

# Monsters Under the Bed

Practical Steps for Protecting Our Children  
from Sexual Predators

By  
Daisy Rain Martin

Monsters Under the Bed:  
Practical Steps for Protecting Your Child from Sexual Predators  
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For Jessie  
and all the children she loves

“Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”

— Augustine of Hippo

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# ONE

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## Yeah, I'm the Crazy Mom

I don't know about your baby, but mine was so delicious I could have put him on a cracker with Cheese Whiz, nibbled on his fingers and toes and skipped dinner every night for a year.

The adorability of newborns is a God-given survival technique that is 100% by design. Think about it. When they've been crying in their cribs for almost an hour because somebody you thought knew everything just this afternoon said that as long as they're fed and dry and burped you should 'let them cry it out'; but now it's 3:00 in the morning and you've had your pillow over your head for the last forty minutes and you can't take it anymore so you give in and walk down the hall to get them and you're pulling your hair out by the roots on the way because you haven't had one good night's sleep in five-and-a-half months and you're breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth and telling yourself that you're a good person and you really don't deserve this, but this too shall pass because if it doesn't, you're going to jump out a window in your pajamas and go screaming down the street in the dead of night. So you walk as calmly as you are able into the nursery that's decked out with that interminable mint green unisex zoo animal décor your in-laws talked you into while you were under some sort of duress and there's that baby you brought into the world... grinning at you with nothing but gums.

Little sausage biscuit.

You melt like your DNA dictates because they literally, not figuratively, are the most beautiful things you've ever laid eyes upon in your natural born life.

You've stocked their room with every toy they could ever want, but all they really want to do is pull all their diapers out of the cupboard one at a time until they bury themselves.

So hilarious. You take a picture and put it on Snapchat.

They fall asleep in their high chairs with those disgusting teething cookies hanging out of their mouths like cigars.

So stinking cute. You snap a picture and put it on Facebook.

They inexplicably come walking into the living room with your wife's—or yours, no one's judging here—Estee Lauder lipstick that was 32 bucks a pop, no less, on their cheeks and in their hair and in the carpet and you think they're Michelangelo or something.

So talented and ever so much better than the poop mural they painted on the wall last week. You grab your phone once again and put them on Instagram. Their entertainment value alone is worth the price of admission because they've absolutely healed you of every rotten thing that's ever happened to you. You love them so darn much it hurts, and you would die a thousand deaths if anything ever happened to them.

I know. It's why I wrote this book for you.

If the news headlines don't keep you up at night completely freaked out, clutching your blankets up to your chin worried about how you're going to keep your babies safe in this world, then you're either straight up guano, heavily medicated, or living out your existence on a spiritual plane I've yet to achieve. To be clear, I'm not knocking any of those mental spaces—I've spent time with all three. This is a crazy planet we live on, after all, and I am the crazy mom.

As a survivor of child sexual abuse, my number one top priority in this life was to protect my own child from any and all harm, as is any good parent's intention.

I was determined that he would not suffer the physical, psychological, and emotional abuse I endured.

And I was petrified.

My vigilance was intense. Geoff doesn't even know my mother or her husband who molested me despite their devotion to their uber-fundie religious belief system and all their dedicated church work. If memory serves, they attempted to contact him through Facebook once he came of age. He messaged them back and told them he worshipped Satan.

I was okay with it.

But I didn't just keep him from them. I much preferred that his friends came over to our house than having him over at theirs. I got to know the friends he chose as well as their families. As it turns out, Geoff is an incredibly good judge of character. He very rarely ever did sleep overs unless it was with Aunt Amie and his cousins, and he was probably in junior high before I let him go. I didn't date much when his father and I divorced because I didn't want to expose him to someone who might hurt him. I put my life on hold. When I met the man who would become my husband and Geoff's "Fa" (Danish for father) it was nothing short of a miracle. But Sean-Martin—yes, we call him by his first and last name—loved us. He loved both of us so, so much and proved it every day. He still proves it every day. I'm pretty sure he became Geoff's favorite human. Apparently, I was just the incubator.

Kidding.

As Geoff got older, he wanted to venture out into the world. I absolutely forbade him.

Also kidding.

I let him go places with his friends only after an interrogation that would surely inspire any law enforcement officer, military personnel, or intelligence agency. Only after I had personally called and spoke to every adult involved in every plan and



gotten every pertinent address and promised that I would make surprise calls and unexpected visits to anyone's house at any given time and inspected every guest list and did the appropriate background checks and did drive-bys and reassured him that if he told me he'd be back by eleven that I would call every emergency response team in the city at 11:01 if he weren't safely and securely under my roof... Okay, I'm not that crazy. But I absolutely, positively screamed out the front door every time he walked down the sidewalk with his friends:

*DON'T DO DRUGS!*

*MAKE WISE CHOICES!*

And my personal favorite:

*BABIES CHANGE LIVES!*

Oh, yes I did. Ask him. His friends would laugh and slap him on the back and say, "Your mom is hilarious!"

Without looking back he'd mumble dryly, "Yeah, a lot of people like her."

When our son, who is an artist and virtual technology and design guy, graduated from the University of Idaho, he lamented his childhood and claimed he was the poster child for Stockholm syndrome.

"It wasn't until I went to college," he said, "that I realized just how much I wasn't allowed to do as a kid, but I never picked up on it because you guys were awesome, and you made me fall in love with you. Artists are supposed to have angst! I have no angst! My future is so... BRIGHT!"

His Fa and I looked at him. Sean-Martin raised one eyebrow, and I put my hand to my forehead. All we could muster was, "You're welcome?"

I continued to ask Geoff until he was at least twenty the same old, tired question I'd asked him since he was old enough to understand what I was talking about.

*Has anything like this ever happened to you?*

I remember vividly the last time we talked about it. We were upstairs watching Oprah. Her guest was Tyler Perry, who had been molested as a child by three different men and the mother of one of his friends. In the audience were 200 men who all held school pictures of themselves at the age their abuse began.

I looked over at Geoff and said, "Son, I have to ask you..."

"Mom," he said. "You've gotta stop asking me. I was never abused. You're obsessed. You're making me crazy. You've got to let it go." And I finally did—at least where he's concerned.

But so many other families have not been so lucky, and I have to stay crazy—for them. For all of us.

Make no mistake, I'm out to eradicate child sexual abuse from the human race before I die. Some people think that's nuts, but I don't care.

Think we can't do it? You're wrong. Keep reading.

We have already accomplished much in eradicating child sexual abuse. When I first started advocacy work the statistics were one in four girls being molested before their eighteenth birthday and one in six boys. As of this writing, the statistics are one in ten girls being molested and one in twenty-five boys. This is progress. But we can't stop until this blight on our planet is nevermore.

This fight is personal. It's personal to me, and it's personal to you. Take heart, reader, because we can absolutely do this.

Truthfully, I didn't start this. A monster crawled out from under *my* bed when I was just a little girl. I certainly didn't start this fight—but I'm going to do my hardy best to finish it, believe that.

It will take all of us who call ourselves Hope Givers to do it. Join us. Get on board with this crusade and make this world a better, safer place for the children of the world.

Your children... because they're precious.

## TWO

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### Pretty Little Lies

The possibility that a predator would lay his or her hands on our children is almost incomprehensible. In our aversion to thinking about the unthinkable, we seem to seek out a more palatable version of the truth, one that makes us feel like we're more in control and can prevent all the nefarious possibilities. Unfortunately, and there's no gentle way to say this, believing things that are not true may give us some semblance of solace in the interim, but it puts our kids more at risk.

Here are a few of the most comment misnomers that we hold tightly to that need to be purged from our minds. As difficult as it is to change one's thinking, I'd rather have parents be informed before they find out too late that what they thought was true all along was actually not. Believe me, preemptively facing the facts is the precise opposite of 'the hard way'.

**#1 – I make sure to teach my child about 'stranger danger'. My three-year-old would never go off with anyone she doesn't know. We've talked about this. She knows better.**

Bless your heart, your three-year-old will

absolutely, positively go off with a stranger.

She's three. She'll take candy from someone she doesn't know and hop in the car with some guy who says he lost his puppy and can she help him find it. I know you've taught her about stranger danger a million and one times, but she has no context for what you're saying. She doesn't even

have the framework to imagine what you're talking about—she is incapable of imagining that someone would take her. Harm her. She won't know she's in a bad

situation if or when she's in one based solely on your words, and these conversations aren't likely to be effective in the moment because she has no framework for what you're trying to teach her.

However, these are the conversations we have with our children largely because it makes *us* feel safer and because we think if we proactively warn them in some way then we can control the situation, prevent a tragedy, and arrive at our desired outcome: our children's safety.

But here's one of the glitches in this whole thing: *Most children are molested by someone they know and someone their family knows... and trusts.* In fact, 90% of victims know the offender.

I'm not saying don't have the 'stranger danger' conversations with your children. By all means, have them because it will take about a thousand and one repetitions for the warning to even begin to take shape in their minds that there are people who will hurt them, people who will lie. Just know that most of the time, they are family members and close friends.

Here's a good analogy. Many schools in America practice fire drills once a month because that's the law. We're required to. As of this writing, some schools have intruder drills once or twice a year. How many school shootings have we had in the last twenty years since Columbine? Now ask yourselves how many schools have burned to the ground in the last twenty years? I can't recall one. I mean, maybe a fire started in a science classroom or somebody burned some popcorn in the teachers' lounge and the school had a legitimate reason to pull the alarm and get everybody out. But do you see how disproportionate that is?

It's the same with stranger-danger vs. someone who has been grooming your child and has been grooming you as well. There is a whole chapter devoted to the grooming process coming up soon.

There are those among us who would feed upon our weak, our isolated, our young. We cannot rely merely on these conversations to keep our children safe. Our children's safety requires vigilance, and even then there are no guarantees. Hard words to hear. Hard words to write. If I could guarantee that if you read this book and do everything I say to do and that your children will never be harmed, I would have named this book, *Monsters Under the Bed: Practical Steps to Ensuring that Your Children Will Never Be Molested with a 100% Money-Back Guarantee*.

