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Stop It Now! NEWS

The Campaign to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

The Mind, the Body, and Child Sexual Abuse

The following article by Dr. James Mercy is an invited commentary. Dr. Mercy is Associate Director for Science at the Division of Violence Prevention, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He also serves on the Board of Directors of Stop It Now!.

I've always been interested in the profound and mysterious ways that the body and the mind are connected. It seems like we are constantly discovering new ways our emotions and feelings relate to our physical body. Yet even with all we know, I think our culture has a tendency to discount, and even disbelieve, that the ways we've learned to think and feel have dramatic implications for our behavior and health. At the same time, the potential influence of genetic and other biological factors seems to be much more readily accepted and influential in terms of how we invest limited resources for treatment and prevention of many different health problems. These observations lead me to wonder if our societal complacency towards the problem of child sexual abuse may be, in part, rooted in our skepticism towards mind-body connections. In the absence of severe physical injury or disease, do we, as a society, subconsciously believe that the consequences of child sexual abuse for its victims can't really be that bad?

I'm trained as a scientist to be skeptical and to be, at least theoretically, objective. But even a scientific skeptic can't ignore the accumulating evidence documenting a link between child sexual abuse, the emotions and cognitions of its victims, and their physical health. We are learning that because survivors of sexual abuse often develop depression and anxiety in their lifetimes, and, in turn, risky behaviors or conditions such as smoking, substance abuse, promiscuity, and obesity, they may ultimately also be at greater risk for serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, and HIV. The injuries caused by child sexual abuse, therefore, unfold throughout one's life and may have a substantial impact on, not just the quality of life, but also life expectancy.

We've also learned that adult survivors of child sexual abuse use health services far more often than those who have not been abused and that they often present with complaints (e.g., chronic pain and headaches) that are among those most frequently encountered by primary care physicians. I cannot help but wonder:



James Mercy, PhD

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▪ SITE NEWS

▪ GEORGIA

Stop It Now! Georgia is sponsoring an advanced training for treatment providers in March, hoping to increase the number of therapists in Georgia who specialize in child sexual abuse. The training is provided free of charge when the recipient agrees to complete 2000 hours of therapeutic supervision. Georgia has also organized a special meeting with juvenile court judges and district attorneys that will take place in May. These officials, from counties in Georgia that have Stop It Now! services, will discuss policy issues relating to juvenile sex offenses in Georgia.

▪ MINNESOTA

Stop It Now! Minnesota is working to include a prevention message into the debate around the tragic death of 22 year-old Dru Sjodin who was allegedly kidnapped and murdered by a sex offender on parole. Staff at the Minnesota site wrote an opinion piece that was published in the St. Paul Pioneer Press along with a follow-up Letter to the Editor emphasizing the importance of adult and community responsibility to prevent child sexual abuse. Stop It Now! Minnesota also continued media efforts by sponsoring a full-page child sexual abuse prevention ad in the Pioneer Press.

From Questions to Answers

In 1992, when Stop It Now! was founded, we felt strongly that increasing public awareness about sexual abuse was not enough, by itself, to radically change behaviors. Popular strategies such as “Just Say No” oversimplified a complex and emotional family issue, and we set out to broaden the field of prevention to include a public health campaign focused on adults.

Our first goal was to assess what the public understood about child sexual abuse and use that information to look at the barriers to and incentives for preventative action. At that time, no one else in the country had studied the public’s knowledge or awareness of child sexual abuse. Using the tools of public health, experts from around the country helped us design the first telephone survey of the public’s knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs (KAB) surrounding child sexual abuse for our pilot program in Vermont. Then, over the next seven years, our sponsoring agencies in Philadelphia, Minnesota, and Georgia, repeated the survey to collect data in each of those locations and nationally. The results, which are summarized below, were surprisingly consistent with the original findings from Vermont. This data is the foundation from which all of our program work is built.

AWARENESS Over 95 percent of respondents said “Yes” when asked: “Are you familiar with the term child sexual abuse?” We also found that a majority of respondents knew that abusers lived in their communities. However, when asked if they saw child sexual abuse as a problem, there seemed to be significant variations, with a high of 89 percent in Georgia and a low of 49 percent nationally.

