



Stop It Now!®

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

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What If Josh Duggar's Parents Had Known Where to Get Help?

A Commentary on the Duggar Sexual Abuse Scandal

by Jenny Coleman, Stop It Now! Director

Northampton, Massachusetts - I was reading one of the entertainment magazines recently with a story about the Duggar family, and I was surprised to find myself sympathizing not only with the daughters and babysitter but also the parents and Josh himself - all of them. The full impact of what can happen when a youth sexually harms another child is being felt by this family. Many families know this experience and Josh Duggar's parents are right that this happens in other families, regardless of politics, religion or any other demographic feature.

Many of the follow up articles, op-eds and blog posts on the Duggar Scandal do one of two things: Either the author is reinforcing the importance of contacting the police or child protection services when a youth sexually harms another child or the author is acknowledging that any high profile media case is a chance for a renewed awareness of the risks of sex abuse, and shares tools and resources of what to do if a child is being sexually abused.

Both responses are important and make sense. *Reinforce what to do when a child is hurting another child - get help, Learn the facts, Make this a teachable moment, Renew the focus on sex abuse* - these are examples of the titles and stories seen in the news.

The Duggar's story is so similar to many of the concerns and questions that we hear on our Stop It Now! Helpline. We've come to expect the fear, shame and confusion from parents contacting us for direction on how to address their own child's sexual problem behaviors. They are petrified their children may be taken away, perhaps charged, and maybe even incarcerated.

Parents dealing with a child's sexual harmful behaviors face some very difficult decisions and they rarely know what resources are available that could help their child and their family. Our reluctance and fear in talking about children's sexual behaviors, and more specifically, those behaviors thought to be sexually harmful makes it difficult, painful and frightening for parents

to know how to reach out for their child. Preconceptions of how others, especially authorities will respond often scare parents. Worry about what will happen next and what will be in the best interest for all the children is rarely a simple black and white answer.

Yes, professional help and authorities need to be contacted and yes, this is once again a reminder to learn about responding to warning signs and to learn the facts. **This is also the time to recognize that protecting children from sexual harm requires more than providing resources after the abuse has been found out. We need more strategies and resources to help families understand healthy sexual behaviors and warning signs, and to help families and communities alike build practical safety plans.**

At Stop It Now!, we encourage adults to take strong protective steps, especially when there are warning signs, and even more so when there is actual evidence of sexual harmful behaviors. So, we ask - *What if the Duggar's had known there was a resource for them to call.* What if they could talk about their son's behavior in a confidential and non-judgmental manner? What if they had received a list of resources and information to help them make their next steps? We ask this question every time another high profile media case in on the tip of everyone's tongue.

We hope that every adult in a position to keep a child safe thinks about safety planning and learning about sex abuse - before a child is harmed.

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About Stop It Now!

Stop It Now! (StopItNow.org) prevents the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed. We provide support, information and resources so individuals and families around the world can keep children safe and create healthier communities.

The Stop It Now! Helpline offers free, confidential advice to any adult with a concern about child sexual abuse. StopItNow.org/help