There are no guarantees, my beloved, and I make no promises. I think that's another honest piece of information that is valuable for you to have.

Humankind could stand to learn much about life and death from animals in the wild. Predators prefer not to stalk and attack the mature, able-bodied in the group. They lie in wait for the ones who are sick or alone. Predators want the easy marks, both in the animal world and the human world. This often means going after the most vulnerable among us. Difference being: animals do it simply to survive.

*It's only personal among humans.*

Those of us who walk upright and know how to fold a napkin and use a knife and a fork and have the capacity to set our eyes upon the setting sun and be filled with a sense of awe and wonder need to take a cue from our four-legged friends. We need to dig deep and get in touch with our primal sense of preservation for ourselves and for our young.

You will see various species of strong, healthy animals surround their young, their old, and their infirmed. They will fight to the death to save them from predators. Animals don't need to introduce bills to Congress and get laws passed and start grass-roots movements to come together and create hashtags and figure out ways to change the system to solve these problems. If we're so ever-loving evolved, we don't we humans have such effective, built-in systems that protect our children?

Gazelles react quickly to any and all threats—real or perceived. They jump in an instant and they *move*. They will hide their young in the tall grass on the savannah if they think for one nanosecond that their fawns are in danger.

When I think a child is in danger, I jump. I *move*. If I see something, I say something. I call Child Protective Services and let them do their jobs. Like a gazelle, if the hair on the back of my neck stands up, I take action, instinctually. I've even gone so far as to confront someone I didn't trust just from watching him interact with one of the kids. I said to him flat out, "The proximity to which you place yourself with that particular child makes my skin crawl. I'm watching you."

Because let me tell you something about being menopausal, which I totally am. Once you get those hot flashes and the insomnia dialed in, it's *glorious*. Don't let anyone tell you any differently. You. Do. Not. Care. What. Anybody. Thinks. If you feel the need to say something, you say something. If you have a notion that you need to step into the ring with somebody, you will do just that. You know why? BECAUSE YOU'RE HOT! And not in the 24-year-old, 2% body fat, Southern-California-stunning kind of a way. More in the sleep-deprived, someone-just-lit-my-bra-on-fire and I-think-I-might-just-quit-my-job-and-move-to-Denmark kind of a way. People fear you, believe me. And it's kinda cool, I'm not gonna lie.

Immediately the protests burst forth:

"Oh, Daisy, you took that all wrong! You misinterpreted that whole thing! Surely, you couldn't believe for a second that I would ever..."

Yeah, I could believe that you would ever... because *I'm the crazy mom*. And I'm the crazy teacher. And I'm the crazy human who has taken a lesson or two from wild animals as to how to protect our young.

If someone gives you the heebie-jeebies when they're around your child and the hair on the back of your neck is standing up, please don't put the onus of responsibility on your child to protect himself or herself. Don't say, "I want you to stay

away from that woman!” (Or “that man!”) That is, as they say, bass-ackwards. Rather, you walk straight up to the individual in question and, bold as brass blazes, you say, “You know what? I don’t like the proximity you’ve established with my child. I’m not comfortable with it. I want you to stay away from my child.” Now, if you are menopausal (or menopausal, which might be a thing) you can ratchet it up a notch and throw in, “I don’t like you. I don’t trust you. And I’m watching you.” If you’re not, however, in the throes of horrific hormonal body changes, you might balk a bit at confronting someone without a shred of evidence, save only a weird feeling. I understand. But remember: if an alligator can hide her kids in her mouth to protect them and an octopus is willing to starve herself to death for the sake of her young, I think you can have a proactive, preemptive conversation with someone. Trust your instincts. You can do this. I believe in you. Because think about this: If no one intervenes, a serial pedophile can molest hundreds of children in a lifetime. That’s a fact. Look what Dr. Larry Nassar managed to do over just a few decades at Michigan State.

**#2 – Children are resilient. They bounce.**

No. *Some* children are resilient—not all. In fact, not too many. Besides, when people claim that children are resilient? What does that mean? ‘No harm, no foul’? That

paradigm in no way negates a child’s pain and suffering—even if those children do recover and grow up to live productive, happy lives. It’s a ridiculous notion and patently untrue. Broken children are very likely to grow up to be broken adults. The number of children who abuse drugs and alcohol is staggering. The number of incarcerated men and women who were abused as children is astronomical. These are children who are at a higher risk of dropping out of school and running away from home. Children who are molested have a higher chance of getting pregnant, becoming

obese or having an eating disorder, harming themselves, suffering from depression and/or anxiety, having physical problems as adults, and attempting suicide.

That doesn't seem very resilient to me.

In fact, you ought to Google "The Adverse Childhood Experiences" (ACE) study. In a nutshell, Kaiser Permanente hooked up with the CDC in the mid-nineties and asked about 17,000 patients to fill out a survey on what their childhood was like and what their health and behaviors were currently as adults. The result was a bunch of bar graphs that basically shows how people who were abused as kids and had dysfunction in their homes are the ones standing in the front of the line of humanity to get really sick and die before they're supposed to.

That doesn't seem very resilient to me either.

The notion, however, that kids who are harmed will somehow magically regenerate into healthy adults is sadly prevalent. There's a question I get asked almost every time I speak about my own experience with child abuse in pretty well every venue: "In a weird way, Daisy, are you grateful for what happened to you as a child because it's made you the person you are today?"

A resounding NO. I'm not. Because I don't believe that I am who I am today because I was abused. I am the person I am today *in spite of my abuse*—not because of it. My perpetrator, in no possible way, gets any credit for making me the woman I am today. What he did to me only served to destroy me—period. By all rights, I should have been a statistic. Truthfully, his other victims have not fared entirely well. And it's not like I've come out unscathed either. No, I'm not triggered by memories, I don't have depression or anxiety, and I've been able to eke out a productive, happy life. But I have the worst survivor guilt you've ever seen, and I'm not even trying to get over it which, if you think about it, is pretty typical for a person with survivor's guilt.

Plus, I'm crazy, which has already been addressed.



My point in all this is that this evil does wreak havoc in this world and in the lives of people, and just because we've rendered a child silent does not mean they're fine.

**#3 – My children would tell me if something happened to them.**

I wouldn't take this one to the bank. The statistics are bleak on this, and we're going to have to do better in equipping our children to advocate for themselves. Much better.

Darkness to Light tells us that one in ten children are molested by the time they are 18 years old. But of that 10%, only one in ten will tell another living soul. That's 10% of 10%. Of that number, only 30% of those cases will ever go to court. Not to mention the fact that the 10% of the kids who tell someone out of the 10% of kids who are molested actually only tell their friends—they don't even tell an adult. And even if and when a child does tell an adult, there are many adults who do not report that crime to the authorities, even though there are mandated reporting laws that require it.

Think about this: numerous studies have been done that indicate that instead of telling an adult they've been molested, it's more likely for the child to lie about what happened to them in order to protect their abuser. In fact, 57% of children who contracted sexually transmitted diseases from their abuse still did not disclose when interviewed by social services. With the unequivocal proof of physical evidence in the form of an STD, children *still* didn't tell. There are a ton of studies on this. Google Lawson and Chaffin, 1992. They're quoted all the time.

Read it and weep. Weep hard.

We will talk about the process of grooming in a few chapters so that parents can understand why children do not normally tell you if they're being molested. Suffice to say at this point, the number one job for those who work so hard to groom your child is by making sure they'll never say a word.

**#4 – The people who care for my child have all passed criminal background checks, so I don't have to worry.**

You know what I call background checks? A good start. And a false sense of security. That's all they are. Any organization who boasts that all of their employees and volunteers have passed background checks but don't

really go beyond that to keep kids safe is not a place for kids to be. If an organization can't tell you about how they train their staff to recognize the signs of child abuse and what their procedures are for reporting, then run like the wind.

I cannot tell you how many victims I have personally spoken to from a variety of institutions who swept reports of child sexual abuse under the carpet, silenced the victims, allowed the accused to simply resign from their post, and sent that pedophile down the road to groom and harm more children. Principals, teachers, counselors, coaches, church workers, and pastors alike. There are those in education who have lost their licenses in one state and move to a different state so they can remain in proximity to children and start all over again. There have been those in the church and sports and scouts who have been allowed to do the same.

Not only did my own perpetrator pass any and all background checks with flying colors, he was an ordained minister *and* a police officer. I have about as much use for background checks as I do a trap door in a canoe.

**#5 – Men who are gay are the most likely to be pedophiles.**

Research simply does not support this. UC Davis has a great article in regard to this misnomer that I've included in the appendix. Suffice to say that the efforts of some due to their religious beliefs and/or religious affiliations to link homosexuality to pedophilia have found some purchase in this country. Anita Bryant, who

started the “Save Our Children” movement in the 70s in response to anti-discrimination legislation, warned America that a gay teacher would be a threat to children, and America largely believed it. The Catholic Church certainly didn’t do much to dissuade the notion since male priests molested boys. The Davis article, however, helps us navigate through the misinformation, and I’ll attempt to summarize the main points.

First of all, it’s hard to do research like this because the only research we have on pedophiles are the ones who are in prison or the ones who are in programs who are seeking help. Makes it tough to get legit data because those groups of individuals may or may not be representative of the general population of pedophiles. The second thing that makes it hard is many of us, professionals included and myself included) are not altogether precise in the use of the words pedophilia and child molestation. We interchange them when, technically, pedophilia refers to a *mindset* or a *propensity* for and child molestation refers to the *act*. Just because someone has a penchant for something doesn’t mean the person acts on it. And just because a person decides to do a certain thing doesn’t necessarily mean they were jonesin’ to do it. Maybe they just did it on a whim. So, a pedophile isn’t necessarily a child molester in the scientific world, and a child molester isn’t necessarily a pedophile. Crazy right?

