

Tell Someone - But Who?

To advise children on how to cope with abuse, a slogan appeared several years ago; “Tell Someone”. 1 } It contains no warning of pitfalls, like betrayal, and being ignored. 2 } It offers no suggestions of what to do, next, if no help is given. 3 } It makes no distinction between abuse within the family and from elsewhere. > The appeal of slogans, is their simplicity, but, you can’t just make something more simple than it really is, just by wishing it were. The most complex problems can be simplified with ratiocination, if you are willing to so grapple, but who is? It’s one thing to evade the nuisance of actual thought, but “Tell Someone” is also under suspicion of self-flattery; the ‘righteous glow’ syndrome. When something important is at stake, such a suggestion, which is hollow at best, and so likely to backfire, really isn’t justified by the visceral thrill of reciting it. A real system doesn’t feel so much like an eight-foot-wide bass drum, but it has a more subtle kind of charm; some chance of working. (Clarinet w/ Cello?)

In most situations, the whole answer is, ‘Tell the Parents, and, if the abuser is one parent, tell the other’. The only further discussion is how to deal with parental abuse when the other doesn’t help, when both are guilty, or when there is only one. “Tell someone”, in itself, doesn’t even counsel children to tell their parents, first, which constitutes neglect, in itself, but my title retains the slogan because I don’t want to throw anything away if it can be used. “Tell Someone” arrived in the world, stillborn, but it’s probably so well known, we should salvage the homunculus, and ‘Frankenstein’ it into action with all the overlooked ramifications. (Warning: Shocking Complexity, Ahead!)

Abetting Abuse, Accidentally

Most people find it very difficult to talk to their children about sex. How can they talk about abuse? No one wants to broach the topic of sex with their children, long before they otherwise would, by telling them how it might be misused. 2 } It’s hard to tell a child two conflicting things; that certain adults, like teachers, are there to help them, and that they must obey them, but that they might run into one who will try to do something awful to them! 3 } Many kids are entrusted to baby-sitters and day-care, when they really are too young to be told anything. 4 } People fail to acknowledge that the problem even exists. Any threat can be greatly reduced by preparation, but the mere discussion of a taboo, is often treated like a violation of it. The unexpected is your worst enemy. Just as in the wild, where predators count on the element of surprise, an abuser must hope that the victim has not been educated to the threat. Failure to warn your child, amounts to giving the perpetrator permission; decking the victim out like a delectable sacrifice, garnished with the allure of his / her naivete.

Victim Blaming Herself

Children often assume the blame for abuse, internally. The child may simply be too embarrassed by her own role in the travesty, to tell anyone, especially if a parent is the abuser. The only solution is the same as to # 1; warn children that such a thing might happen. If you don’t, you can’t tell them not to put the blame on themselves, until their problem is discovered, and their sense of guilt is likely to delay that discovery.

Parental Warnings Are Not Enough

No one who wants to abuse a child, is going to warn their victim about how to deal with an abuser, and, in almost every case, home abuse is by the father.* Warnings must come from schools and other institutions where abusers are greatly outnumbered by other co-workers. Teachers can be expected to warn children of abuse from all quarters. Even teachers who are inclined to abuse, must educate children to the threat if they are instructed by the school system to do so, because they are also under the gaze of their peers and superiors. Should they fail to advise students, as required, they would face consequences, and even become suspected of abusive intent. {Footnote below on Freud's compromise with the upper crust.}

