

BEYOND
SURVIVING

SAFETY
PROGRAM

TOWARD A
MOVEMENT
TO PREVENT CHILD
SEXUAL ABUSE



1

PREFACE

3

TOWARD A MOVEMENT TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

6

OBSTACLES TO CREATING AN EFFECTIVE PREVENTION MOVEMENT

15

CREATING NEW PRACTICES

21

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

22

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

BEYOND SURVIVING:
TOWARD A MOVEMENT TO PREVENT
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

MISSION STATEMENT

The Ms. Foundation supports the efforts of women and girls to govern their own lives and influence the world around them. Through its leadership, expertise and financial support, the Foundation champions an equitable society by effecting change in public consciousness, law, philanthropy and social policy.

BELIEFS AND VALUES STATEMENT

Our work is guided by our vision of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class or sexual orientation. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person is valued.

PREFACE

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a problem that has remained hidden for too long. Many agree that it is one of, if not the most, taboo problems that we as a society choose to shun. The number of girls and boys who are sexually abused in this country perpetuates patterns of gendered abuse and violence. And when family, teachers, family friends, and religious leaders—the very relationships that should define trust, safety and nurturance—become violators, then safety at its core is removed.

The profound impact of this breaking of trust and safety cannot be underestimated. It can trigger disorder of the highest magnitude and dissolve fundamental building blocks for social interactions and relationships. We are only beginning to understand how the lifelong effects of CSA and our inability as a culture to stem the tide or treat the offenders impacts not only individual development, but also our understanding and approaches to creating safe communities.

The Ms. Foundation for Women is deeply concerned about child sexual abuse and, in March 2002, convened a roundtable discussion on this topic. With a group of 27 activists and professionals working in a variety of venues, Ms. Foundation staff guided a discussion on what it would take to build a grassroots movement to end child sexual abuse. Inspired by the strength, resilience, and creativity of survivors, we envisioned a broad-based prevention movement that goes beyond surviving to creating a safe and supportive world for all children. Through grantmaking, the Foundation is committed to supporting grassroots prevention and organizing strategies that offer a new vision of family and community, building safety for children at the core of a nurturing environment.

At this meeting, we asked, “What would grassroots activism to end this form of abuse look like?” We also began to explore ideas for how society can talk about and respond to CSA differently and more effectively. We talked about barriers to shifting our social paradigm and changing institutions to engage survivors and diverse communities at the center of the work to end child sexual abuse. We struggled with the gendered implications of CSA and how communities can protect children, help build healthy families, and hold those responsible more accountable.

It is important to note that this meeting came in the midst of widespread allegations of sexual abuse by priests in Catholic churches across the country. With the steady flood of new allegations each week, we may well be looking at a watershed moment for this issue. Yet, public attention has focused on the Catholic church and has yet to address the impact that child sexual abuse has on its survivors, or the many ways in which society has closed its eyes to this issue. There has been little acknowledgement of the many other venues where sexual assault is experienced by young people and not enough exploration

of the parish community's complicity in keeping the secret and silence.

We realized in convening this meeting that a broad-based movement to end child sexual abuse is a long way off. There is certainly much work that has, and is, taking place to address the issue in a variety of forms and venues, ranging from therapeutic interventions for survivors to treatment programs for sexual offenders; child welfare advocacy and services to legislation that punishes offenders; school-based prevention to public education campaigns; and parenting education to survivor activism. Yet, there is little communication among those who are doing pieces of this work; many who work on this issue comment that they are not even aware of all that goes on. Without even the awareness, it is impossible to develop a network or to coordinate efforts. The issue of child sexual abuse does not fall squarely into its own "category," but is often addressed at the periphery of other issues such as child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other related issues. As such, to talk about a broad-based, grassroots movement to end child sexual abuse is premature. And yet, we must find a way to begin.

We believe such a movement is possible. While there is much to be done, many organizations and individuals

have been strong voices in their communities, raising awareness of the issue and developing long-term solutions. Both for this meeting and for their contributions to the wider agenda, we acknowledge the difficult and creative work that is going on in a variety of forms.

With so little work that addresses community activism, the Ms. Foundation has created this report to provide a starting point for the work ahead. This document offers a place to begin broader discussion around CSA and understand the complexities of the issue, creating a place from which we can begin to take ownership as a society and responsibility for changing those conditions from which CSA arises.

In the attempt to begin this "ownership," the word "we" is intentionally inserted into this document in place of "society."

With significant input from the meeting, this report outlines barriers to addressing child sexual abuse on a grassroots level and describes beginning ideas for moving this work forward to its next step. It is not a meeting summary, nor is it a comprehensive paper on the issues surrounding child sexual abuse. We offer this document as a way to launch public ownership and discussion that will move us toward long-term solutions to end child sexual abuse.

BEYOND SURVIVING: TOWARD A MOVEMENT TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The statistics are staggering: Over 300,000 children are abused in the United States each year; approximately one in three adult women and one in six men were sexually abused as children. Some researchers estimate even higher numbers for women. The effects, scientifically documented and anecdotally related, are cyclical, chronic, debilitating, and sometimes fatal. Suicide attempts, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, self-mutilation, substance abuse, recurrent victimization, eating disorders, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal illness, abusive sexual and intimate relationships, increased risk of imprisonment, increased likelihood to be involved with sex work: these are some of the outcomes of denied, unaddressed child sexual abuse. Insidious and soul wounding, the pain does not end with the physical experience. Instead, it leaves an indelible emotional and neurological imprint.

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Despite the startling facts about child sexual abuse, this

country has yet to sustain a movement to prevent it. Why? Given the nature of the abuse itself, the profound health effects, and the overwhelming numbers of individuals who have been affected, where is the public outrage? In an age when health activism has reached an all-time high and new understandings of how social factors are intrinsically linked to health outcomes

emerge every year, where is the national movement to understand child sexual abuse? And where is the movement to prevent it?