Then you have male priests who molested boys and people called that ‘homosexual’ molestation when a more scientifically precise description would have been ‘male-to-male’ molestation. Here’s a quick quote from the article: “The distinction between a victim’s gender and a perpetrator’s sexual orientation is important because many child molesters don’t really have an adult sexual orientation. They have never developed the capacity for mature sexual relationships with other adults, either men or women. Instead, their sexual attractions focus on children – boys, girls, or children of both sexes.” So there’s that.

One study in the article talked about a doctor who reviewed 352 cases of child sexual abuse. Of those, 269 were able to identify the perpetrator and only 2 of those perpetrators were gay. If my math is up to speed, that means that 267 of those perpetrators were straight—just like my mother’s husband who molested me and at least three other people, one of whom was a male.

There was another study that was done in Canada, but my goodness... how they got that information is a bit personal. Read it if you want to.

The bottom line is scientists and sociologists have come at this six ways to Sunday and the preponderance of evidence indicates that there is no correlation between homosexuality and pedophilia or child molestation. That doesn’t mean that gay men can’t or don’t or won’t molest children. It just means there is no basis to assume that gay men are to be feared or accused of being child molesters. And in regard to the very conservative folks whose religion directs them to be quite vocal about gay men being such a threat to children, I wish those same individuals would be just as vocal, just as united in their purpose, and just as ferocious in calling out the straight men who have proven themselves to be wolves in sheep’s clothing within their own churches. That may seem like a jab or an attack. It’s not. It’s a lamentation, and it comes from a place of great pain. Which brings us to our next point.

**#6 – I know the accused personally, and he (or she) would never do something like that.**

Oh yeah? My perpetrator was (and still is) beloved by many, many people who think he’s funny and sensitive and sings like an angel. Additionally, he sure as heck waltzed into the house of God twice on Sunday and Wednesday nights and sang in the choir. Surely, he’s a standup guy.

I'm here to tell you, that's all a façade. Every last bit. Who wants to admit that they'd been duped for a couple decades?

For heaven's sake, my sweet 95-year-old grandmother can't wrap her head around the fact that her daughter's husband (my step-monster) could have done what he did to her own grandchildren. She lives with them as of this writing and is happier than she's ever been. She has told me in no uncertain terms, "You hold a grudge. You call yourself a Christian, and you refuse to forgive! You father [he's not my father] is a good man! He made me waffles this morning!" I'm sure he did. He made her waffles... he cashed her social security check... he's a keeper. The point is, she can't believe it. She just can't. And I'm not going to argue with my 95-year-old grandmother. Nor am I going to shut down the platform I've built in advocating for victims of sexual abuse simply because she enjoyed a good breakfast and called me to the carpet, you can believe that.

Here's another great example of what I'm talking about. Janet Porter, a campaign spokeswoman for Roy Moore who lost a senate seat in a special election in Alabama in December of 2017, defended Moore by insisting that he is a Godly man and "...no one can fake something like that for forty years."

Now, I'm not saying Judge Moore is guilty and I'm not saying he's innocent. What I am saying is that Janet's notion that a person can't fake his Christianity is patently absurd. Yes, people *can* pretend to be something they're not for any indefinite amount of time—especially if they're hiding in a place that will protect them as long as they play the part. You can believe that too.

Here's the thing, folks. If someone is kind and generous and thoughtful and selfless with us, then we can't wrap our heads around the possibility that he or she could be sinister with anyone else. But here's what is so sinister about pedophiles and child molesters: They want to continue to groom and molest our children so they will go out of their way to be *especially* kind and generous and thoughtful and selfless with

us. I don't know how many times I've heard, "But she's so kind-hearted. Surely she could not have done this." Or, "He changed my life. There is no way on God's green earth he is capable of something like that." It's a hard thing to wrap our heads around. But here's what I want you to know:

It can be anyone. It can be anyone. It can be anyone.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "Daisy, for the love of Sam Pete. How do you expect us to trust anybody then?"

Fair question. Totally legit.

Here's what's also true: most people aren't pedophiles or child molesters. Most of us are good. Most of us are authentic. Most of us love children and want to protect them. I'm merely making the point that, no matter who is accused, you must not rule them out as an offender. Believe the child. Do not investigate or try to get to the bottom of it. Call the authorities right away and have them conduct an objective investigation. Let the evidence or lack of evidence speak for itself. It's hard to do. I, too, have been crushed and devastated because I never thought that the person I loved, who I thought loved me, could do such unconscionable acts against a child.

**#7 – The  
reputation of the  
organization (or  
the individual)  
needs to be**

GAWD! I hate this one so much.

A few hundred athletes who were molested by Dr. Larry Nassar might have a different opinion, as does virtually every person on the planet once the proverbial cat is out of the bag and people find out there were crimes being committed against children and the powers that were did absolutely nothing to prevent it. People tend to get a bit twisted when that happens and all anybody wants to know after the fact is who knew what and when and what did they do about it, who

did they tell, and what reports were made to the proper authorities. How many times do organizations have to drop this ball before somebody figures something out?

The reputation of the organization or individual at that point is diminished forever at best, and it is irreparable at worst. And you know what? To that I say, Huzzah! It should be.

As a public school teacher, if I run through the cafeteria naked with a gun and pop a few bullets into the ceiling during breakfast on a Friday morning in April (which is by far the roughest month for teachers on the calendar) I ought to be fired, wouldn't you say? Further, I ought never to expect to work in the industry of education again. Period. I know that going in.

Additionally, how awful would it be if my administration and/or my district tried to cover up the incident (evidence in the form of bullet holes be damned) and took great pains to erase the video footage of me streaking my way past the French toast sticks and cereal bars and chocolate milk, and they continued to allow me to be in charge of molding young minds? What do you say our society should do about them, hmm?

See, literally nobody agrees with this pretty little lie, and everyone unequivocally declares that their organization is committed to their patrons and their people... until someone in their agency is caught with her or his pants down, so to speak. Then organizations seem to forget all about their principles, they lose their moral compass, and are instantly in panic mode to diminish, deflect, deny. This is how cover-ups are born, boys and girls, and this is how abuse is allowed to continue for decades.

Coming up I have an entire chapter called, *A Few Words for Organizations*, and a portion of that chapter is entirely devoted to calling some serious BS on how organizations have completely mishandled allegations of abuse within their ranks. Whereas the pointed statements I made previously toward certain religious

individuals who failed to call out heterosexual predators in their own churches was *not* an attack, I want you to be clear, I will be attacking the systems and cultures and collectives that turn their backs on victims and protect the offenders. And so should you.

**#8 – You should report only when you are 100% positive that a child has actually been abused. Make sure you do a thorough investigation before making any reports. You do not want to be the one to topple or ruin an individual's reputation over a lie.**

The likelihood that a child is lying to you about being molested is very, very rare. If a young person has mustered up the courage to tell you that they have been or are being harmed, you need to take that very seriously. Listen lovingly and supportively, knowing that your very next conversation is with the police to file a report and/or Child

Protective Services. Period.

It is *not* our job to investigate. It is not our job to collect information. It is not our job to decide whether or not the child is telling the truth. It is our job to dial the telephone.

What *if* the child is lying, you ask. In the 20-plus years I've been in education, there was actually a time when I called and reported what a child had disclosed to me with serious doubts as to whether or not the child was telling me the truth. You know why? Because it's my responsibility as a teacher and my moral obligation as a decent human. In that situation, CPS investigated the claim and my suspicions about the validity of the child's story were confirmed. The authorities found that the child was not in any danger. And shortly thereafter, that sweet apple dumpling learned how to be accountable for her words.

But what if I didn't report that because I had my doubts. First and foremost, I would have been in violation of the law. A child told me she was being abused. I



didn't believe her. I acted in accordance with the law and filed a report. An investigation took place. The accused were vindicated. She took responsibility for her words.

It's very mathematical.

What if a person decides not to report because they've already formed an opinion about a child who has acted out before and has lied or has been disrespectful to authority? Maybe he or she has verbally lashed out at other children or physically hurt them? What if the child has bullied others or let her or his temper fly? Why should we believe children who act that way? Why should we take their words seriously?

Why? Because every single one of those behaviors *could be* a sign that a child has been exposed to some sort of trauma. And if you are someone that a child could trust, he or she just might let you in on that thousand-ton secret. Even if that child is a perpetual liar, make the call. The experts will do their jobs and sort it out.

I hope that gives you peace—that it is not up to you. You do not have to be the one who swoops in to orchestrate and mitigate and adjudicate and liberate. All you have to worry about are seven digits (ten with an area code) and simply tell the professionals what you've observed or what you've been told. They will take it from there. But they can't do their jobs unless you do your job.

Don't drop the ball. Make the call.

**#9 – If I report something and I'm wrong, the accused could come back and sue me for slander.**

Filing a false police report is a crime—that is true. However, depending on the state you live in and the statutes on the books, it could be illegal for you not to report. And you should not be worried about any sort of legal retribution if you are reporting in 'good faith'. That basically means that you have a reason to suspect that a child could be

in danger or has been harmed or are simply relaying information that a child communicated to you.

I once called Child Protective Services about a child that I thought may have been suffering from a certain measure of neglect. I explained the circumstances and made it very clear that I didn't feel that there had been a crime committed, but would it be possible for someone to make a home visit and check on the welfare of the family and perhaps provide some support for them.

I suppose a person could threaten to sue you or go try to find a lawyer to draw up a cease-and-desist-or-else letter. People can pay other people to do all kinds of things. I've been doing advocacy work for about two decades now and been threatened with lawsuits myself.

Or I suppose a person could figure out that you were the one who reported them and come punch you in the nose. If that does happen, you call the police and file another report. Get a restraining order.

I had a guy come into the school where I taught because he assumed that I was the one who called Child Protective Services about his son. (Of course, I was.) He marched right through the door and screamed at my principal, "Where's Daisy Martin? Where is she? I'm here to take her out!"

I'm pretty sure he didn't mean dinner and a movie.

