

Cheryl [Sample Local Argument with Outside Sources]
FYC 13100
Prof. Clauss
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Child Sexual Abuse: Education is the Key to Prevention

Situation: As a concerned parent of three children, I am writing to Indiana state senator David McIntosh. With my letter, I want to alert Senator McIntosh to the severity of the problem of child sexual abuse and to convince him to work toward implementing an education program in Indiana schools.

Dear Senator McIntosh,

Are you aware that every two minutes, somewhere in America a child is sexually abused? What is even more shocking is that by the time she is 13, one out of every four American girls will be sexually or physically abused (*Resource 3*).

I live in your district and am the mother of three children, ages 6, 9, and 10. These statistics frighten me, because I am concerned with not only the welfare of my own children but also that of other children. Fortunately, my children and I have a school system that has implemented an education and prevention program for this issue; however, many school systems in Indiana do not have such programs to teach students about sexual abuse. I ask you, my elected official, to consider the following information about child sexual abuse and then consider sponsoring a bill that would mandate sexual abuse programs into Indiana's school curricula.

Important Basics to Know

According to researchers Kristin Baird and Marilyn Kile, child sexual abuse is any action taken against a child by adults or teenagers for their own sexual gratification. The actions may include fondling, sexual intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, exhibitionism, plus the filming or photography of nude children (5). These are very difficult issues for me to talk about, for the thought of any of these things happening to an innocent child breaks my heart. But as responsible adults, we must recognize these problems, for sexual abuse does irreversible damage to the victims.

Perhaps you may think that it is not the job of the school system to address this problem. With increasing pressures on teachers to cover the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, many people think that such concerns are better dealt with by family members or friends.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. Did you know, for example, that 50% of abuse cases take place in the child's own home? In a majority of cases, the abusers are close male relatives--fathers, brothers, or uncles, for example. In-home baby-sitters are another large group of abusers, while child-care providers also frequently abuse children (*Resource 7*).

Some of the most frightening aspects of child sexual abuse are the traits of the typical abuser. Baird and Kile have categorized two types of abusers: Regressive and Fixated Abusers. Regressive Abusers, for example, have had normal sexual developments through adulthood, are usually married, and have good peer relationships. Their interests in children are a recent discovery, and their sexual abuse is impulsive. These abusers often chose young female victims, even though they may

be currently having sexual relations with adults. On the other hand, Fixated Abusers, according to Baird and Kile, begin their interest in children--primarily boys--during their adolescent years, which in turn reinforces their abusive traits even more. Most of these abusers grew up in unstable homes, and most of them were sexually abused as children themselves. These abusers have trouble relating to their peers, and, if they are married, they often seem childlike to their wives. Both Regressive and Fixated Abusers have similar traits; for example, they usually suffer from severe depression, feelings of rejection from their peers, and alcoholism or drug use (7, 10-11).

In addition to the above patterns and traits of the abusers themselves, child care workers and researchers have also recognized many common "symptoms" that abused children exhibit. The following list, adapted from the National Self-Esteem Resources Center's *Resource Guide*, details some of the warning signs of child sexual abuse. When children or teenagers exhibit any one of the following characteristics, something could be seriously wrong:

avoiding certain places or people	fear of sleeping alone
acting old for their age	new clothes, money, etc
clinging to a certain parent	compulsive masturbation
painful urination	dramatic weight changes
nervous or self-destructive habits	excessive bedwetting

Please keep in mind that these warning signs alone are not sufficient evidence that abuse is taking place; however, these indicators do raise the distinct possibility that something is seriously wrong. And, as you can see, these are simple but important warning signs for any adult to remember and watch out for.

What Can We Do Together?

Because many school teachers, staff members, and administrators do not know enough about the warning signs and prevention of child sexual abuse, education is the key to addressing this problem. As Baird and Kile point out in *Body Rights*, children are frequently very scared of their abusers. Not only do they suffer from the pain of being sexually molested, but they also suffer from the fear of punishment. Abused children often believe that the abuser will hurt someone close to them if they tell anyone, or they may feel as if the problem is their fault (12). It most certainly is not! When adults do not know how to recognize the warning signs, and when children do not know that they have the right to call attention to unacceptable behavior on the part of adults, the pattern of abuse can continue indefinitely. This thought scares me, as I'm sure it scares you, too. We must work together to educate others in our efforts to solve this problem.

When I first realized that my children's school was unique because of its sexual abuse education and counseling program, I set up an appointment with the school counselor, Mrs. Jane Smith. As a concerned parent, I wanted to learn more about the curriculum and volunteer my time and energy. I will never forget how angry I was that first day in her office, when Mrs. Smith told me that the state of Indiana has no requirements or specific guidelines for schools to follow in the implementation of sexual abuse programs. I am disgusted that other educators and administrators do not recognize the importance of taking steps to solve this problem. All children need to be aware of the resources available to them; and all adults need to be aware of these

horrible problems some of our children face.

Mrs. Smith and I have been working together for the past two months. We have implemented a curriculum designed to teach children some of the most important facts everyone should know: every person, no matter how old, has the right to say "no"; every person has the right to say "stop" and "don't touch me there." We have borrowed much of what we teach from *Body Rights*. We have also utilized such useful resources as Duso the Dolphin, a friendly hand puppet that children can relate to and trust. With Duso the Dolphin, Mrs. Smith and I have led class discussions, told stories, and helped children see that they can trust most adults. We have also used Dramatic Playing Cards, Safety Rule Cards, picture books, audiotapes, and lap easel books in our efforts to inform children about the goals of our program. With these few materials, none of which cost our school system much money, we have taken major steps toward helping children. I am sure there are other programs available for other school systems and other curriculums.

We Can Make a Difference

Unfortunately, many children in Indiana do not grow up in safe homes. Many abused children are afraid to do anything about their abuse, for they simply do not know what to do. Many teachers in Indiana do not know how to recognize the signs of abuse; nor would they even know what to do if they did suspect that abuse was taking place. Unlike the home, school is an ideal place for children to learn about sexual abuse. Even though I have done research on this issue, as a parent my skills and knowledge can only go so far. Qualified teachers

and school counselors must be compelled to implement programs in their own schools, using their expertise and talents to help all of our children.

I urge you, Senator McIntosh, to consider introducing a bill to the State Legislation, a bill to mandate child sexual abuse prevention and education programs in Indiana schools. As parents and officials, we need to work together to protect all children from demoralizing and degrading abuse. Together, we can break the vicious cycle of child sexual abuse.

Thank you,

Cheryl ----- (last name deleted by Clauss)

Works Cited

- Baird, Kristin, and Marilyn Kile, *Body Rights: A Teacher's Guide to Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children*. Urbana, IL: Center for Abuse Prevention, 1993.
- Resource Guide*. Washington, DC: National Self-Esteem Resources Center, 1994.
- Smith, Jane. Personal Interview. 16 February 1995. 747-XXXX