



# PARENTALK

*PARENTalk is a Stop It Now! publication by and for parents of children and teens with sexual behavior problems.*

## A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND COURAGE

*"Sue" told the following story at an August press conference in Montpelier, Vermont. Her courage and her story showed so many families that confronting this issue can make a difference for everyone involved.*

Thank you for this opportunity to tell my story, to speak about my family and to tell of our struggle with child sexual abuse.

I am a parent of children who have been sexually abused. I am also a parent of a child who is a victim of child sexual abuse, and then as he grew older, also abused another child. I have felt very isolated in this experience. I am here today because I believe it is important that more people speak out to break the silence around child sexual abuse. In choosing to speak out today, I appreciate your cooperation in maintaining my anonymity, and therefore the privacy of my family, and particularly the children who have been victims of child sexual abuse.

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**"THIS HAS BEEN  
A FAMILY STRUGGLE—SEXUAL ABUSE  
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EVERY PART OF OUR LIVES."**

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The story I have to tell is difficult, and unfortunately, more common in Vermont than we would like to think. When my son was quite young, I noticed that he was having some behavior problems. We took him to several doctors and had him evaluated by specialists. He was diagnosed with ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder. We took him to therapy. Doctors gave him medications. We even began family therapy. Nothing was working.

Then my son told us he had been sexually abused by his older cousin when he was just six years old. That was 5 years ago when my son was 11. We heard from our son that this cousin, who was several years older—yet still a child—had encouraged my son to sexually molest his younger sisters. This was the most devastating news of my life.

But this news was a turning point as well. Finally, we knew what we were dealing with, and were able to get the specialized help my son needed. This has been a family struggle—sexual abuse affects every member of the family and every part of our lives.

After the years of frustration, we were able to find good therapists and my son and daughters are doing very well. We do not ignore what happened and talking about it has helped my family to heal. We also know better now what to look for which helps us prevent this from ever happening again. My son now knows and can feel the impact of what he has done.

I am speaking today because I wish the "experts" we talked with had asked about sexual abuse sooner. I also wish that I had known what to look for. Today there are checklists of what to look for. Stop It Now! has a great brochure for parents. Stop It Now! has also created a toll-free helpline to call for confidential information. Stop It Now! can also refer you to counselors and therapists who are specially trained to treat children who abuse other children.

I hope other parents will hear my story and have the courage to call for information before their sons or daughters are hurt. Or if these children have been hurt, I hope other parents will call before their children choose to act out their hurt on another child.

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

by Joan Tabachnick, *Stop It Now!*

As we publish this second edition of PARENTalk, I am excited about the response to our first issue and the participation and courage of so many parents. Many of us hold the belief that someone must have the courage to speak out first so that others will not feel completely isolated in their experience. This is confirmed by a recent caller to our helpline. She told us, "That mother should write a book!" When asked why, she replied, "I want to know how she had the courage to keep on going and helping her family heal from the abuse."

"That mother" did not write a book, but after working together for over a year, she became the featured speaker at our last press conference that was covered by all three television networks. She has clearly made a difference to one family. We hope that even more will be moved by her words as they appear in this issue of our newsletter.

If you have a story to share or are a clinician who wants to share your insights, please let us know. We hope this will be a valuable tool for everyone affected by children with sexual behavior problems. *Thank you.*

### **NEW RELEASE! BECAUSE THERE IS A WAY TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: FACTS ABOUT ABUSE AND THOSE WHO MIGHT COMMIT IT**

Stop It Now! and the Safer Society Foundation, Inc. announce the release of a new guidebook, *Because There Is A Way To Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: Facts About Abuse and Those Who Might Commit It*—the first ever to talk about child sexual abuse and those who commit it.

This groundbreaking guidebook demystifies what it means to hear about a sex offender in your community. Based upon current research, clinical experience, and conversations with survivors of abuse and recovering sexual abusers, this affordable guidebook describes what everyone needs to know about child sexual abuse and presents the startling facts about the people who are most likely to sexually abuse a child. Most importantly, it offers suggestions about what to do if you suspect abuse.

#### **Guidebook Highlights:**

- Concrete checklists of what to look for in children, in adults, and in the victim-abuser relationship,
- Valuable information about the adults and children who choose to sexually abuse a child, and
- Suggestions as to positive family and community responses to community notification.

For a free copy of this guidebook contact Stop It Now! at 1-888-PREVENT. For multiple copies, (\$.50 per copy, plus shipping), contact the Safer Society Foundation and Press, Inc. at (802) 247-3132.