If you take action on behalf of a child, you could be a hero. You could also be a hero with a black eye. I don't know what to tell you—all of this involves risk. That is the truth, and you might as well know it. I've walked out to the parking lot of my school looking over my shoulder more than a time or two. It's scary out there.

**#10 – It would be most imprudent to get the police involved when someone in the church is accused since this is a spiritual matter. This individual is caught up in sin. We need to show grace and bring restoration. This is what God would have us do.**

You know, I hate to keep dragging the church into this, but here we are. My first two books are very religious in nature, and in spite of the fact that I've got a mouth on me and I'm not really your typical church lady, I call myself pretty devout. I also like facts. Not 'alternative facts' but actual facts.

Evidence-based facts. Facts that emerge from implementing scientific method. You know, those kinds of facts.

Here's a couple of facts. Did you know that 93% of sex offenders consider themselves to be religious? Yeah. Check out Abel & Harlow, 2001.

You might check out a Christianity Today article by Marian V. Liautaud called, *Sex Offenders: Coming to a Church Near You*. She raises some tough questions and describes how churches grapple with the issue of grace and mercy and forgiveness vs. justice and accountability and due process.

Here's my take—disagree with me if you will.

Jesus Christ himself warned us to beware of ravenous wolves among us in sheep's clothing. My own Pastor Jim Halbert asked a great question not long ago about this very notion: "Are these wolves among us merely misunderstood sheep who simply need more grace? Or are they wolves? Because Jesus called them wolves."

Trust me. They're wolves. I know. I was raised by one. He's as fake as a spray tan, people. Counterfeit as they come. And for some reason that is beyond me, there are those in the church who want to cuddle with these individuals and make nice. Because, you know, Jesus is a really nice guy and he holds little lambs and does miracles and stuff.

Well? I'm not here to say he doesn't, but here's another description of this same Jesus:

*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:*

*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

I don't even know what that all means, but it sounds positively terrifying. Had I seen this vision, I'm sure I would have peed down the side of my leg. Especially when that passage in Revelation goes on to say that he trounced on the kings of the earth and all the armies that had gathered together to wage war on him and some beast along with a false prophet got captured and thrown alive into fiery, burning sulphur (uh... ouch?) and he went and killed everybody else with that sword hanging out of his mouth (Look, Dad! No hands!) and the birds gorged themselves on the flesh of the dead.

That's pretty sick stuff. Not to mention, one has to wonder why his robes were dripping blood along the bottom? Because... I don't know... he went sloshing through the guts of his enemies?

Those being the wolves, mayhaps?

Because anybody—and I mean *anybody*, including cops, teachers, preachers, presidents, beloved grandpas and grandmas or the sweetest neighbor in the world—anybody who strategically places him or herself up in the house of God to gain access

to children to feed his or her evil compulsion to steal, to kill, and to destroy, is probably going to be among those whose blood is on the robe of Jesus, the Commander of the Army of the Lord, on that day.

That should preach, y'all. That should preach.

We in the church have two choices: we can stand with the child who was harmed or we can stand with the one who deceived us all and violated that child. There is no room for diplomacy here—if we choose neutrality, we stand with the oppressor. Period.

We.

Must.

Choose.

One.

No one has spoken more eloquently or more powerfully than Rachael Denhollander, the first young lady to speak up against her abuser, Larry Nassar, who molested Olympic-bound gymnasts and other athletes for decades if you recall. I'll let her speak directly to this misnomer, also from Christianity Today:

*...the gospel of Jesus Christ does not need your protection. It defies the gospel of Christ when we do not call out abuse and enable abuse in our own church. Jesus Christ does not need your protection; he needs your obedience. Obedience means that you pursue justice and you stand up for the oppressed and you stand up for the victimized, and you tell the truth about the evil of sexual assault and the evil of covering it up.*

*...that obedience costs. It means that you will have to speak out against your own community. It will cost to stand up for the oppressed, and it should. If we're not speaking out when it costs, then it doesn't matter to us enough.*

Many in the church believe that the abuser simply made a mistake, that we can help him or her 'get better'. Or that victims need to forgive and forget—and we

remind them for good measure that if they don't forgive their abuser, then they won't be forgiven of their sins. If God has forgiven the offender, then who are we to judge?

All of this rhetoric is just one betrayal after another for the victim who, mark my words, will grow up to be big boys and girls and come back on fire and with great fury. She or he will tell the story we gave them—not the one where *they* were believed, supported, protected, validated, and restored, but the story where their *wolf* was believed, supported, protected, validated, and restored. They will rage. They will get on social media and tell the world our sins. They will sue us. They will press charges. They will walk away from the corrupt faith they were given, and they will not stop or even slow down when we threaten them with our libel lawsuits and send our lawyers after them with cease and desist letters. In fact, they're chomping at the bit to see us in court, and they will be victorious over us—as they should because everything that is right and good in the universe stands with them. They will win gargantuan financial settlements, they will shut down churches, and they will topple entire denominations. Look out your front window right now because the #MeToo movement and the #ChurchToo movement has lit this world on fire. People who were not chosen, not believed, not supported, not protected, are blowing through the temples of their pasts with bullwhips, throwing over the money-changers' tables and forcing the wicked out to hide only God knows where, a holy exorcism that's been a long time coming. Heads are doing 360s right now, and it's not even close to over.

I fully anticipate pushback on this by very well-meaning people who have a more accommodating take on how sex offenders should be included in the church. I am well aware of churches who welcome sex offenders to be among them with very strict boundaries that, if not followed to the letter, will cast those individuals out on their arses as far as the east is from the west. I get it. All I can tell you is that I feel strongly about certain things so I write and speak about those things. Other people have strong feelings and disagree with me. That is fine. To you I say, write a book.

Hustle some speaking gigs. Spread your message and so will I. Each of us, after all, must carve a path for ourselves as best we can according to what we believe is right.

But choose wisely. Not only because no one wants to end up on the wrong side of right, but because if we can manage to do the right thing, maybe we can give our children a better, safer world to live in.

## THREE

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### Kids Most at Risk

Pedophiles and child molesters have a very well-tuned selection system they use when looking for victims. There are children who are chosen as viable candidates, and there are children that they pass over. Obviously, we all want to make sure our own children are not ensnared in the insidious web of sexual abuse, but we need to come together and work just as hard to protect all children—not just our own. We need to be the voices of the voiceless and the advocates for those who are more at risk of being violated due to any number of factors.

In my second book, *Hope Givers: Hope is Here*, I talk about a daycare center that had one of their employees arrested for molesting the children in their care. He was about twenty years old and very beloved by the children. Of course he was. It is my understanding that his vetting process included an ‘interview’ game where the whole groups would answer questions for him. From that group, certain children were chosen, taken aside, and invited to play Angry Birds with him alone. It was their ‘special time’. That is where he would molest them.

I have a friend whose son was in his class. When the news of what he really was and what he had done hit the media and parents were informed and asked to cooperate with the investigation, her heart fell to the floor, as any of ours would. She had the presence of mind to avoid asking any leading questions and, to her credit, did not convey the panic she was feeling to her child. She simply began a conversation about Mr. Buddy—not his real name, and I apologize here for anyone whose name really is Buddy. Her son told her how fun Mr. Buddy was and that he liked him very much and all the things they would do in class. In the course of the conversation,



though, the boy became sad and put his head down. My friend was already nauseous, but she kept it together and expected the worst.

She asked him, “What is it? What’s wrong, honey?”

With tears in his eyes, he looked back up at her and said, “Mr. Buddy never asked *me* to play Angry Birds with him.” His little heart was broken because he felt the rejection of not being chosen.

My friend sobbed with relief as she realized that her child had been passed over. He had not been a victim. Sadly, a number of other children in that daycare were.

What puts all children at risk is the simple fact that they are little. They’re young. They’re naïve. They believe adults. They are incredibly susceptible to the deceptive techniques that predators use to entice them. But beyond those universal factors, there are other aspects of a child’s makeup and life-circumstances that increase the risk of him or her being selected and pursued.

One of the best and most informative interviews I’ve ever done on this subject was with my good friend, Janelle Stauffer, who is a licensed clinical social worker and therapist who specializes in complex trauma and attachment disorders. The link to the full interview is in the appendix. Our hour-long conversation is well worth your time—please check it out. She talks at length about “trauma-proofing” our kids. Again, let me reiterate the fact that there are no guarantees here or anywhere else that your child will be safe if you do everything you’re told to do. That’s not reality. Having said that, let me say that Janelle is very knowledgeable about the statistical factors that are present across the board that protect kids. Here they are:

1. Children who are better protected against sexual abuse have a secure attachment to their parents. They feel safe with their parents and know that their parents will protect them.

2. Children who are better protected against sexual abuse can talk about their emotions openly and have been shown by their parents that their feelings will be validated. These children have safe conversations with their parents about all kinds of things.
3. Children who are better protected against sexual abuse understand personal boundaries. They understand their own personal space as well as others' personal space, and they have been assured that they are in charge of their own personal space and that others are in charge of their personal space.

In working with adults who were molested as children, Janelle says that one of the difficulties her clients must work through is the grief about the fact that they never learned—were never taught—that being in charge of their own bodies and their own personal space were not even options for them growing up. They had no control over what was done to them—they were at the mercy of someone who had no mercy—often during the time in their lives when they were in the throes of deciding whether or not the world was a safe place or an unsafe place, and developing that sense of trust vs. mistrust. That profound sadness turns to anger, another important stage in the healing process. Janelle is encouraged when that deep sorrow morphs into angry indignation because it is an indication, perhaps for the first time, that the person realizes, *I have value. A great injustice was done to me that I didn't deserve, and I am angry about it! It should never have happened because I have worth.*

After that, a child's autonomy (or lack of autonomy) is established. This is that glorious stage when our little pumpkins start telling us, "No!" and "Mine!" and "I do it!" I smile whenever I see toddlers walking around with their shoes on the wrong feet because at least I know that an adult has basically agreed, "Okay, you're in charge of your shoes." We all have to start somewhere, right?

