

How Will You Respond?

By David Burch, Church Engagement Strategist

STATISTICS GATHERED BY the organization “Darkness To Light” indicate that 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before they turn age 18. That is approximately 400,000 children each year.

Although most people do not realize it, child sexual abuse is one of the most significant risks facing children today. The consequences of sexual abuse can be devastating and lifelong. Victims are at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, suicide, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and school dropout. As these children grow into adults these consequences can also lead to poverty, homelessness, criminal behavior, and potentially loss of life.



Statistics further indicate that 90% of child victims know their abuser, and the children that are most at risk for abuse are between the ages of 7 and 13. Many children who experience sexual abuse never tell anyone, and instead live in fear with shame and guilt that is devastating to them. Child sexual abuse happens in families, but also in organizations.

Unfortunately, the church is not immune to the risks of child sexual abuse. In recent months, the news has informed the public about scandals of child sexual abuse inside the Catholic Church all around the country, and in December 2018, the Fort Worth *Star Telegram* published their research regarding sexual abuse within Baptist churches.

DO YOU KNOW THE 5 STEPS TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

STEP ONE: LEARN THE FACTS

One in 10 children will be sexually abused before the age of 18.



STEP TWO: MINIMIZE OPPORTUNITY

More than **80%** of sexual abuse cases occur in isolated, one-on-one situations.

STEP THREE: TALK ABOUT IT

Children often keep abuse a secret. Talk openly with them to prevent sexual abuse.



STEP FOUR: RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

Often the signs are **EMOTIONAL OR BEHAVIORAL**, not physical.



STEP FIVE: REACT RESPONSIBLY

Learn how to offer support and report suspicion or discovery immediately.



DARKNESS TO LIGHT STEWARDS OF CHILDREN

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM abuse is an adult responsibility. However, many of the people that spend time around children are not adequately trained to prevent, recognize or respond to child sexual abuse. Sometimes the adults in children’s lives simply lacked the prevention knowledge and did not recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse, or simply decided to dismiss gut feelings. God blesses our churches with children, and it is our responsibility to be good stewards and protect them from the horrors of abuse.

MBCH can provide your church or association with the training needed to ensure that adults have the knowledge and skills needed to recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse and know how to take appropriate action steps. “Stewards of Children” is a two-hour training that teaches adults how to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

The content of the training is compelling and engaging and it equips participants with practical action steps. Participants in Stewards of Children leave the training not only more informed, but with practical knowledge to recognize signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse, recognize unsafe behavior in adults, prevent sexual abuse before it can happen, and react responsibly when a child discloses or an adult discovers that abuse has occurred.



NOW THAT YOU KNOW child sexual abuse is so prevalent, how will you respond? Will you take action and request that your church sponsor a Stewards of Children training in your community? Your church may want to partner with your school system and have MBCH also provide training as an in-service to teachers in your community. We would love to work with you to ensure that the adults in your church and community have the training and skills they need to protect children.

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