

## ***Myths Are Still Alive***

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On a recent edition of radio talk show, a team of experts were discussing celibacy as a way of life. The insightful, lively discussion was thought provoking and interesting and dealt with the various aspects of this complex issue.

The interview reminded me that the myths about child sexual abuse in our society are alive and well and still impacting people's approach to the problem. It seemed like a good time for us to consider some of the myths that are most common and look at the validity of them one more time.

### **Myth: Priests abuse children because of their vow of celibacy.**

*Fact:* Most child molesters never took a vow of celibacy and priests that abuse children do so for the same reasons that others do. There is no easy answer to why adults molest children. Many great psychiatric minds are at work on that aspect of the problem. However, like many myths, believing that celibacy is the problem, one can direct attention in the wrong direction. People may look at "priests" as potential molesters because they took a vow of celibacy. They are distracted by the myth and neglect to observe the warning behaviors displayed by individuals who interact with children and who could be a potential risk of harm to children.

### **Myth: Children lie about being sexually abused.**

*Fact:* Children rarely lie about being molested. In fact, they rarely admit to molestation at all. However, because our own experience with children is that they lie about all kinds of things, we are inclined to believe the adult who says the child is lying. The problem with that logic is that a careful look at the things children lie about reveals something significant. They lie to get out of or avoid being in trouble. They don't lie to get into trouble or to cause trouble. They lie about getting homework done or picking up clothes. They lie about who broke the glass and whether they hit their sister or brother on purpose. Almost the only time they lie to get into trouble is when they think they are protecting a sibling or a parent from potential harm. In some situations, our reaction to a disclosure can convince a child that we don't believe them and sometimes, seeing that, they recant. They don't want any more trouble so they just take it all back. Then, rather than encourage them to speak up, we are often inclined to be relieved that they took it back and convince ourselves they were lying. Speaking up is a very courageous thing. Children that tell deserve to be heard by people who believe them and act accordingly to protect them. Remember, children are less likely to lie to cause trouble than adults are to lie to avoid being in trouble.

### **Myth: If parents did a better job of raising children, they would not be victims of abuse.**

*Fact:* Most of us admit that we are not perfect parents and that new information, new tools, and new insights can enhance our parenting skills and help us protect our children. But, children are victimized by cunning, manipulative, skillful child molesters who spend weeks, months and sometimes years grooming children and families as part of their scheme to seduce a child. The finger of blame for children being molested needs to be pointed in the

right direction—at the molester. According to research, children are safer today than at any time in history. Parents are responsible for creating safer environments. Blaming parents by saying they should pay better attention relieves the rest of us of the responsibility for observing adults in our environments and intervening in risky situations. Remember, protecting children is everyone's job.

These are just a few of the myths that deserve a refresher in today's environment. We need to remind ourselves that relying on myths as truth can and does divert our attention from the actions that can make a real difference for our children such as knowing the warning signs, monitoring all programs, and controlling access to our children.

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