better to offend an adult than to fail a child? I know that I think it is.

Sincerely,

[Put Your Name and Contact info Here]

For resources on recognizing and responding to concerning behaviors towards children, visit www.StopItNow.org. Stop It Now! (the Child Sex Abuse Prevention and Protection Center)

Sample Letters- ATSA/NSVRC

The following letters to the editor are from ATSA (www.atsa.com/Letters-to-the-Editor) and NSVRC (www.nsvrc.org/projects/child-sexual-assault-prevention/sandusky-case-resources-and-trial-packet).

Sample letter - Youth serving organizations need education and policies (252 words)

[DATE]

Dear Editor:

Jerry Sandusky, Penn State’s former football coach faces over 52 counts of sexual abuse against 10 boys over 15 years. I understand these allegations are hard to believe. I understand that an indictment of this magnitude would be a tragedy in any organization, but Penn State and particularly, their football team was known for all-American values of honor, integrity, and hope.

Jerry Sandusky deeply violated those values if these allegations are true. And Penn State may have violated those values as well because they allegedly failed to report these sexual abuse allegations to authorities.

It would be easy to end the story with the firing of key university staff and a quick conviction of Sandusky. It would be easy to say that we should always report suspicions of abuse, even if we are unsure of what really happened or whether the actions were sexually abusive. In the wake of all that has appeared in the media, we must take a deeper look at our own responsibilities.

This tragedy is a wake-up call to every organization that works with youth. I hope that such organizations will educate themselves, the families and the children about child sexual abuse. I encourage every organization to understand what they must do to respond to sexual abuse, to use effective screening tools and to put policies into place about appropriate touch and conduct. I hope all of us will learn from Penn State and ask questions to help put effective policies in place *before* any child is harmed.

Sincerely,

[Put Your Name and Contact info Here]

For additional resources, visit the following websites:

www.atsa.com The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

www.nsvrc.org The National Sexual Violence Resource Center

www.preventtogether.org The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

www.StopItNow.org. Stop It Now! (the Child Sex Abuse Prevention and Protection Center)

Sample Letter - Writer works with offenders: urges action and opening lines of communication with organizations serving youth

(227 words)

Date:

Dear Editor:

I have spent most of my career working to stop sexual violence. I do this difficult work by supervising men, women, boys and girls who have sexually abused children or other people in our community. When I read about Jerry Sandusky, it showed me people continue to have stereotypes about individuals who sexually abuse, and the characteristics of this case really challenge those stereotypes.

As the country watches the case unfold, I urge parents, families, and organizations to talk about what they need to do to make our communities safer for children. I urge adults to find ways to get involved and learn the scope of sexual abuse. We know it takes a lot of strength to come forward. We can imagine that we would have done

everything we could to protect these children. Now we have the opportunity to learn from this experience.

We don't have to wait.

Start with opening the lines of communication. We can ask our church, synagogue, schools and other organizations if they have policies to protect children, if the staff is aware of these policies, and if they know how to implement them on a day-to-day basis. Let's use the Sandusky trial as a "rallying point" to ACT and to begin conversations with every local organization about what we can all do to make our communities safer for our children and teens.

Sincerely,

[Put Your Name and Contact info Here]

For additional resources, visit the following websites:

www.atsa.com The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

www.nsvrc.org The National Sexual Violence Resource Center

www.preventtogether.org The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

www.StopItNow.org. Stop It Now! (the Child Sex Abuse Prevention and Protection Center)

Sample Letter - Who do we really need to worry about and what questions should we be asking those who care for children?

(250 words)

[DATE]

Dear Editor:

All the stories in the news lately about child sexual abuse make me wonder if I was paying attention to the wrong things when my children were growing up. I was hyper-vigilant in malls, crowds, and public restrooms. I kept them close to me and watched carefully when strangers approached or seemed to notice them. I honestly thought that I knew what a sex offender would look like or how they would behave. They would probably look mean, unkempt, suspicious and shifty.

I generally relaxed, however, when my children were with a teacher, coach, babysitter, or neighbor. Someone who I knew or who was responsible for caring for children would not be capable of abusing them. But since the Jerry Sandusky and Penn State case came into the news, I'm starting to get a different understanding of the dynamics of child sexual abuse. I know that most people who might sexually abuse a child do not fit my stereotype.

I'm also starting to understand that this is something we can prevent by responding more proactively. Imagine if we begin to ask different questions of the people who care for our children: Is there a policy in your organization to protect children from sexual abuse? Do you know how to report sexual abuse? What do you do if someone is not quite appropriate around the children or teens in your organization?

This case has opened my eyes and I, for one, am going to start asking different questions now.

Sincerely,

[Put Your Name and Contact info Here]

For additional resources, visit the following websites:

www.atsa.com The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

www.nsvrc.org The National Sexual Violence Resource Center

www.preventtogether.org The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

www.StopItNow.org Stop It Now! (the Child Sex Abuse Prevention and Protection Center)