Inhibitions Against Conveying Children's Accusations Against Parents

When a child needs someone outside the family, to tell about abuse in the home, she might be met with a reaction which seems like indifference, but it's really self-concern. 1} Almost everyone has children. They don't want anyone invading that territory, and, to impinge on a right of another, is to invite the same. Someone might refuse to act on a child's plea, merely to reciprocate respect for their own parental prerogatives. 2} To convey an accusation to a third party, is a swan dive into hot water, for someone like a teacher. They make too little to risk job loss and law suits. Their noble response might bring down a suit against the school board or, county government, etc. 3} The person hearing an accusation could assume that the victim has made it up, to get even for something which parents regularly do, and everyone condones, like non- physical discipline. (An accusation to settle a grudge with a parent, is a problem in adolescence, I think, and unusual, at that. I'm focused, here, on those who are too small to escape from the abuse environment, even temporarily, or to conceive of seeking help from outside.). 4} People assume that everyone exaggerates, and that children are the worst, frequently imagining things, outright. The notion that children hallucinate, is a 20th Century invention. How blithely adults assume that children fantasize, is the result of Freud's statement that 3/4 of his female patients had been sexually molested in childhood. Because his clientele were very wealthy, many in high society must have felt personally accused — and the fact that so many must have deserved it, would hardly have softened their ire. Having spoken heresy, Freud must have realized that it would not be acceptable to just refrain from saying it, again; to say, in effect, 'oh, uh-h, never mind!' A simple retraction would have ruined his credibility, and he would have forever been trailed by the question, 'well, then, why did you say it?' He had to explain why he had made the claim, and, unless he was wrong, his explanation would have to be false. Freud recanted by saying that the woman had an "Infantile Fantasy". It was not meant to be a theory, as it has been painted ever since. People have been projecting their own need to believe phantasmagorical lies, onto their children, ever since!

Solution: How the Victim Can Invert Indifference

The problem is, how to force adults to act, in spite of their misgivings. The answer is to counter their fear, by posing another; that is, to reverse adults' natural reticence, so they will feel less threatened to act, than not to. A single accusation can easily be squelched by the one who hears it, simply by doing nothing. If that person does not choose to act, the naïve trust which encouraged the child to "tell someone", is disappointed, perhaps discouraging him from ever trying again, but, what if everyone in the child's life, knew about the problem, and knew that everyone else knew? If the teacher knew it, and knew that the child's clergyman and relatives knew, it would be impossible

for the any of them, to do nothing. They could not really ignore it, knowing that so many others are aware. They couldn't look each other in the eye, and they would live under the constant threat of being outed as the one who did not act.

It would be more reliable if everyone who hears the story, were certain to encounter others who have heard it, but many of the adults who a child knows, might never run into the others. If the teacher extended family, clergyman, dance instructors, are more or less likely to encounter each other, but less more than more. They might never feel compelled to act, by encountering someone else who has also heard of the problem. Some groupings of adults, interact with others, like relatives and clergy, because several members of an extended family, might attend the same church. Teachers and neighbors might know each other, because teachers interact with neighboring parents, as at PTA meetings. This is still not completely reliable, but adults who fit any one category, mix with the others of their own group; neighbors with neighbors, teachers with teachers, etc. Victims must tell more than one person in any category of people, who are certain to see each other, or, at least, not too likely to just miss each other by pure chance, forever.

People who have heard of the problem, will know that others know of it, too. The child must not tell anyone they confide in, who else they have told, intend to tell. Those two people might already have a stronger bond than just working in the same place, and might conspire to squelch what they have heard, and cover for each other.

Once these stratagems have been incorporated into every child's education, and everyone knows it, anyone who hears of abuse, will have to assume that many others have also heard of it, or soon will. They would never know when they might come face to face with someone else who knows. The power of social and legal concerns, held over adults' heads, would be inverted, to encourage, rather than inhibit action. Anyone who fails to act, must worry that every person she encounters in the future, might have heard of the child's dilemma, and suspect that she has heard of it, too.

Threats from Abuser

Abusers often threaten their victims to discourage them from telling. They often threaten to hurt or kill whoever the child tells about abuse, but the power of that threat can be pre-empted by warning children that such a threat might be made. Of course, that means warning children of the possibility of abuse, itself, but that's necessary, anyway, to give them an edge in resisting.