TALKING ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE Most respondents (>85 percent) were willing to offer some explanation of child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, for many, their explanation was: “Child sexual abuse is the sexual abuse of children.” Even when prompted, they were not able or not willing to give a more detailed explanation such as “touching the private parts of a child.” In our national survey, only 38 percent of respondents demonstrated that they could talk about the issue. In our pilot areas, the number of respondents who could explicitly talk about it was over 60 percent.

IDENTIFYING WARNING SIGNS Over three-quarters of respondents were able to identify at least one warning sign of sexual abuse in a child. This is a tribute to the work of prevention experts who have worked for decades to educate the public about child sexual abuse. However, this number dropped to less than half when respondents were asked for a warning sign or characteristic of someone who has been (or is) an abuser.

KNOWING WHAT TO DO We asked respondents what they would do if they knew someone was sexually abusing a child. In these cases, at least three-quarters of the respondents knew to report the sexual abuse. A significant percentage said they would either talk with the individual or refer him/her to an appropriate agency. We also asked what they would do if they were faced with a situation where they knew someone might be sexually abusing a child, but were not sure. In this case, a third of respondents said they would report the situation. One quarter said they would talk directly to the individual or offer a referral. One quarter said they would not know what to do.

CONTINUED ON PAGE THREE



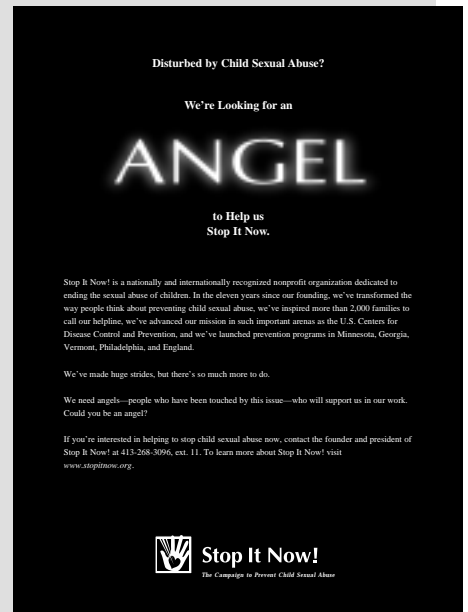


FOR DEVELOPMENT NEWS, TUNE INTO WJBH

WJBH is Stop It Now! shorthand for We're Just Brainstorming Here. We turn it on whenever we need an altered mode of thinking and communicating to solve really big problems. The quiet hum of WJBH in the background helps us suspend the usual judgement and analysis that brings static to our everyday thinking. We turn up the volume on novel thinking and let our ideas blast.

At the beginning of 2003, The Board of Directors tuned into WJBH to see if they could help us to solve the fundraising dilemma faced by so many non profits in these years of shrinking individual and public support. In the spirit of brainstorming, they generated a number of ideas that had never been considered before. One of them lit a fire under a Board Member who said, "I'll donate \$1,000 to get that idea started." The result is the Angel Ad, which ran in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 2003, and netted us many inquiries and some donors. Other national magazines are currently considering placing it as well.

The Angel Ad was the collaboration of Board Members William Ferguson, Bob Mazer and Linda Bowen, with help from Development Consultant, Holly Martineau. Copy was donated by Sujeong Shin; Doreen St. John created the graphic; and Sue Laks of Harmelin Media in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania executed the pro bono placement. From start to finish, this ad shows that WJBH is the place to listen for successful ideas.



THE FOUNDER'S SAFETY NET FOR CHILDREN, a giving circle started last year, welcomes people who wish to pledge at least \$1,000 for each of the next three years. We are pleased to report that every Board Member of Stop It Now! has signed up. Current members of the Founder's Safety Net are:

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Jean Beard | Sarah Creighton | Joan & Wil Hastings | Sally Levering | Barbara Tabachnick |
| Alan Berkowitz | Robert Falconer | Fran Henry | Pamela McMahon | Anonymous |
| Linda Bowen | F. Felix Foundation | Ellen Kaufman, MD | Timothy McNally | |
| Steven Brown | William Ferguson | Larry Kressley | James Mercy | |
| Lisa Chasan-Taber | William Ford | Jenny Ladd | N.J. Pierce | |



Stop It Now!