### **WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?**

Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual conduct with a child by any adult, adolescent, or older child. Be aware of age, size, social and power differences between two children. Sexual abuse behaviors include:

#### **Touching offenses such as:**

- Sexually touching or rubbing private parts
- Touching a child's genitals or asking a child to touch someone else's genitals
- Playing sexual (pants-down) games
- Coercing a child to be sexual with animals
- Genital, oral or anal intercourse
- Forcing a child into prostitution

#### **Non-touching offenses such as:**

- Showing pornography to a child
- Exposing oneself
- Photographing a child in sexual poses
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- Voyeurism (Peeping Tom)
- Verbal or emotional abuse of a sexual nature (e.g., making fun of a child's body parts, calling a child slut, etc.)

*Guest Column***THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE**

*This is the first in a series of guest columns by experts in the field. This article is by Rob Freeman-Longo, an independent consultant, educator, trainer, and author working with the Safer Society Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to sexual abuse prevention and treatment.*

The media, politicians, some professionals, and others have unfortunately given messages of hopelessness and helplessness to parents of children with sexual behavior problems. We are told repeatedly that sexual abusers cannot be cured and that treatment for sex offenders does not work. All too often we hear that child victims of sexual abuse are “damaged goods” or “damaged for life.”

The professional literature tells us that victims of sexual abuse and adolescents and children with sexual behavior problems both have a strong hope for recovery. There are a variety of effective treatment programs for victims and for sexually abusing youth. Recent studies reveal that many child sexual abuse victims grow up to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted human beings. And most children and adolescents with sexual behavior problems who participate in sexual behavior programs are at low risk of continued sexual behavior problems as adults. The issue here is to give these children and teen messages of hope and recovery, not negative statements that there are “no cures.” These are our children with problems—they are neither demons nor monsters.

There is nothing good about sexual abuse. But when it does occur, there is good news. Children are resilient. Children who have experienced child sexual abuse, with help and support, can grow up to live happy and healthy lives. Children and adolescents with sexual behavior problems can be safely and effectively treated. In fact, there have been studies which show that with specialized treatment and the support of family and close friends, children can and will learn how to step out of that cycle of abuse and trauma. There has always been hope and there continues to be hope. I

believe that in this issue adults have forgotten the power of positive language. We must simply remember to use words of encouragement and support the families and children when they experience problems.

### WHAT ARE SOME OTHER BEHAVIORS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

It is not always easy to tell if child sexual abuse is happening, especially if the possible abuser is another child. Remember, you are not on your own; you only need to decide that it would be helpful to have someone else look at what is going on. Do you know a child or adolescent who:

- Takes younger children to secret places? (e.g., forts, hideouts, the woods, etc.)
- Plays secret games with younger children? (e.g., doctor, pants-down games, etc.)
- Plays games with a child that the adolescent would otherwise avoid or hate? (e.g., an adolescent playing house with a child of five.)
- Experiences sudden wide changes in moods or habits? (e.g., refuses to leave his or her room or expresses anger in unexpected outbursts.)
- Insists on hugging or kissing a child when the child does not want to be hugged or kissed?
- Tells you he or she does not want to be left alone with a child?
- Becomes anxious when he or she is told about a particular person coming to visit?
- Uses frequent sexualized language in commonplace settings? (e.g., I'll stick my xxx in your mouth if you don't )
- Shows sexual material to younger children?
- Shares alcohol or other drugs with younger children or younger teens?

## SPONSORSHIP

Thanks to our community partners and to the funding sources for PARENTalk:

**Kidsafe Collaborative of Chittenden County  
Upper Valley Community Foundation  
Children & Family Council for Prevention  
Programs**

## FREE BROCHURE AVAILABLE

The information given in this newsletter's sidebars, and much more about children's sexual behavior, is available in the Stop It Now! brochure *Do Children Sexually Abuse Other Children?*. For your free copy of the brochure, call Stop It Now! at (413)268-3096. You can also call the Stop It Now! toll-free helpline to talk confidentially with staff about your situation. The helpline can be reached at 1-888-PREVENT and is open Monday through Friday, 9AM-5 PM EST.



## Stop It Now!

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Helpline: 1-888-PREVENT  
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Web: www.stopitnow.org

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## PARENTalk...A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND COURAGE

PARENTalk is by and for parents. What questions or topics would you like the newsletter to address?

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Stop It Now! is grateful for your feedback and will respect your confidentiality.

*Yes!* I want to support Stop It Now!'s work to keep all our children safe from sexual abuse. Please accept the enclosed contribution.

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