Child sexual abuse is not new. Western chroniclers cite a “modern” history that dates back to the eighteenth century, when the Old Bailey in London documented 25 percent of their capital rape prosecutions involving children under age 10. Jean-Martin Charcot began studying “hysteria” in female asylum patients in Paris in the 1870s, laying the groundwork for Sigmund Freud to publish *The Aetiology of Hysteria* in 1896, the thesis that documented the abuse of girls and the epidemic born out of its effects. Entire families can attest to the intergenerational abuse carried over from year to year, an unspoken genealogical truth. Yet, despite its prevalence throughout history, child sexual abuse has been plagued with what Judith Lewis Herman dubbed, “episodic amnesia.”¹ Much like the effects of trauma itself, child sexual abuse has a legacy where “periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of oblivion.”

In this vein, for the last 30 years in the United States, child sexual abuse has sporadically registered on the map of social and health-related concerns. In the 1970s child sexual abuse was publicly examined for the first time within both a political context and in service provision. Activists and advocates began to frame the problem in terms of power dynamics, linking

¹ Judith Lewis Herman wrote the landmark book on psychological trauma entitled, *Trauma and Recovery: the aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*, published in 1992.

the causes and effects of social oppression and violence against women with the understanding that child sexual abuse is not about the failings of individuals and individual families, but part of a larger fabric of power-

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lessness and oppression. "Victims" of abuse began to recognize the healing properties of empowerment and "survivors" began to emerge. Still, though, a movement to prevent child sexual abuse was not sustained.

Mainstream knowledge and recognition of child sexual abuse came out in the 1980s. Survivors' voices grew even stronger, and providing adult survivors with a safe space to speak out and heal moved the issue forward. Rigorous studies of the effects of such abuse started appearing and the need for therapy and treatment was granted legitimacy. What was examined in the context of power dynamics in the 1970s was now less regarded as a social systems issue than an individual treatment concern. Therapy, however, was not a multicultural outlet. Because of limited access and differences in cultural perceptions of therapy, white, middle- to upper-income women tended to seek therapy more than women of color, men or men and women who had low incomes or were poor. As a result, some professionals note, child sexual abuse was erroneously pigeonholed as a "white woman's" issue.

While therapy and treatment gained momentum, heightened media attention framed child sexual abuse as a public safety hazard where strange men lurked in parks and playgrounds. The "stranger danger" approach to prevention efforts

focused on developing curricula to teach children how to both identify and protect themselves against abuse from strangers. This conception of primary prevention left children in charge of protecting themselves and ignored the much larger problem of abuse within the family and those close to them.

The 1990s witnessed a backlash against survivors and a significant stall in building a comprehensive prevention movement. Despite increasing numbers of studies, research and advances in clinical practice, the experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse were challenged, most markedly by the False Memory Foundation, an organization created and supported primarily by individuals accused of abuse. The False Memory Foundation launched a highly publicized campaign claiming that the memories of childhood abuse that surfaced through ther-

<p>Child sexual abuse is sexual activity with a child by an adult, an adolescent or older child. When any adult engages in sexual activity with a child, that is child sexual abuse. It is a crime in all 50 states. When sexual activity involves another child or an adolescent it is not always so clear. Some kinds of sexual behavior among children might be innocent explorations rather than abuse.</p> <p>Child sexual abuse includes touching and non-touching behaviors.</p>	
TOUCHING	Touching a child's genitals (penis, testicles, vulva, breasts, or anus) for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary reason
	Making a child touch someone else's genitals, or playing sexual ("pants-down") games
	Putting objects or body parts (like fingers, tongue, or penis) inside the vulva or vagina, in the mouth, or in the anus of a child for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary reason
NON-TOUCHING	Showing pornography to a child
	Exposing a person's genitals to a child
	Photographing a child in sexual poses
	Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts either in person or on a video
	Watching a child undress or use the bathroom, often without the child's knowledge (known as voyeurism or being a "Peeping Tom")
<p><i>Reprinted with permission from STOP IT NOW!'s Guide Book, Child Sexual Abuse: Facts About Abuse and Those Who Might Commit It.</i></p>	

apy were suggested, implanted, and therefore false. These allegations cast public skepticism and doubt about survivors' experiences. At about the same time, public outrage over the death of Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old girl who was raped and killed by her neighbor, a convicted sex offender, in New Jersey spurred the passage of "Megan's Law." This law established a registry of convicted and released child sexual offenders that is available to the public. Other states and the federal government followed suit. While some professionals saw this as a necessary step in holding abusers accountable, many convicted abusers were released back into society without treatment, leaving others to feel that Megan's Law pushed abusers back into hiding and made them even less likely to ask for help.

The complexities of child sexual abuse and the realities of those who abuse have been obscured by sensationalism and reactive politics. Institutional responses to

Child sexual abuse is a broad, deeply rooted, cross-cultural, cross-economic epidemic that requires dramatic shifts in the way we envision children, family, social responsibility, power relationships and dynamics, sexuality and sex education, and systematized oppression.

child sexual abuse over the last 30 years have assembled a piecemeal system of reactive approaches rather than well-conceived, proactive, and preventive ones. Even when policies have been well meaning and intended to protect, they have had little effect on the landscape that created the problem in the first place.

What has emerged is a quietly growing realization that child sexual abuse is not just about individuals or individual families. It requires more than individual healing for survivors and punitive measures for abusers. Child sexual abuse is a broad, deeply rooted, cross-cultural, cross-economic epidemic that requires dramatic shifts in the way we envision children, family, social responsibility, power relationships and dynamics, sexuality and sex education, and systematized oppression. It is a problem found in every community. But despite the intense efforts of survivors, practitioners, service providers, activists, and advocates to

address the trauma of child sexual abuse, a cohesive, broad-based movement to prevent child sexual abuse has yet to coalesce.

OBSTACLES TO CREATING AN EFFECTIVE PREVENTION MOVEMENT

Too Much To See

How is it possible that so many children are sexually abused each year and yet the average person on the street has no knowledge of this?

How can there be such a drastic social divide between the information we have and what we are willing to acknowledge about child sexual abuse (CSA)? And if this has been going on for so long, if it is so pervasive, why are we so unwilling or incapable of seeing it? There are many complicated and interrelated reasons that we will discuss in the body of this document. But, according to one veteran, “Because it is too much,” seems to sum up at least part of it.