P.O. Box 495, Haydenville, MA 01039

___ **Yes!** I want to protect children from child sexual abuse. Here is my tax-deductible gift of \$_____ to **Stop It Now!** supporting prevention education and the public health advocacy.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

E-mai _____

All gifts to Stop It Now! are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. ___ I wish my gift to remain anonymous.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWERS CONTINUED FROM PAGE TWO

The results of these surveys are the basis of the program work at Stop It Now!. Because people do not know the warning signs for perpetration, our programs emphasize teaching these signs. Because adults do not know what to do or what to say to other adults about child sexual abuse, our programs and materials offer skill building in these areas. For example, our training materials help adults learn to use explicit language and proper names of body parts when describing sexual abuse. Furthermore, our helpline continues to encourage families to educate themselves, ask questions, create a family safety plan, and especially, to stay involved when they are concerned about a situation but have no evidence or information to report to authorities.

Results from these surveys in Philadelphia, Minnesota and Georgia can be found on our website www.stopitnow.org.

by Joan Tabachnick



HELPLINE

SITE NEWS

A Look Back At Helpline Calls 2003

The Stop It Now! helpline received a total of 666 calls in 2003. Seventy-seven percent of the calls were from friends and family members concerned about behaviors of a loved one, 16 percent were from individuals and professionals looking for information, and 7 percent were from adults concerned about their own thoughts, feelings or acting-out behaviors .

Callers to the Stop It Now! helpline speak to us confidentially. The following are composite stories using callers' own words:

"I am a survivor of incest and am getting therapy for that, but now I have to deal with the other side of the issue: the fantasies, interests, and responses to possible abusing behaviors. I haven't offended, nor do I plan to, but these feelings are so disturbing, I know I need help."

—*Adult concerned about his own thoughts and feelings**

"My six year-old daughter says her half-sister, my ten year-old daughter from a previous marriage, tried to touch her private parts while "playing doctor." The hardest part is that my ex-wife refuses to see that there might be a problem, and my current wife can't understand that I need to support BOTH my daughters. How do I talk with them both about this?"

—*Parent of potential victim AND child with sexual behavior problems*

"I am concerned for my cousin and his nine year-old son. They sleep in the same bed together every night. At family gatherings, my cousin seems overly affectionate with his son and acts jealous when other relatives give him attention. I might be overreacting, but something seems off. What should I do?"

—*Concerned family member*

by *Amanda Horowitz*

*Having been sexually abused as a child does not predict abusive behaviors later in life.

MIND/BODY CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

If one out of every five women and one out of every seven men has been sexually abused, what might the full impact of child sexual abuse be on our health care system and on the chronic and infectious diseases that most profoundly affect the health of our nation?

The scientific skeptic in me acknowledges that the evidence concerning these associations is far from complete and, therefore, we need more research. But my heart tells me that we also need to do a better job of forthrightly and clearly communicating how child sexual abuse affects its victims and what it may be costing each and every one of us. My heart and mind also tell me that preventing child sexual abuse is vital. Reaching people before they abuse and before they are abused is one of, if not the most important way, to stop the damaging and costly effects of child sexual abuse. Programs like Stop It Now! and others that focus on prevention must continue to press for change until child sexual abuse is eradicated.

PHILADELPHIA

Stop It Now! Philadelphia, in association with the Northwest Interfaith Movement Daycare Collaborative, has expanded outreach efforts to daycare facilities. Stop It Now! staff are in the formative stages of getting permission to offer prevention materials to parents of children in daycare centers throughout Philadelphia.

VERMONT

Stop It Now! Vermont is undergoing an open-ended evaluation to determine its future direction. The evaluation focuses on funding sources and sustainable initiatives.

UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND

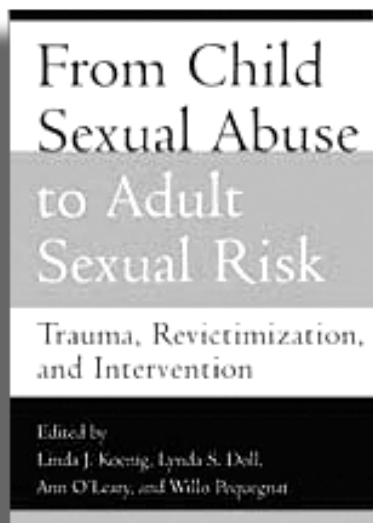
Two new Stop It Now! sites are starting in the UK and Ireland. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is funding a site in Croydon, and government funding is supporting work in Northern Ireland. Stop It Now! staff are creating a new brochure for adults who have questions about their sexual thoughts, feelings and behavior towards children. This brochure is a compliment to the increasing number of helpline calls from adults with such concerns.