Because here's what key: the whole idea of consent cannot happen until we let our kids own their own bodies. So, really, kids need to be given permission and be praised as they recognize and embrace their own power. Some parents are leery about handing over such power—they don't want their kids to be entitled brats.

That's not what we're talking about here. Believe me, I raised a boy who is so empowered that he has taken charge of all my professional and personal technological decisions (to my great relief), he thinks I'm a really bad driver and rarely passes up an opportunity to point that out (I shut him up by making him cart me around), he thinks my music preferences are ridiculous (Pentatonix, Celine Dion, and the Dixie Chicks are awesome—I don't care what he says), he has no desire whatsoever to practice the religion THAT I HAVE CHOSEN FOR HIM, and he has put Sean-Martin and I on *his* phone plan with strict 'parental controls' so that we don't mess up our Android phones, which apparently is not too difficult for 50-somethings to do.

But he's a good person, I promise.

Let your children have a say in their lives and over their own bodies and with their own personal space. Nurture that. Foster that. Encourage that. Reward that. It makes your child more insulated against predators. Mind you, it doesn't rule out the possibility of being violated but, statistically, these are the most common factors that are present in kids who are passed over by predators.

However, there are parental factors that also contribute to the buffer between children and those who would harm them. I will repeat myself multiple times on the subject of vigilance, but that's really where it's at, folks. How actively involved are parents in their children's lives? Do parents know their kids' friends? Their friend's parents? Are they at their children's soccer games and music recitals? How do their kids use social media? When the kids are not at home, do parents know where they are? Who they're with?

This is a list that shouldn't need to be written, but here we are. Almost three decades in public education have made me a bit jaded. Ah, the stories I could tell you. Truthfully, the vast majority of parents are extremely attentive to their children, and I'm not talking about those families. But why do I know more about where *some* kids are at night than their own parents, considering the fact that I see them only 94 minutes a day, five days a week? I promise you, the kids whose parents have no idea what they're doing are most at risk for all kinds of horrible possibilities.

Here's something else that shouldn't have to be written, but Janelle and I talked about this during our interview as well. I am completely flummoxed that I even have to write this, but here it is: If you personally know or have been told that you have a history of sexual abuse in your family, then **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR CHILDREN ALONE WITH THE PERPETRATOR OR WITH ANYONE WHO HAS EVER LOOKED THE OTHER WAY AND ALLOWED THE ABUSE TO OCCUR.** Why that needs to be spelled out in a book like this is crazy.

To be clear, my son does not even know my mother or her husband. *He doesn't even know them.* He and his wife, my beautiful daughter-in-law, are bringing another baby into this world, and the people who raised me will not be receiving an announcement. They are out of our lives forever. My son was three when I last visited my parents. I thought I could manage a relationship with them and because of my religious upbringing, I thought I was obligated to. Forgiveness for their sins against me was expected, and I thought I was doing God's will. Three days was all it took to cure me of any notion that I owed them a thing. I wrote about this in my first book, how I got in my car with my baby and drove away from them forever. God and I have worked it out, no worries there. Have I gotten flack for that? You bet. Did that resistance change my mind? Not even a little bit because I know that I am the one who stands between my child and anyone out there who might harm him. So please. Pretty please. With sugar on top. Don't think anything has changed with the person in

your family who has harmed children. I don't care that they're old now. I don't care that they say they've found Jesus. I don't care, I don't care, I don't care. I do care that you'll be called out for keeping your children away from 'family', but don't let it break you down. Get rid of all the thoughts in your head that tell you it's no big deal. It is a big deal. It's the biggest deal ever. Do. Not. Leave. Your. Children. With. Anybody. Who. Has. Ever. Molested. Children. If you do, you are placing them in the very place they are most vulnerable.

Another important factor to consider in terms of vulnerability is any physical, mental, or emotional challenge that a child may have. Child molesters are looking for children who will not bust them out. Non-verbal children require much more supervision and protection, and a child who doesn't have the capacity to tell is exponentially more at risk as is a child who cannot run away or a child who has a harder time processing in his mind what is going on.

Additionally, a perpetrator targets victims who have some particular vulnerability or need. Maybe they come from a broken home or have parents who work a lot and are unavailable. Children who are largely on their own. Children who have trouble fitting in—they are isolated and are not involved with other groups of kids. Kids who don't have a lot of friends. Kids who are emotionally needy and crave any kind of acceptance or affirmation.

A predator will fill those 'needs' with great haste, I promise you. He or she will become part of a community where children are present. Those who prey on children will ingratiate themselves in that community, gain trust, and create relationships with children and their parents. They will survey the landscape and begin their selection process. Once the victims are chosen, the individual grooming processes will begin. Predators will have several children in various stages of that grooming process. I promise you, these people are stealthy. They are patient. They

will wait. They will move. They roam back and forth like a lion, seeking whom they may devour.

But be encouraged. Just the fact that you are reading this, taking all this information in, reflecting on your own parenting and your relationship with your children, contemplating the changes you'll make and feeling validated in all that you already do to keep your children safe... all of that will go a long way in wrapping your children in safety and putting that lion down.

You can do this.

You absolutely can.

## FOUR

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### A Child's Autonomy and Raising Good Humans

We've established how fundamentally important it is for a child to develop a sense of autonomy, not just for protection purposes, but to build healthy relationships as they grow. Here's a quick story about what that looked like for us.

Good friends of ours found out they were pregnant and told us their good news in our driveway because they were so excited that they couldn't even wait until we walked into the house. We were absolutely beside ourselves. This much-anticipated little nugget would have the best parents and the best two sets of grandparents ever. Sean-Martin and I wanted to be something a bit more to this baby than Miss Daisy and Sean-Martin so we decided on the names, Mimi and Grumpy. Sean-Martin was grumpy about being called Grumpy so, obviously, it stuck like glue.

Our sweet baby girl arrived right on time, just 5 pounds, 6 ounces, and we couldn't get enough of her. We are on a very short list of people who will ever be blessed to care for her when Mom and Dad need an evening out, and that is A-Okay with us. As she got older and became more cognizant of the world around her, she up and decided one day that she didn't want hugs and kisses from us.

And guess what? We didn't make her.

There's nothing better than cuddles, we all know that. I love to hold babies and kiss their chubby cheeks and sing silly songs to them and nibble their toes. I could no doubt make a career of that. When she decided she wanted none of it, I had to acquiesce and so did everybody else.

Mom and Dad felt badly and were tempted to say, “Aw, honey. Please give Mimi and Grumpy a hug,” but we didn’t let them.

“This is her body. Her choice,” I said. Being educators themselves who have studied child development, they knew it was true and right not to persuade her. Since 2-year-olds are not the most eloquent creatures, we helped her find the words to ensure her autonomy over her own body and her sense of self.

Was it like eating glass? Of course it was. But we’re the adults. We can suck it up. That was a critical time in her life. I had to ask her permission if I could eat her toes. She said no. I reinforced to her that those were her toes, and I respected her decision. No means no.

And then I ate copious amounts of chocolate.

Not too long after, Mom and Dad had some more happy news... another baby came into our lives, this time a boy—all 26 pounds-498 ounces of him. (Okay, not really, but he was a biggun’!)

All I wanted to do was hold him and kiss his chubby cheeks and sing him silly songs and nibble on his toes.

We snuggled with this new baby to our hearts’ content, and guess who got over her aversion to affection? Little Miss. But it was on her terms, not ours. She’s been hanging off our necks ever since. All is well.

This is very likely to happen in your family. When Uncle Leroy or Aunt Lulu is rebuffed by a child who does not want to be touched, don’t let Uncle or Auntie start making whining sounds. Don’t let your friends and relatives stick out their lower lips and roll their fists on their eyeballs like they’re wiping tears from their eyes. And please don’t say to your child, “Oh, you give So-and-So a kiss! You’re hurting their feelings!” Tell the whiners to suck it up and be the adults that they are.

In the most affectionate way, of course.



Because as Janelle explained in the previous chapter, affording your children the autonomy to say yes or no to being touched is imperative in her or his development. It is quite normal and absolutely necessary to grow a healthy human. Explain to your relatives that you are teaching your son or daughter that they have every right to say who they kiss and hug and who they don't and that you will not force them to do something with their very selves that they don't want to do or that makes them uncomfortable. Apologize if you must, but simply let these individuals know that you expect them as adults to understand that you're equipping your child with a sense of independence and that you are building trust with your child. If Uncle (or Auntie) protest and try to tell you that all you're doing is relinquishing your authority and promoting obstinacy in your child and blah, blah, blah... don't invite them over next Christmas.

Kidding.

Just pull the 'It's my kid and that's the way it is' card. Conversation over. Remember that kids get heebie-jeebies too, and that's an important part of themselves to nurture as well as endorse. All of this lets kids know you're in their corner.

If we force our kids to sit on laps they don't want to sit on and kiss people they don't want to kiss and allow people to touch them when they don't *want* to be touched, how likely are they to come to us and tell us that a different person has touched their private areas and that wasn't okay with them? Because we've taught them that they don't get to say who does what with their bodies—adults do. And why? Because we didn't want to be rude to Uncle Leroy or Aunt Lulu. We didn't want to have a conflict. We followed the social norms of family and adhered to those 'rules'.

Things to think about.

This makes me want to talk about how disproportionately kids are taught to be polite, compliant, and obedient. We instruct them not to complain or ever question authority (especially our girls, tragically) and in so doing, we squelch their power to

advocate for themselves and others when boundaries are crossed. Females are even more socialized to submit to any and all authority, especially male authority, and we all know there are certain traditions that many people are very attached to that reinforce this paradigm. Unfortunately, this creates very fertile ground, not only for abuse to occur, but for it to be covered up as well.

It seems like a delicate balance between affording kids some control over their lives without having them run the whole house, which most of us think they do anyway. We do want kids who listen to us and respect authority. We certainly don't want to let our kids to run amok or grow up with an inflated sense of entitlement.