“We need to recognize that this a form of social conditioning in our society. When we’re talking about the kinds of numbers and percentages we’re talking about, this is not an ‘abnorm,’ this is a norm.” -Valerie Heller, Forensic Psychologist*

■ *Social paralysis.* The very enormity and complexity of child sexual abuse makes it difficult for people to address. Like a deer caught in headlights, there is a social paralysis that catches and stops people when they hear about or are being confronted with child sexual abuse. There are intense emotions to contend with (e.g., horror, sorrow, rage, despair) and too much of a reality or consciousness shift to bear. In interviews conducted by the Ms. Foundation, most agree that this response is symptomatic of a

society where so many members have themselves experienced unresolved and denied CSA.

■ *Shock, disbelief, denial.* For those who have not experienced CSA directly, it may be the terrible nature of the act(s) that is hard to digest. Shock, disbelief and denial are the responses of people who find it too hard to understand or cope with. Interviewees also say that CSA is woven so thoroughly into the fabric of our society that to see it means to recognize not only the nature of the abuse, but to acknowledge how extensively it has been tolerated. Judith Lewis Herman talks about coming “face to face ... with the capacity for evil in human nature.”

■ *Seeing it everywhere around you.* To fully recognize the possibility of CSA means breaking through a thick cloak of denial. It means seeing it in your family, your friends, your neighbors, and your community. It means the possibility of seeing your own history, or experiencing the vicarious trauma of those it has affected. Sometimes it means recognizing that it has occurred to your own child or a child with whom you are close. For many, this is too much to see.

■ *Secrecy, shame, stigma.* This is a triad of forces that operates simultaneously, both on a personal and social level, feeding and providing justification for

* All quotes are taken from the interviews.

each other. Secrecy begets shame begets stigma begets secrecy. Survivors report that part of what enables abuse is the ability to manipulate a child into secrecy. The secret is reinforced by the shame the child experiences and that follows the child throughout his or her life. The dynamics of shame and secrecy, and powerlessness and fear, are deeply instilled in the child, making it profoundly difficult for survivors to disclose CSA both at the time of abuse and throughout their lives. In addition, child sexual abusers are among the most stigmatized individuals in our society. They are publicly despised and ill-tolerated. This stigmatization does not allow potential and actual abusers appropriate outlets to reveal their abusive behavior and seek help. Their stigmatization feeds their shame, enforces their secrecy and undermines prevention efforts. The social reaction to stigma, shame, and secrecy is to further stigmatize, shame, and keep in secret. Silence is enforced by the abuser and maintained by society.

The Silence: A Lack of Dialogue, Education, and Information

The silence is deafening. Compounding the shame and secrecy felt by survivors and abusers is a blanket of silence over public dialogue. For a problem of such epidemic proportions, the lack of public dialogue is striking and truly profound because child sexual abuse is shrouded in secrecy and we lack a common language with which to address it. The silence created becomes its own language. In the absence of social knowledge, myths and ignorance abound, pervading the media and popular opinion. We need increased public dialogue; a language with which to address sex, sexuality, and abuse; and basic information and education about who is affected and how frequently CSA occurs.

■ *Language.* We do not have a common language for abuse. Survivors, abusers, family members, and loved ones don't know how to translate the feelings before or after abuse occurs. Survivors do not always describe the experience as abuse and therefore do not identify with programs that define it as such. The lack of language does not adequately frame our understanding of the complexities involved. It tends

to paralyze us, make it difficult to identify what is happening, disarm our ability to communicate pain and confusion, and prevent abuse from happening again.

■ *Sex and sexuality.* At the base of our silence is the social discomfort around sex and sexuality, making discussing even healthy sexual behaviors extremely difficult. Maladaptive sexual behaviors and violence are hard to address because we lack the basic skills to name and identify the nuances of sex and sexuality, both healthy and unhealthy. Our persistent inability to address sex and sexuality in a realistic, positive, or even neutral manner supports and enforces shame and secrecy around sexual behaviors. The limited availability of comprehensive sexuality education leaves many young survivors to learn about sexuality from their abusers with a blurred distinction between healthy sexuality and sexual abuse.

■ *Stranger danger.* In the absence of realistic and educated dialogue about CSA, the most prevalent myth is that of the stranger lurking in the park or on the street corner. This serves to mask and minimize the reality that abuse occurs most often with someone the child knows and denies the experience of the majority of survivors. It can lead to irrational fear instead of providing useful information for prevention and intervention.

■ *Sensationalized media.* Media sensationalizes and legitimizes mythology around abusers: that they are a demonic breed of men rather than the women and men we know in our communities. Media highlights "stranger danger" instead of reporting on the full reality of CSA. The lack of positive images, in contrast to unhealthy and violent sexual images, limits discourse on child sexual abuse.

■ *Unequal information distribution.* When good information is available either through the media or through the efforts of advocates, healers, educators, and/or activists, it is not equally available in all communities. Many brochures and other types of public education are typically available only in English, and even where translated, do not easily cross a cultural

divide. In addition, written information should be viewed as only one part of a larger solution to address child sexual abuse.

The Family and Community

Our families and communities are our most basic building blocks for all relationships throughout our lives. As children, we learn and grow in our families—no matter what their size and biologic relation—no matter how well or badly they function. And our family units are situated within communities upon which we rely and draw heavily. Insidiously, most abuse of children happens within this intimate sphere, by trusted and loved family or community members. Because of the sacredness of family and its relationship to community, CSA is wrapped tightly around issues of love, loyalty, responsibility, and betrayal. How do we deal with this in our families, our communities, and the institutions that are situated in these settings? We tend to look outward and blame, or inward and deny. When we do respond, we apply punitive measures that are neither uniformly just, nor respectful and supportive of the family where the abuse has occurred. We have yet to accept the full responsibility for CSA as a society—as parents, family, neighbors, friends, community members, and leaders.

- *The family is sacred.* The family is considered a sacred entity in our society with unquestioned rights to privacy. There is little accountability outside the family for actions that take place within the home, as outsiders are not accorded a role in family matters. Neighbors feel compelled to keep to themselves their suspicions of the child sexual abuse going on in the family down the street. Family and friends even wonder if it is any of their business that things seem a little strange between the child and his or her relatives.
- *My family is sacred.* Within the family where abuse is occurring, the pressure is strong to keep silent. Keep the family secret. Don't disobey the rules or break loyalty. To speak up means to disavow the family, to turn away. To talk to friends or neighbors is to betray the pact and air family secrets in public. To tell

someone is to risk not being believed, getting in trouble and getting the family into trouble. It is none of anyone else's business.