They must be taught to tell the parents, in spite of the threat. The most important thing for children to remember, is to not tell the offender that they don't believe him! To call his bluff would be a provocation to murder. When it has become standard to warn children, the way I suggest, abusers will know it, and assume that their victims will report it. The loss of their power to threaten a victim, might discourage some predators from trying it, at all, but the increased threat of getting caught, is an incentive to kill the victim. 1} If the abuser is unknown to the child, he would not be too threatened with identification. He must prefer not to draw attention to himself, for a greater crime than he is internally compelled to commit. 2} If the abuser is someone to whom the child has been intentionally entrusted, like teachers, babysitters and relatives, the death or disappearance of the child, would immediately place her/him in the

spotlight of suspicion. He/she should settle for trying to convince the victim not to talk, some way other than threatening, and just hope that enough time will pass to make prosecution impractical. Teaching children about the threat of abuse, itself, must be easier than teaching them guile, but they must learn it for the purpose of convincing the abuser that they won't tell. Sadly, this very suggestion, when widely understood, will warn abusers of how children have been coached in guile. Unavoidable, I'm afraid. On balance, it saves more from trouble than it threatens, if only because so many abusers are just not going to kill, anyway. It isn't their emotional purpose. If they are compelled to kill, we're on, to another subject.

Keeping Parental Abuse Within The Family

Although the child's interest overrides everything else, minimizing the scandal, is a reasonable concern. The entire family could be permanently stigmatized. If a parent is guilty, and the other one doesn't deal with it (or there is only one or the other is an accomplice) the child could tell others in the family, first. It shouldn't be very hard to enable children to protect themselves from the abuse and indifference of adults, while protecting the family from eternal ridicule.

Perhaps relatives should be consulted by the child, before teachers, clergy, etc. Telling two relatives should be easy because they are often married couples, but someone who is only related by marriage, may just be 'the wrong person' to tell. The in-law aunt or uncle might tell people who really don't need to know, whereas the true relative, the offender's sibling, will probably try to contain the scandal. Rather than tell someone who is only an aunt or uncle by marriage, victims should tell their real "blood" relatives; the brothers and sisters of the offending parent. Even in the absence of moral compunction, an aunt or uncle should feel moved to do something about their own siblings, at least from fear of shame, should they be found to have kept the secret, for any time.

Grandparents should be interested. The parents of the innocent parent are like aunts and uncles by marriage; not related to the perpetrator. The parents of a guilty parent could be the best bet, but it's still better to give siblings the first chance, so the parents of the abuser might be spared.

Abuse By Relatives Other Than Parents

There is an exception which overlaps into the two major categories of parents and outsiders. What if the abuser is a relative, other than the parents, like a grandparent or uncle? Because the offender does not reside in the home, like an abusive parent, the danger could be eliminated, without both parents necessarily knowing. If children were taught to tell only the parent whose relative is the abuser, it could be kept on that side of the family. It would be up to that parent whether to keep it from the other. (I'm not advocating that the parent who learns it, first, should tell the other, or not. Time and experience may yield an objective answer, once this protocol has been in place for a while, but, until then, parents would be on their own, to decide.)

An abuser may only be related by marriage. If the abuser is an "in-law" (if neither of the parents is a "blood relative" of the abuser, the child could tell the parent who is a sibling of the abuser's spouse. (The problem of whether to tell the other parent, is also implied, here.)

Primer

Here is a summary of the tactics any victim can use, in the order they should be used if the previous one doesn't work. These strategies might take some time to get help. How soon can you get to speak to all those people you might have to? In the meantime, the abuse could occur, again. You can't wait to see how those people will respond. You must get a concerned answer from each person you tell, and it must seem sincere. If you get an answer which doesn't sound like a commitment, move on to the next person.

If the person you tell, asks who else you have told, they are not reliable. They are trying to decide whether they have to do anything about it; already conspiring to co-operate in a cover-up.

1) Promise your abuser that you won't tell anyone.

2) If the parents are not the offenders, tell them.

3) If one of the parents is the offender, tell the other. (Be prepared for the bad parent to turn on the other. The parent you tell, might become a target of abuse, too, but at least you have an adult ally.)

4) If the other parent doesn't help, or if both are offenders

A] Tell at least two people who are certain to encounter each other. That will usually mean co-workers, like two or more teachers or clergy.

B] Tell them that you have told someone else, as well.

C] Don't tell any of them, who the others are. They might talk to each other and agree to ignore you. The idea is to get them to fear being exposed by the other, for not doing anything.

5) Help From Within the Family, When the Abuser is Within the Family

A] If the offender is not a parent, tell both parents (same as if anyone else is the offender).

B] If a parent is the offender, and the other parent doesn't help, tell at least two of the next closest adult "blood" relatives of the offender; your aunts and uncles who are the brothers and sisters of the abusive parent (not your aunts and uncles who are married to them).