Our kids' adherence to following rules is one of our top priorities, and I get it. I'm a public middle school teacher, for crying out loud. I understand the importance of rules, but I will also tell you that we have to teach our kids when certain rules should be broken. I'll give you an example.

In this crazy country we live in, we have to practice intruder drills at school (while our lawmakers wring their hands trying to decide whether or not they want to keep children safe or get reelected... ah, decisions, decisions) in case someone decides it would be fun to bring an arsenal of weapons and mow down the entire school. During our last intruder drill of the year just a few months ago, one of my students asked if they could hide in the elevator if they were in danger. I told them that if somebody came in with a weapon that fired 400 rounds a minute, they had to think for themselves at that point and do whatever they had to do: run, hide, fight, *live*. That's when another student said, "But we're not allowed to be in the elevator unless we have an elevator pass."

See what I mean?

It's the 'thinking for themselves' part that kids often get stuck on and, in a moment of crisis or in a moment of experiencing some kind of abuse, they are

colossally ill-equipped to navigate their way out of the situation or advocate for themselves after the fact IF we have not given them the right to their own autonomy.

There are times, in fact, that kids need to break the rules, to question authority, to complain, to go against the status quo, to swim upstream, to resist. It is up to us to teach them how to do it effectively at the appropriate times.

This is why in 26 years of teaching, I only have two rules:

#1 – Be respectful.

#2 – Don't annoy me.

If they've broken Rule #1, I promise you, they've already broken Rule #2. I could care less about chewing gum, tardies (please don't tell my boss that), eating snacks in class, raising their hands to ask if they can get up to sharpen their pencils, or even challenging me on something they disagree with. (I do love that last one and highly encourage it.)

I teach Pre-AP Advanced English and Literature to kids who have great test scores and are very good at the game of playing school. They follow directions and do whatever they're told. Early in the year, my students make it crystal clear to me that all they want me to do is tell them exactly how I want something written or read so they can regurgitate back to me what I just demonstrated to them so that they can have their precious A's. Every year I tell them, "Look, people. I know all you want are the highest grades possible because that's your academic holy grail. You think your report cards are the end-all-be-all, but I promise you, they're not. Bless your hearts, while you're obsessing over one letter of the alphabet, I'm over here trying to build Dumbledore's Army."

Some kids are right there with me, and some are still stuck in the mindset where their role is to simply do what they're told. In other words, some of my kids would dive into that elevator without hesitation while others are waffling over whether or not they'll get lunch detention if they do.

We want to equip our kids to be able to do whatever they need to do to be safe as soon as they are developmentally ready.

To help them along with this, here's what I care about in my classroom:

#1 – Are my kids good people?

#2 – Can they read and write at or above their grade level?

That's it. With only these two items to worry about, my students are free to clear their minds of having to remember 3837474839304958575 rules and simply ask themselves one thing for every situation they find themselves in: Is what I'm doing demonstrating that I'm a good person? If they can wrap their heads around that, then they can develop autonomy over their own behavior and make good choices accordingly? Which would save the rest of us the trouble of having to do it for them, frankly. And shouldn't we get them to that place of maturity where they can decipher whether or not they're making good choices or bad choices, frontal lobes notwithstanding?

What if we adults let up just a bit of our focus on trying to make sure our children are tacitly obedient, but instead teach them the proper times and occasions when they should resist the status quo in order to make the world a better, safer place? What if we showed them how to do just that by questioning and calling out those social systems and cultural conditions that have absolutely failed us? Where is our *own* autonomy in all that needs to be fixed in this world? Can we show them how that's done?

What if we adults allowed our kids to see hardship in the world to build in them a sense of empathy? Even young children have the capacity to understand injustice. Do we encourage them to be brave? Do we show them how by standing up for those who are being intimidated by someone else in a position of power? Do our children see us advocating for those who are afraid or are at the mercy of someone

who is not showing mercy? Do they see us building resilience in those who need to be encouraged in that way?

When we teach children to be compassionate, kind, brave, resilient, empathetic, and respectful and to treat everyone, starting with our very own selves, with basic human dignity, they are much more likely to follow the rules when it's right to do so; and they are much more likely to resist the rules when it's right to do so. But that is going to require them to have autonomy over their own lives.

I spoke for some folks at a place in Boise not too long ago, and a gentleman who had raised eight kids told me something that I thought was brilliant and apropos to end this chapter. He said, "My wife and I decided early on when we became parents that we weren't just going to raise healthy children—we were going to raise healthy adults. We were committed to that, and thankfully we turned out some great kids."

Well said, Dad. Well said.

## FIVE

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### Open Communication

You are reading this book right now because you want to do everything you can to protect your child from harm. You also want to make sure that, God forbid, if something were to happen, your child would come to you right away. I'm trying to do everything in my power to write a book for you here that will prevent the abuse in the first place, pare down the amount of time it takes for a disclosure, and provide healing if the worst were to happen.

So let's have some frank conversations about our conversations.

By the time you realize that something is amiss, it is likely that your child is already embedded in the grooming process. His or her disclosure is also process. Kids who have been abused and are contemplating telling someone put their foot in the water and reveal something that seems somewhat 'safe' for them to tell in order to see how an adult will respond. If the adult freaks out, gets angry, or is dismissive, the child will shut down. This is positively a factor in the tragic statistic mentioned before that only 10% of children will tell someone about their abuse, and often that person is another child—not an adult. We must get better at how we receive this information. I'm not trying to blame. I am trying to educate and inform.

Let's start small. Who remembers being told this as a child?

"Don't be a tattle-tale."

"Buck up – stop being a sissy."

"Are you bleeding? No? Then go play!"

"She's not hurting you."

“Boys will be boys.”

“You kids just need to work it out.”

“He probably has a crush on you. He’s just doing that because he likes you.”

That last one has kept therapists in business for years.

The blasé responses and the blaming that many adults give to the victims when they attempt to advocate for themselves is phenomenally harmful.

Remember the sweet little girl who wouldn’t let me hug her or kiss her or eat her toes? Her mama and I took her and her little brother to the playground at the park by my house one Saturday when they were over. While Mom was pushing both of her children on the swings, I tuned in to three boys all having a great time swinging on the monkey bars, climbing the rope ladders, and sliding down the spiral slide. A girl about their age tried to play with them. She was friendly. She said, “Hi, can I play with you?”

Let me tell you, the misogynistic BS I heard on that playground that day floored me. It wasn’t just, “You have cooties!”

It was:

“You can’t play with us. You’re a girl. Girls suck.”

“Yeah, girls are stupid.”

“Boys are always better than girls.”

And then it became:

“You’re ugly anyway.”

“You smell like dog crap.”

“You EAT dog crap! That’s why your breath stinks!”

Obviously, the meanness of four boys ganging up on one little girl who was only trying to play with them was horrifying, but not as horrifying to me as her mother’s response when she went to advocate for herself.

“Oh, don’t be silly,” her mother said. “They’re not hurting you. You’re just being a tattletale.”

Here is unequivocally what her daughter heard her say:

“You are ridiculous.”

“They are innocent.”

“Don’t make waves,” or “Don’t tell me something that is going to require any action on my part.”

“There is nothing wrong with the way you are being treated.”

“You need to suck it up.”

“They’re not wrong for mistreating you – you’re wrong for *saying* they’re mistreating you.”

“What you really need to do is be *silent* because females should never accuse males for their bad behavior – they’re *males*, after all. We want them to *like* us, so we must learn to tolerate whatever they dish out.”

Perhaps she even hears the message, “You are not worth being treated well. They are telling you that you’re beneath them because you *are* beneath them.”

What else is she supposed to hear? Her own mother defended *them* instead of *her*! And, in fact, *blamed* her for opening her mouth.

The boys’ mothers were deep in their own conversation, not even paying attention.

“Do not come to me with a problem if it is going to require any action or effort on my part.”

“You are not my priority.”

“Your complaints are not important to me.”

“I don’t have your back.”

“I cannot be trusted.”

“I am not someone you can confide in.”

I seriously doubt those are the notions parents intend to convey to their children. But sadly, it is exactly what is communicated when we are dismissive of their



hurt feelings. To us it sounds like tattling and it's annoying so we shut them down. I know. It can be irritating. You've worked all day and your boss is on your case and there are still dishes in the sink from last night and the dog just threw up on the carpet. Their complaints seem incidental to us because we're adults, and it's hard not to exhale abruptly in that 'you're-getting-on-my-every-last-nerve-child sigh that tells them that the things that matter to them do not matter to us.

And then we wonder why they won't tell us that someone is molesting them. It is on the playgrounds and classrooms and back yards where children's identities and self-concepts are formed. They need our help in navigating through these kinds of situations. One of the most important things you can do to keep your children safer is to listen to them when they are advocating for themselves. Foster an open line of communication with them. Create a sanctuary where they know they can come to you and rely on you. Of course, we want to teach our children how to navigate their way through painful situations where they're rejected and their feelings are hurt. They do need to gain independence in this area. But first prove to them you can be trusted. Treat their hurts tenderly. Then teach them that they can trust themselves.

Allow your child to talk about how he or she feels and treat those emotions with the utmost compassion. They are real to that sweet pumpkin. Never dismiss or diminish their feelings. Do not defend or make excuses for other children's behavior and for the love of God, don't reinforce negative BS gender paradigms – i.e. "Boys will be boys," or "Girls are all about the drama." Neither gender gets a free pass to act badly. This is just therapy-waiting-to-happen.

Validate your child, but be careful not to reinforce any notion that she or he is a victim. If your child is old enough, don't necessarily rush to defend you're her or him. Ask them what they think is the best action to take. Of course, you could get anything from, "Make them be my friends," to "I think we should blow them up." Their frontal lobes aren't going to be coming together for a while so they need

guidance with this. This is really about getting your child to problem-solve independently while stepping in whenever needed and intervening on their behalf when they are in over their heads.