by *Michael Pease*



New Book Links Child Sexual Abuse and Adult Sexual Risk

A new book edited by CDC and National Institute for Mental Health staff is poised to make an important contribution to the field of prevention. The American Psychological Association published the book, with the following description:



From Child Sexual Abuse to Adult Sexual Risk: Trauma, Revictimization, and Intervention

Edited by Linda J. Koenig, PhD,
Lynda S. Doll, PhD, Ann O'Leary, PhD,
and Willo Pequegnat, PhD

From Child Sexual Abuse to Adult Sexual Risk examines the relation between child sexual abuse and adult sexual health outcomes in men and women. An emerging body of literature suggests that children who experience sexual violence are more likely to engage in sexual risk behavior and, consequently, may be vulnerable to many negative reproductive and sexual health problems as adults. These problems include unwanted

pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection, and adult sexual violence.

Stop It Now! is working with other staff scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and additional researchers to inform physicians and the medical community about the health outcomes of child sexual abuse. We know physicians could be more engaged in preventing sexual abuse if they better understood the link between child sexual abuse and the common presenting symptoms in their patients population. We believe this book will help our efforts.

To learn more or to order the book, please visit <http://www.apa.org/books/4317016.html>.

STOP IT NOW!

STAFF

Allan Arnaboldi, ext. *30
Associate, Helpline

Alisa Klein, ext. 18
Director, Public Policy

Joan Tabachnick, ext. 14
Director, Public Education

Fran Henry, ext. 19
Founder and President

Holly Martineau, ext. 12
Consultant, Development

Victoria Yoshen, ext. 12
Consultant, Administration

Amanda Horowitz, ext. 13
Coordinator, Helpline

Michael Pease, ext. 16
Director, Field Development

Stop It Now!'s mission is to prevent sexual abuse before it happens. Our public education, public policy and research programs call on abusers, people at risk to abuse, and the family and friends who know them to act on behalf of the children in their lives. Our national, toll-free helpline provides hundreds of callers every year with little known information and resources. Through our innovative public health methods, we motivate adults to protect children.

EXPERT PANEL

Robert Appel
Vermont Human Rights Commission

Judith Becker, PhD
University of Arizona

Suzanne Brown
Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

Robert Burakoff
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Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Ed Carter & Associates

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Center for Effective Public Policy

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James Clemente
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Robin Delany-Shabazz
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Springfield College

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Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

Larry Kressley
Public Welfare Foundation

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*ex-officio
Department of Health and Human Services*

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The Task Force for Child Survival and Development

Linda Spears
Child Welfare League of America

Victor Veith
National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse

* Organizations listed for identification purposes



STOP IT NOW! IN THE NEWS

Laura Davis, co-author of *The Courage to Heal*, includes ideas and participants from Stop It Now!'s Dialogue Project in her latest work, *The Last Frontier: Is Reconciliation Possible After Sexual Abuse?*. **Donna Jenson** is interviewed as a survivor, and **Wayne Bowers** speaks of his experiences in recovery from sexual offending. Each of them points the way toward healing and restorative communication for people affected by sexual abuse. The workbook and tapes are available at www.LauraDavis.net.

Alisa Klein, Stop It Now!'s Director of Public Policy, was interviewed extensively for and quoted in the December 11, 2003 *Cape Cod Register*. The article discussed the impact of community notification on keeping children safe from sexual abuse, and can be found online at http://www.townonline.com/barnstable/news/local_regional/reg_newtrsexoffenders12112003.htm.

Contemporary Sexuality, a newsletter of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, featured Stop It Now! as the cover story of its December 2003 issue. The article offered a summary review of the primary prevention work that Stop It Now! conducts through its sites. Expert Panel member **Gina Ogden** is quoted as saying, "[Stop It Now!] has a chance to be successful in a groundswell-building way."

STOP IT NOW! NEWS

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Editor Fran Henry
Consultant Holly Martineau
Consultant Lisa Oram
Design Doreen St. John

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Stop It Now!
P.O. Box 495
Haydenville, MA 01039

Phone (413) 268-3096
Fax (413) 268-3098
E-mail info@stopitnow.org
Web www.stopitnow.org
Helpline 1-888-PREVENT

Haydenville, MA 01039

P.O. Box 495

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