

**GCCHM Leadership Certification
Level XI, Course #6**

**RESPONDING TO ABUSE
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(Presenter's Notes)**

Introduction

We have been entrusted with an overwhelming responsibility to safeguard and protect the children and young people in our church and our school. A large percentage of our ministry involve children and young people, such as Sabbath School, VBS, Adventurers, Pathfinders, summer camps, and others. Hence, when abuse happens it is vital that we do what is best for the victim.

Reasonable Cause

- There is a legal responsibility to report any “reasonable cause” to suspect abuse.
- A reasonable cause is what any reasonable person would discern from their knowledge of the situation.
- Report to supervisor first so necessary information is obtained.

Reasonable cause to suspect means that, based on a mandated reporter's observations of the evidence, professional training, and experience, he or she has a rational or sensible suspicion that a vulnerable person has been harmed or placed in danger of being harmed.

Get the Necessary Information:

- Recognize the signs.
- Talk to the child directly – be aware of your tone, listen, avoid judgment or blame, reassure the child, be patient.
- REPORT – check your country's laws.
- Report these crimes to the proper authorities—police, Child Protective Services, child help abuse hotlines, etc. Reporting agencies vary from state to state and country to country.
- After you report you may not hear back or see signs of investigation right away. Continue to support the child. You can call back to follow up on the case.
- If you become aware of abuse by any church leader, a quick response is vital. Contact, the Conference, Adventist Risk Management, and your attorney.
- Remember that regardless of the accusation, the mission of the church must be to protect the abused, to listen to the victim, and to cooperate with the authorities.
- If you are a church leader and someone comes to you for counseling, unless what they tell you is illegal, you must keep the confidence. To share what you hear with anyone else in the church can ruin your ministry and their spiritual walk.

The Sacred Trust

The pastor, the teacher, the therapist, the Pathfinder leader—whatever person is in charge—is the one responsible and accountable. Larry Spielman says, “The leader's role produces an implicit trust between the leader and those over whom the leader has power. The

leader must not use this sacred trust for personal gratification. The power differential between King and subject, or leader and follower, makes the person with the less power vulnerable to exploitation.”

http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/19-3_Spielman.pdf

PRACTICE BAT (if child discloses)

1. BELIEVE

- Trust what the child has told you.
- People find the child’s behavior strange and don’t trust their words.
- People may know the suspected abuser and find it hard to believe he or she is capable of such an act.
- A child rarely lies about abuse.

2. AFFIRM

- Express your concern for the child.
- Let them know you care and you’re there for them.
- Let them know you will be their support and will tell someone who can provide help.

3. TELL

- Report the abuse to the appropriate authority.
- The one reporting should talk to their supervisor or mentor about the issue so they could make the best possible report together.
- You can also do this on the mandated reporter hotline which carried more weight than anonymous reporting hotline.
- Always report child abuse.

A Key Position

- Every church needs a key person in charge of handling cases of suspected abuse.
- That person must be trained in reporting and supporting the child.
- Everyone in the church should know this is the person to bring any suspicion of knowledge of abuse.

Objections to Reporting

- Will reporting cause the child to be harmed more by the vengeful parent or caregiver?
- Too often the Child Protection Center doesn’t help the situation.
- Will the parents remove their child from our program after we report?

Long Term Help is Needed

- Reporting is just the first step.
- Victims will suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They need professional help as well as support from others through prayer.
- If you hear of an abuse case, don’t express disbelief. Unfortunately, things like that do happen, even in our church.

- When any type of abuse occurs, the objective from that point on is restoration. This involves such components as confrontation, confession, repentance, personal counseling, marriage or family counseling, and accountability groups. The restoration process is not easy and it takes time. In not all cases is restoration possible or appropriate.

Ministry Magazine

“Another factor misinterprets the gospel mandate to forgive sinners. Thus, pastoral sexual misconduct is viewed more as a moral lapse than as a betrayal of professional trust. Of course, this ignores the Savior’s directive that those who harm little ones should be severely, even irretrievably, punished. Remember, sexual misconduct is seldom a need for a sexual relationship as much as it is an abuse of power and position.” —“Organizational Misconduct,” James A. Cress, September 2002, Ministry magazine.

Clergy Misconduct

“How do you make church leader misconduct in the congregation worse? By responding in the wrong ways. The problem of pastoral misconduct affects all denominations. The Presbyterian Church estimates that up to 23% of its clergy have at some time engaged in “inappropriate sexual behavior or inappropriate sexual contact.” In the year 2000, every Catholic Diocese in America except two had been hit with civil lawsuits involving sexual misconduct.

http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/quick_question29.html. Accessed 2/26/08.

Author Naomi Wolf was sexually harassed as an undergraduate at Yale University in the 1980’s. She has written about her years of struggle to determine what Yale has done to hold its faculty accountable. She concludes that, "If we see this as a systemic-corruption issue, then when people bring allegations, the focus will be on whether the institution has been damaged in its larger mission." She says, “The Catholic Church is a good example: The public understood that church leaders’ maintaining silence about systemic sexual transgressions corrupted the mission of an organization that had a great responsibility to society as a whole.” She says that “even the military is starting to understand that this type of sexual harassment of cadets corrupts its social mission.” So if the institution looks at how its mission is damaged when one of its leaders/employees/representative engages in abuse of power, it might be motivated to act when it recognized its self-interest and potential negative consequences it may face (legal, financial, public image, etc.) which can undercut its mission and indeed, its survival.

Information from Dr. Marie M. Fortune, Founder and Senior Analyst, Faith Trust Institute, in a promotional e-mail.

The Importance of Church Discipline

Most churches assume that they will never have a case of abuse and therefore have no plans as to how to take care of the problem. One of the most common ways of

dealing with a problem of abuse of power has been to sweep it under the rug. But dealing with the abuser is vitally important. Here are some texts to look at: “Discipline is not optional. It is mandatory in Scripture.”

“*Matthew 18:15-20* teaches that a sinner is to be confronted, reproved by one individual, if they refuse to listen, then bring two or three to talk to the sinner; and, if he refuses to repent, bring to the church, and he still refuses to listen and repent, then he should be excluded from the church.

“*Acts 5:1-11* illustrates the seriousness of sin within the church, the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit to sin, and the quick judgment of God upon sin.

<http://www.cotubic.org/ministers/Restoration/introduction.html>. Accessed 2/20/2008.

Redemptive Discipline

“These passages make it clear that God intends the church to take corrective measures when members persist in sinning.”

A Few Ellen White Statements Regarding the Abuse of Power:

“Many who profess to be the ministers of Christ are like the sons of Eli who ministered in the sacred office and took advantage of their office to engage in crime and commit adultery, causing the people to transgress the law of God. A fearful account will such have to render when the cases of all shall pass in review before God, and they be judged according to the deeds done in the body.... Adultery is one of the terrible sins of this age. This sin exists among professed Christians of every class...” —The Sin of Licentiousness, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (1989), 99.2.

“As God has shown me how abhorrent in His sight are these defiling sins, and as they are steadily increasing in our world and would intrude into our churches, I warn you to give no place to the devil. Fly from the seducer. Though a minister, he is Satan in the form of a man. He has borrowed the livery of heaven that he may serve his master and deceive souls.” —The Sin of Licentiousness, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (1989), 105.2.

Ellen White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, page 256

“The world has nearly filled up the measure of their iniquity, but that which will bring the heaviest retribution is the practice of iniquity under the cloak of godliness...” —

Biblical Command

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Proverbs 31:8-9

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress..."

James 1:27