- *My community is sacred.* In some immigrant communities, communities of color, or small towns, the sense of community as an extension of the family is compounded and may be so strong that identifying sexual abuse would be akin to family betrayal. When communities have been confronted with multiple issues such as racism and poverty, and where interactions with "systems" have yielded poor results, there is no desire to further interact with these systems.
- *Focusing on the "atypical" family.* A heterosexual two-parent family is still considered "normal" and is automatically given the right to privacy. Other family configurations invite greater scrutiny and disapproval from outside. While sexual abuse occurs in all kinds of families, it is easier to hide when fewer people are scrutinizing.
- *Power and control.* Within the heterosexual "nuclear" family structure, there is often a hierarchy of power. The father is at the top, the mother in the middle and children at the bottom. Fathers reign supreme over other family members, with exclusive rights and power to do as they please. This dynamic exacerbates abuse and the powerlessness of abused children.
- *Children have no rights.* Children have little control over their own destinies, with few rights outside of those granted by their parents. In situations where the father sexually abuses his children, the father may not feel a sense of wrongdoing because of his "entitlement" over his children, and the children are powerless to go against the power structure within the family.
- *The intergenerational impact.* For some families, abuse has carried on for so long in the family, it is considered the norm. Learning, development, and coping systems within the family are often created to accommodate it.

- *Limited systems of response.* Most incidents of CSA are not reported to authorities. When they are, the system (child welfare and/or criminal justice) either responds by incarcerating the abuser, removing children from the family, or both. These systems are not geared toward allowing the family to stay together or even to address healing for the family as a unit. Healing is focused on individuals (either abuser or abused child) rather than engaging the family and community as a whole. The systems act upon individual weaknesses rather than seeking to build family and community strengths.
- *Additional impact on marginalized families.* Not all families are treated equally. Poor, marginalized fami-

In New York City, all cases of child abuse and neglect are opened in the mother's name, regardless of her involvement in the abuse.

lies are exponentially more likely to live under the thumb of public institutions. In communities where incarceration is high, threat of incarceration as a result of speaking about CSA within the family is greater. In these settings, children are more likely to be removed from family. For immigrants, deportation is a threat. The risks are far greater than for other families.

- *Punishing the non-abusing parent.* Non-abusing parents, typically the mother, have a difficult role, especially in cases of incest. Society holds mothers or female care-givers accountable for family life. Mothers are often charged with neglect for “allowing” their children to be abused. They are often caught in a “no-win” limbo, straddling the love, loyalty, and dependency on their partners with the love, loyalty, and responsibility to protect their children. Often, the non-abusing parent is accused or blamed for being complicitous in the abuse.
- *When the mother is abused.* Negotiating the different relationships with the abusive partner and the abused child is even more complicated when the mother or caregiver is abused herself. The range of complicating emotions—shame, secrecy, fear, sense of power-

lessness, etc.—can virtually paralyze battered partners, making them appear complicitous. Even under these circumstances, mothers are held accountable for the actions of their abusers. Within the child welfare system, responsibility means holding mothers culpable for the well-being of their children.

- *Institutionalized denial and tolerance.* Community institutions are products of our society. The same individuals who are neighbors and community members are part of these institutions. Schools, faith-based institutions, medical establishments, and other community institutions that do not respond openly and responsibly to allegations of child sexual abuse condone such behavior through silence and create a culture of acceptability. Many institutions appear more concerned with liability than with human interest and social responsibility.

- *Responsibility.* Whose responsibility is it to prevent CSA? Often, responsibility to disclose has been placed heavily on the child being abused. We need a shift in responsibility from the child to adults in the home, community, school, or other institution.

Demonizing and Incarcerating the Abuser

Society characterizes abusers as aberrant forces outside of our social environment. The aggressive response is to put them in prison. It is the public's misconception that they are imprisoned forever, safe from society and therefore forgotten. Despite growing recognition of the need for treatment programs and options, it is punitive laws and sentencing that have been pursued with the most regularity and developed most extensively. But what happens if the people we are calling evil, sick, and depraved are our fathers, mothers, uncles, pastors, teachers, and others we love and respect? Incarceration does not mend a broken family and it does not change behavior. Although opinions about incarceration of the abuser vary, participants at this roundtable agreed that it does not change the expansive landscape of child sexual abuse. We need to develop a system of accountability and new ways to change behavior.

- *Keeps abusers underground.* Abusers who may want to seek help may stay underground for fear of being locked up, unworthy of treatment, or simply untreatable.
- *Oversimplifies a complex relationship.* Demonizing the abuser does not recognize the complex relationship between abuser and survivor. Survivors often have mixed feelings and confusion about their abusers. Hate, love, anger, pity—survivors may feel many emotions. Many survivors may not initially experience abuse as “abuse.”
- *Undermines abuse.* Often abusers have been abused themselves. Dismissing abusers as evil and sick fails to recognize and prevent subsequent effects. Adolescent abusers who have themselves been

“Sexual trauma is not always one of violence. Many times it's perceived by the survivor as loving or gentle. I know a family where all four children were abused by the same uncle. He was their father figure. He took care of each one of them. And he had sex with each one. We could say that it's violence, but those kids would not report their experience as violent.” *James Cassese, Psychotherapist, Author*

abused need additional help as both victim and perpetrator, but often receive none. It also limits the knowledge to be gained from abusers, such as when history of abuse leads to perpetration and when it does not.

- *Limited effect.* While it may hold abusers accountable to society (not necessarily to the survivor), incarceration does not change the conditions that create the abuse. Likewise, incarceration without treatment does not stop the abuser from abusing again. Incarceration does not change the behavior; it may just put it on hold or exacerbate the behavior.
- *Limited return.* Despite the fact that incarceration is vigorously pursued, few abusers are actually reported, convicted or incarcerated. The majority of abusers are never identified and therefore never treated or held accountable.

- *Disincentive for families.* Families concerned about incarceration are less likely to report abuse. Few family members want their father, uncle, mother, or other relative sent to jail. The threat of incarceration serves as a deterrent to confronting the truth. More holistic measures are needed to work with and treat the family.

