

Sexual Predators are Everyone's Problem

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Recent headlines remind us that the risk to our children from people we trust—or should be able to trust—is ever-present. The last week of February 2010, Delaware pediatrician Earl Bradley was formally charged with 471 counts of sexual abuse against 103 children. In an interview with CBS news, Dr. Eli Newberger a pediatrician at Harvard Medical School, compares child sexual abuse by pediatricians to the priest abuse scandal that rocked the Catholic Church in 2002.

The tendency of many adults to make excuses for inappropriate behavior on the part of other adults in the environment is becoming more apparent as these cases come to the forefront. In the Delaware case, there were repeated attempts by individuals that worked with Dr. Bradley and parents of other young patients to bring the behavior of this doctor to the attention of law enforcement officials.

For example, in 2005 and 2008, reports were made about Dr. Bradley kissing small children and conducting inappropriate examinations of their private parts when the children were being evaluated for unrelated complaints such as sore throats. Information was submitted to a local judge seeking a search warrant for Dr. Bradley's office. The judge refused to sign the warrant and the investigation stalled.

In addition, the evidence being discovered by the Attorney General shows that other members of the medical profession knew or suspected that the doctor was abusing children. However, they made no reports to the medical society. They simply fired him and forced him to move on. Even complaints by his own family were referred to as simply a "family matter."

This case as well as others involving pediatricians across the country in the last few years remind us once again of the manipulative nature of sexual predators and the need for each of us to take responsibility for protecting children. In most of these cases, individuals observed something that indicated a child was at risk. Even when reports were made, someone along the line derailed the investigation in some way.

When we observe risky behaviors of the adults within our environments, we must report and keep reporting until someone listens to us. Investigation is essential—regardless of the discomfort associated with pursuing the reports. When those in authority discount the allegations, we must be willing to speak to someone else and the next person up the chain of command and the next person up the chain of command, if necessary.

Our discomfort, our hesitancy to point a finger, our willingness to let someone else deal with the problem places children at risk. When we turn our attention to the children at risk, the need for action becomes apparent. This case reminds us that the problem we are addressing in the Church is one that society is still struggling with and it is up to us to call attention to what is required of adults in the environment when other adults behave inappropriately with children.

Know the warning signs. Trust your instincts when something is happening that makes you uncomfortable and don't give up when others don't see the problem as you do. Children are counting on you to protect them. Remember, it's everyone's job!

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