

When The Right Choice Is Difficult - Reporting Family Child Sexual Abuse

The VIRTUS® Programs

A woman contacted local authorities to report her suspicion that her husband had sexually abused a child. The arrest report states she found videos of her husband molesting a little girl and was able to recognize her husband in the video from a wound on his hand.

The woman allowed police to enter their home early in the morning to arrest her husband as he slept. She turned over the computer's hard drive to authorities.

The police report there have been a number of minor children who now live, or who have previously lived, in the home. So far, the evidence reveals four different acts of molestation. Dylan Goforth "Woman turns in husband accused of sexually abusing child," www.tulsaworld.com (Oct. 12, 2013).

Research statistics compiled by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), which are similar to statistics reported through the Protecting God's Children programs, continue to reveal child sexual abuse is not a rare occurrence. Research suggests 25 percent of girls, and nearly 17 percent of boys, will suffer some form of sexual abuse before age 18. While there are some slight differences in the numbers here as compared to the statistics outlining the frequency of abuse in the Protecting God's Children program, both sets of statistics highlight the fact that there is a substantial amount of child sexual abuse that occurs.

Most often, the perpetrator is someone the victim knows and trusts, and the abuse often occurs in the home. Family members or others seen as close family friends commit about 75 percent of the child sexual abuse reported to authorities.

Keep in mind child predators are not always adults. The NCTSN reports individuals under 18 are responsible for perpetrating 23 percent of reported cases of child sexual abuse.

Safe adults need to be familiar with the warning signs that might indicate a child is the victim of sexual abuse. A child's response to abuse can range from anxiety and angry outbursts to becoming withdrawn and depressed. For this reason, a sudden change in behavior can be the key to recognizing abuse is occurring.

In addition, victims may display reluctance to be left alone with particular individuals or demonstrate knowledge of sexual language or behaviors that are well beyond what is appropriate for their age.

Fortunately, studies show child victims of sexual abuse can recover from their experience with counseling and support. However, safe adults must first act to stop the abuse by being alert to warning signs. If discovered, report abuse to the proper authorities.

The following information from childwelfare.gov will assist safe adults in the reporting of suspected child sexual abuse:

- Every state designates "mandatory reporters" who are required by law to report suspected incidents of child sexual abuse. States differ in their definitions of who is considered a mandatory reporter.

- Some states have laws that require everyone to report suspected child abuse (e.g. Texas).
- Although state laws vary, typically a report must be made if the reporter has reason to believe abuse has occurred or has knowledge of a child being subjected to abusive conditions.
- Most states have websites or phone numbers available to report child abuse.

Most reports can be made anonymously, although investigators find it helpful to know who is reporting. Approximately 18 states require mandatory reporters to provide their name and contact information. You can learn more about state statutes regarding the reporting of child abuse and neglect at this website: [Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

Brought to you through the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. and its VIRTUS® programs with the goal to help prevent, address, and mitigate wrongdoing in the community of faith and to help adults become protectors of children and to help communities become safe havens for children.