Decide with your child some sort of action that they can take. Teach them to use their words. Words are so important! Help them find their voices and use them effectively. Then decide with your child what action *you* are going to take. If your child says, “No! No! Don’t do anything! I’ll be embarrassed!” reassure them that it’s your #1 job as a parent to embarrass them... Okay, I’m kidding. I just want to see if you’re paying attention here.

Reassure them that they are and will always be the most cherished and wonderful part of your life. There is nothing you would not do, give, or sacrifice for them. You love them. You believe that sometime soon, when they’re ready, they’ll be able to handle these situations by themselves and that you’ll help them every step of the way. Did you mention how much you love them? They can come to you for *anything*! You have no intention of failing them. Anything and everything that is important to them is important to you.

It is on the playgrounds and classrooms and back yards where children’s identities and self-concepts are formed, and they need our help in navigating through these kinds of situations.

It’s in our homes where they first begin to decide whether the world is safe or unsafe. When we talk about body parts and say super scary words like penis and vagina instead of winky-dink and hoo-hoo like we’re shampooing our hair in the morning, that’s a good thing, folks. No difference between a kneecap and a clitoris. Well. There very clearly is a difference between those two things, but there shouldn’t be a difference in how we talk about those two things.

To be completely truthful here, I blew chunks at this as a mother. One day when Geoff was around nine years old, we were driving down the freeway when he decided to tell me, “Mom, I think I know what sex is.”

“What is sex?” I said.

“You’re gonna freak out,” he said.

“No, I won’t,” I said.

“Yes, you will,” he said.

We repeated this probably six times, and then he said, “Mom, you’re gonna get how you get.”

“Honey,” I said, “Sex is a natural thing. God made it. It’s where babies come from. It shouldn’t be anything we need to freak out about. I promise I won’t freak out.”

“Okay, but you’re gonna lose it. I know you.”

“No, I won’t. Tell me.”

So he said what he thought sex was.

I almost wrecked the car.

I referred him immediately and hysterically to his Fa, who was very objective, very matter-of-fact, very SAFE, and much better than I am in every possible way in this situation.

Please be better than me.

Please.

I suck.

Please don’t suck.

I suck so bad that I’m writing a chapter here about open communication for a book designed to keep children safe from sexual predators, which is something I’m incredibly passionate about, and I can’t even tell you what the thing was that Geoff said sex was. That’s how bad I suck.

But I am good at the rest, and the rest is this:

Talk with your treasures, not only about good touch and bad touch, but *secret* touch. Their little bodies are very likely to respond how they were designed, and although a child is colossally confused and conflicted when he or she is molested, it still feels physically good. Children might identify that as ‘good touching’. A good way to do this is to have discussions that include questions like this, and this certainly is not an exhaustive list.

- What parts are okay for someone to touch?
- What parts aren’t okay?
- What if somebody does touch you there?
- What if someone who isn’t supposed to touch you there says that they’re going to do something bad to you if you tell? Or they’re going to do something bad to mommy or daddy if you tell?
- Who could touch you there with your permission?
- Who is a safe person you can tell if someone does touch you there?
- Who is a safe person you can tell if someone shows you pictures or videos of naked people?
- Who is a safe person you can tell if someone asks you to touch them where a bathing suit covers?
- Who is a safe person you can tell if someone tells you a naughty joke?
- Who is a safe person you can tell if someone just flat out makes you uncomfortable—even if you don’t know why?
- If you do have something to tell me about this, will you ever, ever, ever be in trouble?

Ask that one maybe a thousand times. Because you know what? Even though I freaked out when Geoff... said what he said... I let him know in no uncertain terms

that he was perfectly fine to tell me whatever he wanted about anything, that he was absolutely not in trouble because he didn't do anything wrong, and that I was the crazy mom.

Which he already knew.

It's not a good idea to convey to a child, "Don't you ever let anyone touch you in your private places!" as if that child could ever do anything in a million years to stop it. So if someone does touch their private parts, they won't tell you because they *believe* that because they didn't do anything to stop it, they actually did let someone touch them even though there was no consent at all.

We need to spend 90% of the time talking to our kids about friend/family member danger and 10% of the time talking about stranger danger. These conversations need to be proportionate to the statistics, and 90% of children who are molested know their abuser, and so do their families.

Additionally, let's tell kids that *secrets* are not safe. Remember back to when you were little, and your best friend said they wanted to tell you a secret? Were you not over-the-moon excited to be chosen and trusted? Did you not feel incredibly important? Included? Sharing a secret with someone feels like being allowed behind the velvet rope to the VIP section at the most exclusive and sought after event in the town! All humans love that feeling.

So how do we talk kids out of that?

Two things come to mind. First, we can easily replace 'secrets' that are not okay, with 'surprises' which are totally okay. Maybe Daddy is planning a birthday party for Mommy and the littles get to be included in that.

With a sneaky smile on his face, he says, "Shhh! Don't tell Mommy! It's a *secret!*"

Conversely, maybe Daddy is molesting the kids.

With a sneaky smile on his face, he says, “Shhh! Don’t tell Mommy! It’s a *secret!*”

However, if Daddy is planning a birthday party for Mommy and the littles are included in that and he says, “Shhh! Don’t tell Mommy! It’s a *surprise!*” that suggests that Mommy is going to find out very soon about this very exciting event. This is perfectly fine. But secrets imply that no one else should *ever* know—that a child is so, so lucky to be selected for such preferential treatment. Therein lies the trap.

Second, when you start educating kids about the process of grooming itself, they begin to understand why it is so important that they tell you if something is going on that is ultimately intended to harm them. I have an entire chapter devoted to what grooming looks like and what it feels like to the child, but suffice to say here that it is imperative to let your child know as soon as they can understand that, while many people are well-intended and trustworthy, there are those who are not. They don’t have to live in fear or suspicious of everyone they meet because you will be there to protect and help them navigate toward safe people and away from dangerous people. But to be clear, their #1 job is to come to you with any concerns or confusion or when they’re nervous or uncomfortable around anyone.

Your job is not to drop the ball on this. They will come to you if you invite them to. Let them watch you establish boundaries for people in real time—even if people aren’t a danger. You have but to say, “My child said he’s uncomfortable around you. I’m not saying anything has happened between you, but you need to back off.”

Harsh, right?

I don’t care. I’m the crazy mom.

That person may have a very legitimate excuse in regard to whatever transpired. Totally plausible. How about this in the way of a response?

“Look, I mean no disrespect, but my child has said he’s uncomfortable with you for whatever reason. I’m in the process of establishing my trustworthiness to my kid and making sure he knows without a doubt that he can come to me if he’s ever uncomfortable with someone for any reason. So while he’s working things out in his head about what’s safe or not safe for him, I’m working to keep him out of situations that could be potentially harmful like being groomed for sexual abuse, not that that’s what this is, but establishing my reliability with him is more important than possibly offending you. In the meantime, don’t approach my kid to try to work it out. Just give him his space until I say otherwise. I’m sure you’re great—I’m not insinuating that you’ve done anything wrong. But this is a big issue and parents need to do more of this kind of thing.”

Listen, I make children uncomfortable all the time. In middle school I have to say things like, “Why, for the love of Sam Pete, are you licking the desk! It’s disgusting! Stop!” and “Why should I have to even form sentences like, ‘Stop licking the desk’ anyway? Why do you continually put me in situations like these?”

It’s not comfortable for anybody.

I swear, if anybody ever looked me in the eye and set boundaries like that for me, I would HUG THAT PARENT! I would wash that guy’s car! I’d bake him a friggin’ cake! The best thing to come out of an ordeal like this one is that your child will feel very secure and protected, cherished and valuable. You will have established yourself as the first line of defense in his or her life.

Think about how far that would go to increase the chances that your child will, in fact, come to you with all of his or her questions and fears and thoughts, the good and the bad and everything in between.

Finally, we as parents don’t merely communicate verbally. We speak to our children through the lives we lead. What do we communicate to them about what healthy relationships look like? What do we show them about true love? What do you

and your spouse or you and your partner openly communicate to your children about building a life with someone who has promised to be with you forever?

Because love is patient. Love is also kind. Love is not jealous. Love doesn't brag. It's not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil—it rejoices with the truth. Love always protects. Love always trusts. Love always hopes. Love always endures. Love never fails.

That's parenting, y'all. That's the stuff of life.



## SIX

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### What Vigilance Looks Like

As daunting as it seems to ensure your children's safety, parents *can* take steps to make their children safer from those who would choose them, groom, them, and harm them.

A great place to begin is to put all the adults in your child's life "on notice", so to speak, about the actions you will take as a parent if ever it comes out that one of your children has been molested.

This is *not* what I mean by that: *"If I find out that anyone here has been touching my kid, I will kill you and burn this place to the ground with you in it."* I know that is likely the sentiment, but that's actually counterproductive.

Here is something you could easily say to the people who care for your children be they teachers, youth pastors, coaches, principals, neighbors, friends, relatives, babysitters, or even other children:

*Our children are the most precious part of our lives, and we love them and care for them and will do anything to protect them. I appreciate all that you do to pour into our children's lives, and you have my utmost respect for how you make the world a better place. Having said that, let me say that child abuse is something that we are vigilant about. We talk with our children and have taught them to advocate for themselves if anyone is inappropriate with them. We encourage them to use their voices. Although we have no reason to suspect that anything is amiss, we as a family always want to proactively let those who care for our children know that if ever a situation arises where our children are harmed or threatened, we will go to the lengths of the universe to make sure that any and all guilty or complicit parties are charged and convicted to the fullest extent of the law.*

Then look whoever you're talking to dead in the eye. And smile pleasantly. Do not qualify or apologize for your words, and do not be the next to speak. Just wait. See if they respond in a way that resonates authentically. If they balk or are insulted or get defensive or look at you like you're a weirdo, then I'd seriously ponder whether or not they are the people who should be spending any time with your child. Their response should sound something like this:

*Good for you! I couldn't agree more! I wish every parent would go into their daycares and schools and sports teams and churches and youth centers and summer camps and declare that! Our kids would surely be a lot safer!*

Of course, child molesters and those who protect them have highly advanced manipulative skills, and they could throw out the same thing. But here's what you also have to remember: pedophiles pass on kids all the time.