Power

Child sexual abuse is the result of a profound violation of power. The abuser holds the power and the abused child is disempowered; the imbalance is what marks abuse. In fact, the imbalance of power is what abusers expect and rely on. Power, among other things, is what the abuser is seeking. But what creates this dynamic? What makes this hunger for power and the imbalance so enticing—how much is pathological and how much is based on

social construction? And what happens in a society that continues to feed the importance and imbalance of power?

Abusers are products of our families and our communities. It would be easy to dismiss a few people as aberrant forces, but

there are many. As a society we are clearly creating the right kind of environment for abuse to occur. If we weren't, would it be so pervasive? How, then, are we creating abuse?

This country is no stranger to power imbalances. Though we have come far, we have yet to fully address racism, homophobia, and sexism. These forces are deeply ingrained in our social psyches, our individual consciences. What is the relationship of these power disparities to the sexual abuse of children? What part does oppression play in the creation of this problem? As meeting participants demonstrated so persuasively, these connections must be examined in a movement to prevent child sexual abuse.

And then, how would we as a movement to end child sexual abuse not recreate the same kind of oppression that we seek to unravel? How do we empower survivors without disempowering their abusers, yet still

demand accountability and restitution? How do we help abusers, because we know that disempowering abusers lays the groundwork for more abuse? How do we empower communities around this issue who are already disempowered in many other ways? In these questions and their debate is where our hopes for moving forward lay.

- *Promoting authentic power.* If all people in power understood and felt a sense of their own power, we might change the landscape of abuse. From the roles that we play as parents, caregivers, and guardians to the larger constructs of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, we must understand the power we hold and have a true sense of ourselves as individuals.
- *Language is power.* The power inherent in the relationship and the physical interaction involved in abuse is the ability to name the event. Language holds great power. Often the abuser holds the power to name what happened because of the age of the abused child—to call the abuse love, a secret, or sex. This language creates the framework of understanding for the child. These definitions have a lasting effect on how young survivors define or understand the abuse.
- *Speaking is power.* Those whose voices are heard have power. Children's voices are not heard or questioned; survivor's voices are not heard. In many

“Institutions are not talking about child rights, social justice or how the sexual abuse of children is connected to other social issues. To truly impact child sexual abuse, we need to address these inter connections, and incorporate offenders and silent-by-standers in the solution.” *Staci Haines, Founder and Executive Director, Generation Five*

communities, women are socialized to be quiet, to not speak up, and their voices are not heard. The squeaky wheel gets the grease: we give power to people who speak up. For an issue that experiences such silence, for people who have been silenced, breaking through to this understanding and reframing what “speaking” means is essential.

- *Challenging authority.* To name child sexual abuse is to challenge authority on a profound level. Girls are especially socialized to defer to authority while boys are socialized to be authorities. Disclosing abuse is difficult for each in his or her own way.
- *Shift the power to children.* Adults have more power than children. To appropriately shift and acknowledge the rights of children would change this imbalance.
- *Lateral power.* Power is not just hierarchical; it can also be lateral. CSA also occurs among children of the same age and gender—with some children holding more power according to the “group” with whom they associate. For example, the star athlete holds power over the quiet smart kid. This kind of power can be abused. Likewise, boys who are perceived to be less masculine are more likely to be targeted for abuse. All children must be taught to respect others and have compassion.
- *The power irony.* Men, particularly white middle- and upper-class men, are both given, and assumed to have, the most power. Yet men who abuse often report feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy. When they abuse, they are acting with power, but they don't necessarily see that they have the power. How men are socialized around power plays a significant role in CSA.
- *Exporting abuse.* Men from the U.S. and European countries are often the “clients” in an under ground economy that preys on young children and women in developing countries. With an imbalanced economic world order, few restrictions are in place to prevent this form of abuse.
- *Economic disempowerment.* Access to protection, detection, and recovery services is not distributed equally. Some children have more protection: after-school care, better child care, and no languager

barrier. Children who are economically disempowered and do not have access to these kinds of protections are more likely to be put in circumstances of abuse. Equal distribution of protective services would change this.

- *Structural power.* There are different kinds of power, some of which are active—the power you take or earn—and some of which are inactive, based on what community you were born in. While structural power is not active, it exists. A priest in a church has structural power, a gay father does not. People respond differently to structural power, and our ability to protect our children is affected greatly.

Gender

In understanding the challenges to preventing child sexual abuse, we need to more closely consider gender and its role in creating, enabling, or responding to abuse. For anyone closely involved with CSA, there is no question that gender impacts abuse and its outcomes. But there is no unanimous opinion about the degree to which the sexual abuse of children is driven by gender or the ways it relates to other characteristics of power—such as age, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation.

Many will assert with confidence that CSA has its roots in the power that men have over women, a deeply embedded response to patriarchy. Others discern that power comes in many forms—people are empowered or disempowered related to the “group” with which they identify, such as gender. One thing is clear: with CSA, there can be no assumptions or givens. The “analyses” and designs that have fit other movements are not a perfect fit for CSA. The steps we take to prevent it must be informed by what we know and what we have learned in other movements. And, significantly, as we move through complicated and enlightened discussions about the role of gender, we must not forget that our goal is to prevent all abuse for all children, whether they are boys or girls, whether perpetrated by a man, woman, or another child. Yet, this does not mean that we should move to a gender-neutral analysis. As we explore the gendered nature of abuse and its dynamics,

we seek a fuller understanding beyond what it means to be male and female to reach what “human” looks like.

