

Keeping Kids Safe is an Adult Responsibility

To Help a Child

If you have concerns or believe that a child has been sexually abused:

BELIEVE

Always take a child's disclosure of sexual abuse seriously. Let the child know that you believe him/her.

VALIDATE

Validate the child's courage in speaking up and assure the child that you will keep her/him safe.

GET HELP

Call to report the abuse to the proper authorities and seek out services to support the child.

To get support anywhere in the United States:

- Call your area Child Protective Services. (In WA State: 866-ENDHARM)
- Contact RAINN's 24 hour hot line at: 1.800.656.HOPE or www.rainn.org/get-help.
- Call 911

Executive Director's Message

By definition, all children are vulnerable and dependent on adults to keep them safe. When it comes to the dangers of a child being sexually abused by an adult or an older child, this is a responsibility we dare not ignore. Prevention programs that focus on actions a child can take to protect him/herself from being abused may be helpful, but are no match for the clever manipulation of an adult perpetrator. It is unrealistic to believe that a child can fend off the sexual advances of an adult or an older child.

According to a recent survey, most parents or guardians believe that a child will tell them if they are being sexually abused. We know from experience that this is a dangerous belief. Research tells us that only 38% of children who are abused tell someone. Holding an expectation that a child will take responsibility for keeping him/herself safe or that this child will tell of the abuse leaves children at grave risk.

It may be difficult to understand why a child wouldn't just say *no*, run away, or speak up in response to being sexually abused... *(continued on page 2)*

A Survivor—Not a Victim

"Ever since I had my daughter, I have realized that the only way that I can be a good parent and good person to myself is if I begin the healing process that I've delayed. A process that should have begun 10, 15, 20 years ago—but one that I could only begin when I realized that I needed to ensure not only my survival but hers. To ensure that she grows up in a place that is nurturing, a place that is safe, a place that opens up her life to possibility... *(continued on page 3)*



Why Kids Often Keep Their Abuse Secret

Executive Director's Message, continued from page 1...

Children are Taught to Obey Adults:

Children implicitly trust adults. From earliest memory, adults care for, guide, and protect children. As children grow, they make generalizations to make sense of the world. From earliest memory, children are taught to obey parents, grandparents, teachers, etc. In a child's mind, all adults are trustworthy. To a young child, an older child or teen also seems like an adult.

Perpetrators Don't Look Like Scary Strangers:

In fact, perpetrators look like adults that children know and trust—because they are! 90% of abusers are known to the children they abuse and approximately 60% of abused children are abused by individuals the family knows and trusts. Abusers often take the time to form a trusting relationship with the child or the family, thus ensuring easy access to the child. Warning signals that might alert a child (or parent) to danger never go off. This is also a primary reason that children don't report. When the abuser is someone known to the child or family, an abused child fears he/she won't be believed for fear of disturbing relationships.



Sexual Abuse is Often not Violent or Harsh:

Sexual abuse often begins gradually and subtly or even as a game. Children are often groomed to accept the nuanced advances of an abuser, never realizing they are being controlled and manipulated by the abuser. By the time a child begins to feel violated, the child may have come to believe that they are complicit in the sexual relationship.

The Power of Shame:

It is impossible to over-emphasize the role shame plays in an abused child's experience. Children who are sexually abused translate the bad feelings of sexual violation to themselves, believing they are the cause of these complicated, scary, and shameful feelings. Children who believe they have done something wrong shrink back, hoping to hide in the shadows for fear their shame will be found out.

Frozen in Trauma:

It may be difficult to imagine the quiet workings of abuse as traumatic. Yet the experience of a child who is outmaneuvered and overpowered by an adult's sexual desire is nothing short of trauma. We know well the brain's protective and automatic fight, flight, or freeze response to trauma. The act of sexual violation most often only allows the option of freeze to the terrorized child. Not only is a child unable to take action to protect him or herself, but a traumatized brain shuts off the avenues to process information, take action, and in many cases, even recall some or all of the abuse.

If there is a lesson to emerge from this difficult reality, it is the critical need for adults to be aware of the vulnerability of all children and to take action to protect them. The reflexive turning away from the horrible actuality of an adult sexually abusing a child appears to be all too common. We know the certain outcome of this egregious failure; children are left to silently bear continued abuse and a lifetime of struggle, and abusers remain at large. All adults must put the needs of all children before their own, be alert to the signs of abuse, and, most of all, listen and believe a child who asks for help.



For more resources, visit www.ShepherdsTherapy.org and read our "How to Keep Kids Safe" page.

A Survivor—Not a Victim

Continued from page 1...

You see, I am a survivor—of a lot of things. I realize these things more each day that I go to group and realize that the things I considered normal or even quirky that happened in my family are actually quite disturbing.

Shepherd's is a safe place, for I am starting to breathe because I can utter all of the things that have been stuck deep inside me with women in the group that are also survivors who feel these things. These women are trying to become better, trying to see things clearer. These beautiful survivors.

I call myself that now. A survivor. I am not a victim. I am a survivor of all of these things and trying to become a better person—now—more whole, more aware, checking in everyday—for my daughter—for myself. This is my step—a hard, long step in the right direction.” ~*Shepherd's Group Client*

GiveBIG for Scholarships!

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BIG



This spring, Shepherd's will once again participate in The Seattle Foundation's GiveBIG event: **Tuesday, May 3rd 2016.**

Part of every donation made to support healing on May 3rd will be matched!

This year, all GiveBIG gifts to Shepherd's will go to the *Hope and Healing Scholarship Fund*, supporting services for clients with the greatest financial need.

That means 100% of all gifts will go directly to fund scholarships for those who rely on them for services. In fact, with the match, your support will grow—so even MORE than 100% of your gift will go to create opportunities for healing.

Growing a Legacy

Legacy gifts through wills and beneficiary designations have helped to ensure Shepherd's Counseling Services' therapy for survivors of childhood sexual abuse over the years. An active donor shares why they have planned legacy giving to Shepherd's:

"When our attorney asked if we would like to consider planning gifts to charitable organizations in our will, I thought immediately of Shepherd's Counseling Services.

We believe so strongly in what they do, and as a smaller organization, we can have such a direct impact. We are glad to think that even our modest legacy gift will support survivors of childhood sexual abuse in finding this life-changing opportunity for healing."

To leave your legacy of support for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, visit our Donate page for more information or contact Jill at jill@shepherdstherapy.org.

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Inside Shepherd's News

Keeping Kids Safe:

What to do if you fear that a child is in danger, why abused kids often don't tell adults, and more.

"I am not a victim..."

A survivor describes her journey to create a better life for herself and her daughter.



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www.shepherdstherapy.org