

Chapter 10

GENERAL CONFERENCE STATEMENTS on CHILDREN



STATEMENT ON WELL-BEING & VALUE OF CHILDREN

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the right of every child to a happy and stable home environment, and the freedom and support to grow up to be the person God intended. In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the fundamental importance of children by adopting the “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” In harmony with many of these lofty principles, and considering the value Jesus placed on children when He said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt 19:14, NIV), we seek to aid children who suffer from the following destructive influences:

Poverty—Poverty impacts children’s development, robbing them of necessary food, clothing, and shelter, and adversely affecting their health and education.

Illiteracy—Illiteracy makes it difficult for the parents to earn wages or care for their family or for the child to reach his or her potential.

Poor health care—Millions of children have no access to health care because they lack the proper insurance coverage, or they live where medical care is unavailable.

Exploitation and vulnerability—Children are corrupted and exploited when they are used for cheap labor, sweat shops, armed conflict, and the perverted sexual pleasure of adult predators, and are exposed to sexually explicit materials in the mass media and on the Internet.

Violence—Every year many children die violent deaths. The vast majority of individuals who suffer in armed conflicts are women and children. Children bear deep physical and psychological scars, even after the fighting stops.

In response to the above issues and needs, Seventh-day Adventists stand for the following rights of children:

1. The right to a loving and stable home where there is safety and freedom from abuse.
2. The right to adequate food, clothing, and shelter.
3. The right to proper health/medical care.
4. The right to an education that prepares children for a positive role in society by developing their personal potential and giving them earning capacity.
5. The right to a religious and moral education in the home and church.
6. The right to freedom from discrimination and exploitation.
7. The right to personhood, respect, and the development of positive self-esteem.

STATEMENT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse occurs when a person who is older or stronger than the child uses his or her power, authority, or position of trust to involve a child in sexual behavior or activity. Incest, a specific form of child sexual abuse, is defined as any sexual activity between a child and a parent, a sibling, an extended family member, or a step/surrogate parent.

Sexual abusers may be men or women and may be of any age, nationality, or socio-economic background. They are often men who are married with children, have respectable jobs, and may be regular churchgoers. It is common for offenders to strongly deny their abusive behavior, to refuse to see their actions as a problem, and to rationalize their behavior or place blame on something or someone else. While it is true that many abusers exhibit deeply rooted insecurities and low self-esteem, these problems should never be accepted as an excuse

for sexually abusing a child. Most authorities agree that the real issue in child sexual abuse is more related to a desire for power and control than for sex.

When God created the human family, He began with a marriage between a man and a woman based on mutual love and trust. This relationship is still designed to provide the foundation for a stable, happy family in which the dignity, worth, and integrity of each family member is protected and upheld. Every child, whether male or female, is to be affirmed as a gift from God. Parents are given the privilege and responsibility of providing nurture, protection, and physical care for the children entrusted to them by God. Children should be able to honor, respect, and trust their parents and other family members without the risk of abuse.

The Bible condemns child sexual abuse in the strongest possible terms. It sees any attempt to confuse, blur, or denigrate personal, generational, or gender boundaries through sexually abusive behavior as an act of betrayal and a gross violation of personhood. It openly condemns abuses of power, authority, and responsibility because these strike at the very heart of the victim's deepest feelings about himself/herself, others, and God, and shatters his/her capacity to love and trust. Jesus used strong language to condemn the actions of anyone who, through word or deed, causes a child to stumble.

The Adventist Christian community is not immune from child sexual abuse. We believe that the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist faith require us to be actively involved in its prevention. We are also committed to spiritually assisting abused and abusive individuals and their families in their healing and recovery process, and to holding church professionals and church lay leaders accountable for maintaining their personal behavior as is appropriate for persons in positions of spiritual leadership and trust.

AS A CHURCH WE BELIEVE OUR FAITH CALLS US TO:

1. Uphold the principles of Christ for family relationships in which the self-respect, dignity, and purity of children are recognized as divinely mandated rights.
2. Provide an atmosphere where children who have been abused can feel safe when reporting sexual abuse and can feel that someone will listen to them.

3. Become thoroughly informed about sexual abuse and its impact upon our own church community.
4. Help ministers and lay leaders to recognize the warning signs of child sexual abuse and know how to respond appropriately when abuse is suspected or a child reports being sexually abused.
5. Establish referral relationships with professional counselors and local sexual assault agencies, who can, with their professional skills, assist abuse victims and their families.
6. Create guidelines/policies at the appropriate levels to assist church leaders in:
 - a. Endeavoring to treat with fairness persons accused of sexually abusing children.
 - b. Holding abusers accountable for their actions and administering appropriate discipline.
7. Support the education and enrichment of families and family members by:
 - a. Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.
 - b. Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.
 - c. Fostering Christ-like relationships between males and females in the home and in the church.
8. Provide caring support and a faith-based redemptive ministry within the church community for abuse survivors and abusers while enabling them to access the available network of professional resources in the community.
9. Encourage the training of more family professionals to facilitate the healing and recovery process of abuse victims and perpetrators.

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The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Lev. 18:20; 2 Sam. 13:1-22; Matt. 18:6-9; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Tim. 5:5-8.

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This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on April 1, 1997, in Loma Linda, California.