- *Narrow, gendered “definitions.”* When CSA is not being sensationalized as “stranger danger,” it is largely defined as male to female abuse and stereotyped as father to daughter incest. This is true even among organizers, activists, advocates, and professionals in the field. People think they “know” what to expect based on gender and gender roles and therefore what to look out for. A mother, for example, will assume that because her child’s babysitter is a girl, nothing could be happening, even in the face of contrary evidence. False definitions make for a false sense of security. While father to daughter incest and male to female abuse is a significant aspect of child sexual abuse, a wide range of other abuse occurs. The abuse of boys is especially under-recognized, as is the abuse of children by women and other children. Narrow definitions of CSA hinder our ability to truly understand sexual violation in all of its complexity and to prevent it.
- *Fathers “teaching” daughters.* In some communities, fathers view the abuse of their daughters not as abuse, but rather as “teaching” them about sex and preparing them for their adult relationships.
- *Girls vs. boys.* Meeting participants agree that available statistics show that girls are abused more frequently than boys. However, most available research on child sexual abuse has centered on the abuse of girls. The research that exists on boys shows that boys tend to report differently, more readily choosing to deny their abuse or to act like they liked it. This suggests that more boys are abused than we know. More research must be done to get an accurate picture of the abuse of boys.
- *Abuse outside the box.* For survivors with experiences outside of the “expected” experience, understanding, discussing, and coming to terms with the abuse is much more difficult. A woman abused as a child by another woman, for example, will be less likely to understand the experience for what it was because it falls out of the “typical” experience.

- *Heterosexist/homophobic assumptions.* The existing assumptions and narrow definitions of CSA are heterosexist and serve to further complicate and stigmatize same-sex abuse. For gay/lesbian adult survivors, this is especially problematic. As the controversy regarding Catholic priests abusing boys currently shows, the abuse of boys by men is often framed as a homosexual issue, not one of abuse. While some abusers may be homosexual, the assumption that the abuse occurs because of that fails to understand the issues inherent in the abuse of power. As well, for both gay men and lesbian survivors, there is often an assumption that early abuse “caused” their sexuality—a heterosexist assumption that views homosexuality as aberrant.
- *Disrupting the foundation of our beliefs.* People don’t want to acknowledge the abuse of boys because it would upset the way things are supposed to be. Where the abuse of girls is known and “accepted,” the abuse of boys would dismantle our assumptions of safety. If there is the possibility of abuse among boys, our entire value system is called into question.
- *Where are the men?* While there has been a significant lack of public dialogue around preventing CSA, even more marked is the lack of dialogue specifically among men. As abusers, men choose to keep out of the conversations for fear of being caught. As non-abusers, men choose to stay out of the mix fearing they will be identified with abuse. In addition, our society does not provide an adequate role for men in the lives of children. Beyond the assumptions that men should provide monetary support, our traditions seek to keep men away from children and the responsibility for their care.

Professional Limitations

Social and cultural obstacles create limitations for individuals and service providers who would otherwise seek to prevent CSA.

- *Funding constraints.* Most funding has been allocated for child protective services and legal systems. Smaller amounts have gone towards a limited focus on individual treatment for survivors, and even less so for abusers. Little is available for prevention-related activities and for non-service providers. As well, because of the stigma and perceived hopelessness surrounding child sexual abuse, direct funding is limited. Narrow funding guidelines make it difficult to include this topic in funding portfolios.
- *Limited training and professional knowledge.* Just as with the general population, professionals who may be in a position to deal with or identify CSA may lack understanding about its prevalence, related issues, and how to handle situations where either allegations or suspicions arise. Few academic institutions or curricula include sexual trauma coursework, even for professionals working directly with children. Professionals who are not trained are less likely to speak out. Without knowledge, fear of ramifications and liability become intensified.
- *Missed symptoms.* Because of a lack of training, medical institutions, schools, and other settings often do not properly identify children presenting with signs and symptoms of sexual abuse. In addition, many professionals may not choose to identify the problem without a prescribed course of action or solution to offer.
- *Product of the environment.* Professionals experience the same social responses—shock, denial, desire to maintain the status quo, inability to take action based on one’s own history and the like—that exist in the mainstream.
- *Professional stigma.* Some professionals fear the stigma and emotional difficulty attached to CSA, making them less likely to pursue study of or disclose their professional involvement on this topic. Child sexual abuse is not seen as a distinct field, even though many professionals work on related issues. There are few linkages across fields, making it difficult to connect with others. Those who are working directly on child sexual abuse need more tools to advance their work.
- *Falling between the cracks.* Child sexual abuse often sits peripherally in many different venues, but does not

sit neatly into any one area. Venues that deal with child abuse, domestic violence, or sexual assault all acknowledge child sexual abuse as one piece of their work, but do not explicitly or regularly incorporate it. While there was no consensus as to whether child sexual abuse should become a separate “specialty,” roundtable participants agreed that child sexual abuse often falls between the cracks.

- *No community role.* Despite the many service agencies that exist in communities across the country, the family as a unit is not easy to access, and certainly not on this topic. In seeking solutions, we must forgo the tendency to rely primarily on professional responses and instead support community leaders who want to speak out and find solutions to CSA.

CREATING NEW PRACTICES: SHIFTING, RE-FOCUSING, AND MOVING FORWARD

Since child sexual abuse is more widespread than we think, there are countless individuals, organizations, and institutions that are connected, or peripherally connected, with the issue. Some are more focused on CSA than others and use a wide array of approaches. The following is just a sample of the range of responses addressing child sexual abuse:

- Academic research
- Child abuse prevention programs
- Child welfare programs
- Children’s health and medical projects
- Domestic violence and family violence programs
- Prevention programs
- Federal, state and city child protective services
- Legal, criminal justice, corrections, and law enforcement policies
- Mental health and social work programs
- Offender treatment programs and facilities
- Public health programs
- Survivor organizations and self-help groups
- Psychotherapy
- Healing techniques
- Bodywork
- Human rights and social justice programs
- School-based programs
- Parenting programs and organizations
- College campus activism
- Media

Still, with all the work to confront child sexual abuse, many activists and professionals feel that the ways we think about CSA and the current systems to address it do not properly consider or offer ways to prevent it. New information has not led to new behaviors or practices. To catalyze a prevention movement, we

need to shift and re-focus our understanding of what CSA is, how it is understood, and how society and the family perpetuate it.

Essential to shifting and re-thinking our notions of CSA are the ways that we address the diversity of experience and culture in our country. We have learned from past movements that we cannot assume that the same perspective works for all communities. Too often, the only perspective is that of a white, more privileged community—one that represents only a slice of the full picture. Children abused in this country are not monolithic, nor are their abusers, families, and communities. The actions we take to address CSA in a Mexican-American community in Texas will be different than the actions we take in an African-American community in Chicago or within a white family living in Appalachia. Yet, the basic tenets of CSA—the sexual abuse of children by a person who has power over them—and our need to prevent it will be the same. Since the root of child sexual abuse is the abuse of power, other power dynamics such as race and class must be considered.

