

TALKING POINTS: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

CURRENT EVENTS

On Saturday, Nov. 5, Attorney General Linda Kelly announced that criminal charges have been filed against a former Penn State University coach along with two school officials as the result of a grand jury investigation into multiple reports of the child sexual abuse. In the report, former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky is charged with 40 counts related to child sexual abuse. Meanwhile, the university's Athletic Director Timothy M. Curley and Senior Vice President for Finance and Business Gary C. Schultz are charged with perjury and failure to report child sexual abuse allegations to authorities. Schultz has stepped down from his post and Curley has taken administrative leave amid the allegations. To view the report, visit <http://www.attorneygeneral.gov/press.aspx?id=6270>.

OUR VIEW

We believe that all children should be protected from acts of sexual abuse. Above the protection of the reputation of an individual or organization, adults who suspect child sexual abuse must be responsible for reporting to ChildLine (800-932-0313) or local law enforcement officials. If you aren't sure what to do and would like to talk to a specifically-trained sexual assault counselor you can contact the HERO Hotline at 1-877-874-HERO (4376).

ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is a violation of trust and power that can affect children of all ages, from birth to age 17. Abuse can be in many forms including sexual acts such as rape and other types of penetration, inappropriate touching, voyeurism, exhibitionism, pornography, child sexual exploitation and Internet-based child sexual abuse. Many victims don't talk about the abuse. Children feel confused when a person they know and trust violates them. Many people who sexually abuse children will manipulate or threaten the child in an attempt to keep their victim silent. Children want the abuse to stop, but fear what might happen if they report it.

STATISTICS

- Both boys and girls are vulnerable to the abuse. Research shows that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before they reach the age of 18. [1] Some research shows that as many as one in three girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age of 17 (Briere & Elliott, 2003).
- Most people who sexually abuse children are adults and are usually known by the child. (93% of victims know their perpetrator). Of those who sexually abuse children, nearly 77% are adults and 23% are juveniles. [2]
- Reports show 96% of people who sexually abused a child are male. [2]
- In 2010, there were 3,051 total sexual injuries to children in Pennsylvania, according to Department of Public Welfare's *2010 Annual Child Abuse Report*. This includes rapes, sexual assaults, statutory sexual assaults and sexual explicit conduct for visual depiction.
- Throughout Pennsylvania, 51 rape crisis centers provide service to nearly 8,000 children each year.

[1] Tjaden, P. and Thoennes, N. (2000). Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice. www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf

[2] Snyder, H. N. (2000) Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement: Victim, incident and offender characteristics (NCJ 182990). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Retrieved from Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/saycrle.pdf>

WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes the signs of abuse are obvious, but most often, they are not. Symptoms of child sexual abuse can include physical injuries, bedwetting, headaches, mood and emotional changes, inappropriate sexual behavior or increased talk about sexuality in an age-inappropriate way. However, most offenders try not to inflict obvious, physical injuries to avoid being detected.

HEALTH EFFECTS

The effects of child sexual abuse can affect the victim for many years and into adulthood. Several multi-decade studies have documented that people with child sexual abuse histories experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance use disorders, suicidal tendencies and chronic illness such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes than people who were not abused. Issues with trust, self esteem and emotional regulation can result in problems in interpersonal relationships. Additionally, high levels of anxiety in these adults can result in self-destructive behaviors. According to the American Psychological Association, many victims encounter problems in their adult relationships. The effects of abuse also impact educational attainment, job retention and earnings.

RESOURCES, HELP & PREVENTION

- **Education and resources:** Through education, people can more readily identify offender behaviors and be confident enough to report any suspicions they have to authorities. Visit www.nsvrc.org, www.pcar.org or www.heroproject.org for more information. Also, the ACE Study analyzes the relationship between categories of childhood trauma and health/behavioral outcomes later in life. Visit www.acestudy.org for more information on the study.
- **HERO Project:** Child sexual abuse is preventable and adults everywhere have a role to play in these efforts. Adults have the responsibility to report suspicions of child sexual abuse to law enforcement. If you aren't sure what to do and would like to talk to a specifically-trained sexual assault counselor you can contact the HERO Hotline at 1-877-874-HERO (4376). The HERO Hotline was launched statewide by PCAR to encourage adults in our communities to intervene and report suspicions of child sexual abuse. To learn more about the HERO project, visit www.heroproject.org.
- **Information packet:** April is child sexual abuse prevention month and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center released an information packet this year to coincide with the event. It's available online: <http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/child-sexual-abuse-prevention-information-packet>
- **Engaging bystanders:** Adults can talk about what they learn and instruct others how to intervene if they hear or see something that doesn't seem appropriate. This method is commonly called the "bystander approach" and engages everyone in prevention efforts.
- **Talk about it:** Parents, guardians and caregivers can foster open communication with children, establish personal boundaries, help children identify adults they can trust, monitor children's online usage and be role models by promoting healthy relationships.
- **Work together:** Adults can invite local rape crisis centers or child advocacy agencies to teach their churches or civic groups about prevention and encourage school districts to do the same.