C] If that doesn't work, tell your grandparents who are the parents of the abusive parent.

D] If that doesn't work, tell your other grandparents who are the parents of the innocent parent. If that parent didn't help when she had the chance, she's not really "innocent".

*E] If the abuser is a real aunt or uncle (by "blood") tell the parent who is the brother or sister of the abuser.

*F] If that doesn't work, tell the parent who is the sibling of the abusive aunt or uncle (not the in-law aunts and uncles who are just married to your "blood relatives").

*E & F

I don't know that it's right, and I don't think it's possible to keep the abuse a secret from the other

parent, forever. D & E only suggest that the child *begin* by telling that parent who is the sibling of the abusive aunt or uncle.

I realize that many will need this help, before they are old enough to read this suggestion. Adults must instill the principles in the youngest. #s 2 & 3, are simple and will cover most cases. Children should have it in print, in the home, tucked into a notebook, in classrooms, on a poster board, like other lists, schedules and placards of basic lessons. These days, the protocol would be on an app, of course.

One estimate says that 3/4 of kids have phones by age 12. Real phones are too big and must be handled just so. Some new device is needed, like a specialized smaller phone with a few pre-set numbers. Something like a beeper would do because no message would have to be transmitted. Any beep from such a quick-call emergency device, would always be taken as an incident. GPS tracking is a given, now. It could be small and light enough to be at the ready, at all times, on a belt-clip, or shirt pocket clip like a pen, or designed as a bracelet; a substantial, locking bracelet which could only be unlocked with an e-signal, as from a phone. Parents might control that. Doctors and law enforcement, might be reached just after an assault or when it's imminent. Such a device would probably eliminate the problem, outside of the home by guaranteeing predators that they'll be discovered.

Most states and counties must have agencies, dedicated to this problem. They should be accessible, directly, by children, so they should never need any of the protocols I have suggested, unless they prefer not to take it to the authorities, first. That is probably what they should do, 1 }to protect evidence of the abuse and 2}to protect other adults from being put to the test.

There is the chance of kids pranking or over-reacting to something an adult says to them, but I don't see that happening often. They would understand that every call is tracked, and that they would be in trouble for abusing the system, especially if they were summoning the police.

Post Revelation Family Plan

If the abuser is a parent, it seems clear that the home should be broken up, and the child totally separated from the offender, but, as many of you already must know, the other parent will often stay, if only for financial support. Strict oversight becomes one more chore in her daily life.

The question of what to do if both parents fail to protect (whether or not, one of them is the abuser) is more straightforward. They must both be removed from the child's presence. (About eight-to-fifteen years should do it in most states, good behavior notwithstanding.) Separating the family like that, is another difficulty for everyone, and it increases the threat of exposing the problem to the whole world, by provoking speculation, but, if both parents are guilty, that's just part of the fallout they have brought on themselves.

2011? - 12/18/23

I have recently read that Freud only retracted his accusation in one case, and that he continued to write up cases of family abuse in which he never accused the father. He would accuse any other

relative, and even a governess. Modern experts in related fields, know that abuse from inside the family is almost always by the father (90%). I postulate that Freud made a deal with high society to never accuse the father. If so many cases do involve the father, that would account for the fury of his opposition. He concocted “Infantile Fantasy” as a way of retracting father accusations, but he consistently got away with accusing others. If 90% of perps are fathers, they would feel vindicated. Who’s left to complain? Decades after one case, he corrected his accusation to admit that he had known all along that the abuser was the father. If he has left fathers out of all cases for so long, why should he take the trouble to admit such a lie? He’s also devoted to sorting the problem, out. At the end of his career, with nothing to lose, but still cautiously, he uses a single example from which he hopes the future will extrapolate; it’s the dad. It had been verified by modern study of the subject, before I was able to get around to it, here.

Work Dates

7/ 02 - 08/ 15 & 5/ 27/ 16 & 4/ 23/ 17 & 6/23/18 & 10/24-31/18 & 5/27-29/21 & 3/15-22/23 &

4/10-12/23 & 12/30/25 & 1/14/26