A broad-based, national movement to prevent child sexual abuse must be multi-layered, multi-cultural and must inspire efforts on many different levels—from grassroots to legislative action. We have a long way to go before we can even call it a movement. What follows in the next several pages are some ideas generated at the meeting. While not fully developed, they provide a place to start thinking creatively about what might be possible.

Educating and Recognizing the “Sacredness of Community, of Self, and of Children”

When we splinter into factions, when we divide over power, we perpetuate abuse. By looking at our differences and acknowledging where we stand in relation to gender, race, culture, economic status, sexual orientation, and all the ways that we are divided along power, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of CSA and how to prevent it. And we come to understand that so long as our boys and girls are hurting, so long as our families and communities are abusing, we are equal in our denial.

New visions for community and family response and engagement are necessary to address child sexual abuse. The vision must begin with community strengths rather than deficits. A shift must occur in how families interact with, and within, the community at large and vice versa. Education around CSA requires much more than providing information. It involves modeling appropriate behavior and coming up with new language around sex and sexuality. It means involving parents in open and honest discussions, and engaging “intimate networks” to challenge and support old notions and create new ones. We also need systems of responding once abuse occurs that do not simultaneously destroy the family or community.

“Sacredness of community, of self and of our children... this makes us equal. We all hurt [when] our boys and girls hurt.” *Corrine Sanchez, CORE member, TEWA Women United*

- *Communal spirit.* Community involvement is less about creating more punitive measures for abusers (like Megan’s Law) and more about strengthening the connections between people, breaking down the silence and secrecy that enables abuse and providing more support and better communication for individuals and families who need help. We need to find ways to leverage community empowerment rather than community destruction, and envision what community safe space would look like.
- *Influencing relationships.* Change can happen on an individual level by focusing on “intimate networks,” the friends and confidantes who often know what is occurring in the lives of family and friends. We need to provide tools for them to intervene proactively.
- *“Basic” education.* To prevent it, we must know what it is. Education requires laying a foundation to understand that sexual abuse goes beyond the physical act. It is more than simply describing “good and bad” touches. CSA is the result of many different factors and affects individuals on many different planes. Likewise, CSA is not just a physical experience between the abuser and abused; there are many rings of influence. To truly understand CSA, the parameters and all the components that have enabled it to occur must be examined. This is true both within individual families and in society at large.
- *Community and culturally appropriate education.* How do different communities condone abuse through their traditions or practices? How are different communities involved in the prevention of CSA? An examination of racism and the differences among socio-economic communities is critical. A new vision for prevention means understanding the needs of different communities and creating culturally relevant strategies. For example, while some immigrant communities may approach the topic of child sexual abuse indirectly so as to engage communities without offending elders, this may not be true for others.
- *Language to share and process experience.* Better language that helps break through the dichotomy between victim and survivor, language that offers a spectrum of survival and healing terms, will help us as a society first own the issue, then move toward prevention. More venues for listening, for open and honest dialogue on sex, sexuality, and sexual abuse are needed.
- *Parenting education.* Parents must be taught how to communicate body boundaries and positive sexuality in raising their children. They must be equipped with appropriate language to talk with their children

about sex and sexuality and be comfortable with their children's, as well as their own, sexuality. Simultaneously, parents and caregivers need opportunities to learn how to work through their own histories of CSA.

- *Family structure.* How can we take a closer look at roles within the family to build support for all family members individually and as a unit? Concepts worth exploring include models for child empowerment, ideas of children's communities, child-centered strategies, and voices for children without placing the burden of responsibility on their shoulders.
- *Good touch, bad touch.* Continued education with children around appropriate touching and boundaries is necessary, but this is only one aspect of an overall education. The burden of prevention must shift to adults.
- *Look at sexually reactive children and bullying.* "Sexually reactive" children may provide an important link and insight to the prevention of CSA. These are children or adolescents who, at a very early age, show signs of sexual play or manipulation that is not necessarily a product of typical development, but instead may be indicators of sexually explicit experiences. Children who bully may provide a needed link to understanding violence, manipulation, and intimidation. Many professionals believe that children who bully have been abused themselves.
- *Enhance sexual integrity.* We are very limited in our ability to communicate healthy sexuality. We have been so silent for so long that we have not created an appropriate language or communication channels for children and youth to understand what is appropriate and what is not. To change this we must provide youth (and adults) with images and models of healthy sexuality and positive physical and sexual images for women and men that are not gender stereotyped. We need to engender in youth an appreciation for and healthy experience of their bodies: "I have a body and it is good." Likewise, teach children/youth the fullest sense of "integrity," or respect, for the physi-

cal, mental and spiritual boundaries of themselves and others. Parents also need to be taught these concepts.

- *Resilience.* Raising the credibility of survivor voices is a first step in recognizing, acknowledging, and offering the possibility of moving beyond surviving to a place of "thriving."
- *New roles for community.* Building a sense of interconnectedness, where what affects one affects all, where "bystanders" play an active role and enhance adult responsibility to intervene creates new ways for community members actively engaging in and shaping the community.
- *Faith communities.* For many, faith communities are the first place they turn for help, yet they may not be responded to, or their trust may be violated. Faith-based institutions can help to address the crisis around child sexual abuse through updating their own policies, practices, and teachings.

Accountability, Restitution, Reparation

Abusers must be held accountable for their actions and realistic options for treatment must be explored. We need ways that abusers can come forward and seek help without being dismissed as evil. Likewise, communities and families must be both supported and involved with the solution.

- *Create more treatment options.* Move beyond incarceration as the only legal option. Shifting the focus means considering all the options for working with abusers and not just funneling time and resources into incarcerating without treating. Groups such as Stop It Now! are working to create a broader understanding and community context for preventing child sexual abuse through the identification of and expansion of options for offenders.
- *Holistic approach.* Create new ways of working with the abuser within the family context. Current systems are not effective in trying to keep the family together and there are few models for working with the family as a whole that can keep children safe while simultaneously working to heal relationships. Groups such

as Generation Five are working with community systems to move toward such an integrated and holistic approach, while trying to work on devising prevention strategies that involve all sectors of the community.

- *Onus on the abuser.* Put the onus of reparation and restitution on the abuser, not the child survivor. For example, where currently children are often removed from the household in an effort to protect them, instead remove the abuser. Work to reintegrate the child into family and school activities, rather than to isolate. Groups such as Justice for Children are working to secure the rights of children when abuse has occurred.

“This is an issue in which as many stakeholders as possible need to be at the table. This is a community problem. And the only way to get a problem solved at the community level is to involve all the members of the community.” *Fran Henry, Founder and President, STOP IT NOW!*

- *Hold institutions accountable.* Institutions that condone abuse through silence or inappropriate policies must also be held accountable. Mandated reporters such as doctors, social workers, school officials, and other professionals are not uniform in their approach and may inadvertently exacerbate the problem through their interventions. For example, many institutions have written policies on how to handle problems of child abuse as they are revealed, but these policies are not necessarily utilized uniformly. In the process of making a report, reporters may alienate or lose contact with the family and lose the opportunity for effective intervention.
- *Research.* Abuse occurs along a continuum, making some people and some communities more vulnerable than others. What makes a child more vulnerable? What makes an abuser more likely to abuse? While in recent years a formidable amount of research has emerged, more is needed. Research and dialogue with abusers will enable a deeper understanding of what makes abusers “tick” and what enables abuse to happen. In addition, more research is needed to better understand effective treatment for survivors and better address prevention strategies.

- *Social ownership.* For us as a society to make any headway on this problem, we must first take ownership of its existence, and look more closely at how and where it happens. We must publicly acknowledge and name it wherever and whenever we see it. We must begin to speak about it, process it, and invest in its elimination.

Creating a Movement

Abuse does not occur in a vacuum. An effective movement to prevent CSA will recognize the inter-connections with other forms of violence and oppression. Likewise, understanding the dynamics of power and its influence in the lives of the abuser, the abused, and those

around them is critical to exploring ways to prevent CSA. Giving voice and empowering both communities and individuals serves to shift power dynamics and the abuses that result from unequal standing.

- *Social cost of CSA.* CSA is not a phenomenon that affects just individuals; it affects communities. The “cost” of CSA on public health is well known by practitioners, but is not well documented or understood by society. Cost-benefit analyses are important ways of capturing political attention and garnering much-needed resources.
- *Models.* Public health and other models can contribute to a movement by developing and identifying risk factors, continuing research and looking at prevention in primary, secondary, and tertiary terms to assess risk and need.
- *Power Groups.* Abuse occurs within the framework of “power groups” where the abused and the abuser are defined according to their “membership” or identity in these groups. CSA is not just about age or gender, but about power dynamics. Talking about CSA in terms of oppression broadens the scope of the discussion and reconfigures the definition of trauma.
- *Connecting with other social movements.* We have so much to learn from what other movements have already done. Opportunities to link with efforts such

as drunk driving, domestic violence, sexual assault, gay and lesbian rights, human rights, children's rights, harm reduction, and violence prevention can help move the work to end child sexual abuse forward.

- *Many issues.* Child sexual abuse is often one of many different issues that affect people's lives. Poverty, racism, domestic violence, poor health—there are many different concurrent issues people may be dealing with. A movement to prevent CSA must recognize this and deal with the multiplicity of concerns for individuals and communities and seek all opportunities to work across issues.
- *Change on a local level.* Individual communities must establish solutions that include mechanisms for accountability. National work, be it policy or education, should draw its strength from activities that connect on a community level and reflect local implications.
- *Resources.* Funding allocation must be re-examined. More diverse sources of funding need to be allocated to create a new format for addressing prevention work.

“As leaders, we must be willing to work through places in ourselves that are barriers to fully being ourselves. If we do not rid ourselves of disappointment, hurt, despair, mistrust, our ability to create new ways of thinking and leading will be limited. If we continue to lead without freeing us from our past hurts, we will continue to perpetuate the unjust systems that we are seeking to eliminate.” Lillie Allen, Executive Director, Be Present Inc.

- *Supporting individual movement.* People must move through the myriad of emotional experiences and barriers in their own lives to come to terms with abuse. Likewise, a national movement needs to support survivors and people working on their own issues without subjugating their experience or attempting to define it for them.
- *Use social marketing and mainstream media.* Media plays an important role and has tremendous power to give real information and to change the way we approach the topic. We need to develop creative

partnerships with media based on a different vision of how we want to talk about CSA. Mainstream media outlets that can play a role in the process of creating language and understanding about CSA can “normalize” the issues and reach survivors and abusers in their homes. Beyond public awareness, media as an outreach tool can also help establish a course of action and demonstrate what we can do about CSA. For example, highlighting success stories in the media can teach new models of dealing with CSA.

- *System reconstruction.* Systems need to be integrated and consistent in their approach to supporting families across disciplines. Child welfare and other systems can be re-conceptualized to add value rather than add further burden on families who are confronted with CSA. A dramatic shift in perspectives and designs is required to build systems that offer true resources to families.
- *Personal and public traumatic response.* Because CSA is a very specific type of trauma, leaders must be trained and educated on the traumatic response they are likely to get when talking about it publicly. This is part of the work. Communities need room to hear, react, deny, and come back. Those taking the lead in speaking out must consistently engage communities to reflect on their own responses. Likewise, organizers must be prepared for and supported in their own responses.

- *Creativity.* Any process that seeks to create a movement must allow its organizers to be creative and open. Importantly, they must not be stuck in their own traumatic responses. They must draw upon them for knowledge and even strength, and move past them into creativity.
- *Movement.* We must be comfortable with the unknown. Allowing the work to flow and resisting the need to exert too much control will ensure that the movement actually moves.

You are a marvel.

Each second we live is a new and unique moment of

The universe, a moment that will never be again...

And what do we teach our children?

We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris

Is the capital of France? When will we also teach them what they are?

We should say to each of them:

Do you know who you are? You are a marvel.

You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been

Another child like you. Your legs, your arms,

Your clever fingers, the way you move.

You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven.

You have the capacity for anything.

Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then

Harm another who is, like you, a marvel?

You must work – we must all work – to make the world

Worthy of its children.

- PABLO CASALS (1876-1973) -

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