There is a *choosing process* where these monsters will decide which kids pose the least risk of them getting caught. A daycare I read about online had unwittingly hired a pedophile who played an "interview game" with the kids to see which ones he would invite to play Nintendo with him later. By themselves. He chose kids who he felt would not tell—including a non-verbal, special needs child. By having the aforementioned conversation with those who are in close proximity to your children, you have thrown up one more barrier between your child and harm—our children need all the protection they can get. You have basically made it clear:

*Our family is vigilant.*

*We are well aware of what goes on in this world.*

*We have no intention of burying our heads in the sand or pretending things like this don't exist or turning our heads the other way.*

*We are educated about this issue.*

*We are equipping our children with the power of their voices to protect and advocate for themselves and for each other.*

*We will believe our children.*

*We will report child abuse of any kind.*

*We will press charges.*

*We will be relentless in our pursuit of justice.*

This conversation, however, is not over! When you have finished having the first conversation, then ask for details as to what their protocol is for how they handle cases of child abuse in their organization. This is a critical component of this conversation. You will very likely hear that everyone on their staff has passed a background check.

To that, I say, Whoop-dee-dee. We talked about this in the *Pretty Little Lies* chapter—they'd be remiss if they didn't! Background checks are not the end-all-be-all—they are merely a start. Somebody at some point would have had to put a child's safety over a perpetrator's precious reputation and file a police report. That doesn't always happen. In fact, it doesn't happen a *lot*. Believe me, I've put my arms around many a victim of child sexual abuse whose perpetrator passed background checks because instead of reporting like they were supposed to, the organization allowed them to 'resign' and move on down the road to abuse more children. I'm waiting for the day when I turn on the news and see those who didn't report be put in handcuffs, read their Miranda rights, and hauled off to jail. Lord, haste the day.

If those who care for your children can't look you dead in the eye and tell you in no uncertain terms as to what their reporting protocol and procedures are, get your children out of there! Don't ever leave your kids in a place where there is no plan to legally advocate for them if something were to happen. Don't assume every organization has a plan. Penn State obviously didn't have an effective protocol for protecting kids from Jerry Sandusky, and these were educated people.

Listen for them to say that there is never a circumstance when an adult should ever have to be alone with a child.

Listen for them to say that adults are never allowed to bring gifts or treats for specific children. If she or he doesn't have a piece of gum for everybody, she or he doesn't have a piece of gum for anybody.

Listen for them to say that their employees are on notice that if there is ever a situation that comes to light that an adult has asked a child to keep a secret for them or has identified any child as a ‘special friend’, that is grounds for immediate termination.

Listen for them to encourage you to drop in to their facility unexpectedly at any time to check on your child or to download an app that beeps your phone whenever they pee or eat or get the hiccups.

Listen for them to invite you on a tour of their facilities and to point out the fact that they have a big window here and a Dutch door there where their employees can be seen at any time. Let them show you exactly where the bathrooms are and where the adults are and how kids use the restrooms and get all cleaned up and wash their hands with soap while they sing the ABC song so they know they’ve washed their hands long enough.

### ***What about sleepovers?***

I gotta tell ya... not my favorite, but I know it’s incredibly hard to have your child crying and, mayhaps, throwing a wall-eyed fit because everybody else got to go over to Suzy’s house to spend the night, and they don’t get to. And sometimes it’s a necessity. When my sister died, I had to have Geoff stay with someone overnight because I was a mess, first and foremost, and I had a colossal amount of arrangements to tend to and decisions to make. Geoff was only five years old and had only ever stayed under my roof or his father’s.

This was huge for us.

I took him to Aunt Amie’s and Uncle Tim’s to play with his cousins and have a sleepover. I did not have any reservations whatsoever as to his safety, and they cared for him like they cared for their own because he was their kid too—just as their children are mine.

Obviously, you're not going to leave your child with anyone you don't trust, whether they are relatives, close friends, or acquaintances that have invited your child to a sleepover to celebrate a birthday or some such event. If I'm being completely transparent and honest which, sometimes to the vexation of those around me I perpetually am, I'd think twice about sleepovers in general. I just don't like them, plain and simple. My questions are these:

- Who is supervising?
- What do you have planned for the kids?
- When are they going to bed?
- What other kids will be there?
- Who are their parents?
- For younger children: Don't even think about giving my child a bath—one day without one won't hurt him.
- For older children: Will there be alcohol? (Like they're going to tell you if there is.)
- Are they prepared for you to come to their house unannounced and ring the doorbell—because it's a distinct possibility. (Crazy!)
- Are there guns in the house? Where are they kept? Who has access to them? Do your children know where the guns are?
- Does your family do drugs?
- Do you smoke?
- Is that movie rated R?
- Are they going to play Spin the Bottle or Truth or Dare or Light as a Feather or put your hands on a Ouija Board and ask it if it's gonna kill you in the middle of the night so my kid can have nightmares for three months? 'Cuz you can forget about that!

A CIA-worthy interrogation like this just might get your kid uninvited.

Well. Cry me a river.

So what should you ask your children when they get home to make sure they were kept safe if they ever got to go in the first place?

“You didn’t get molested, did you?”

Don’t do that. And don’t ask, “Were you a good girl?” Or “Were you a good boy?”

That sends the message that your expectation is that they be compliant with the adults in authority while in someone else’s home. If that someone wants them to do unmentionable things, it reinforces in your child’s mind that her or his cooperation with said adult is actually your directive. As parents, we know that is not the case, but that may be how your child interprets it. In fact, when you’re dropping them off (if you even decide to allow this) I wouldn’t yell after them to ‘be good’ as they’re getting out of the car because that could also be interpreted to ‘do what you’re told’.

Ugh. It’s just all so convoluted and hard. But when your child comes home, I would gauge her or his demeanor to see what there is to see behind those eyes and hear what there is to hear behind those words. I would ask if they had a good time. If they were comfortable. If they had fun. I would gently pursue any line of conversation that would reveal to you any discomfort or irritation he or she may admit. Let them talk. Let him tell you every mundane thing for the next eleven hours about that blasted video game he wants now and how his friend’s mom makes way popcorn better than you and they use really weird toilet paper at their house—it’s super thin and it’s not good for pooping at all—and their dog was huge and scary at first but then it was okay because she caught the ball in her mouth when he threw it like eighty times and her name is Coconut and isn’t that a funny name for a dog and... and you just listen.

And when he’s done, (or she) and it doesn’t have to even be in the car on the way home, you bring the whole conversation around to the important conversations you’ve been having with your child since they were itty bitty:

You are precious to me.

You know I always want you to be safe.

We've talked about all kinds of things, haven't we?

We talk about these things because I want you to know that you can always, always tell me anything—no matter what it is.

You know that the first thing you do if an adult ever tells you not to tell me something is to tell me.

You know you won't get in trouble if you tell me that someone is doing things to you that aren't appropriate or if they've told you to do something to them, right? None of that is your fault.

You know that if someone tells you that they'll hurt me if you tell that they're lying, right? They won't hurt me. They're just trying to scare you, and you can tell me anything.

If an adult threatens to hurt you if you don't keep a secret, tell me right away. I won't let anybody hurt you.

Tell me even if it's somebody in our family or somebody who is our friend—even if it's somebody we all love.

I will believe you.

I will do whatever we have to do to protect you.

I will be on your side.

You do not ever have to be with somebody you don't want to be with. I won't make you. I'll figure something else out if you truly aren't comfortable.

No one in our lives is more important to me than you. I choose you over anyone and everyone. Period. I will always protect you.

Your body belongs to you. No one should be allowed to touch your body if you don't want them to. Not Mommy, not Daddy, not even Jesus. You get to decide what happens in regard to your body.

If you're doing things that you're not sure are right or if somebody is doing something with you that you're not sure about, come ask me – you will not get in trouble for asking me. I promise.

In the same way that the best time to plant a tree is 25 year ago, the best time to start talking to your kids openly and granting them autonomy over their bodies and reassuring them that you are a safe place to land is... you guessed it... 25 years ago.

“But my child is only 3,” you say.

Well then, make it 27 years ago!

The point is, this is something you build over a long period of time. These are your children. God gave them to you. You can't be with them all the time, every minute of every day. But you can be a strong presence in the lives of those who have access to them, and you can leave powerful words that will linger in the air once you walk out of the room. Don't be concerned if someone thinks you're uptight. Be uptight. We all should be uptight about keeping kids safe. We should all be someone that children can trust and that pedophiles will fear.



## SEVEN

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### The Process of Grooming and Pulling Your Child Out of the Monster's Grip

I taught choir one year to elementary school kids. My third graders were so squirrely! They'd look around, flick each other, pick their noses – and this is when they were performing! I worked hard with them to get them to stand still, get their fingers out of their noses, and keep their hands to themselves. When they were almost perfect, I decided it would be ever-so-smart to take off one of my shoes and throw it off to the right to see if their eyes would follow it or if they would keep their eyes on me.

Wouldn't you know, I clocked some poor kid in the head with it?

He looked at me like I'd stepped outside my mind, and I was mortified. Obviously, it was an accident. But every single one of us has that primal sense of self-preservation that is instant and instinctual. The first thing out of my mouth was, "Oh, mylanta! Please don't tell your mother!"

In an instant, I was absolutely horrified that I said what I just said. I stopped the class and had them all sit down. Instead of teaching them about focus and stage presence, I began to teach them how very, very, *very* important it was for them not to keep secrets for adults and that whenever an adult says not to tell their parents, then they should go straight to their parents and tell them everything! I made them all promise me!

And then I called the boy's mom and let her know that I threw a shoe at her son and hit him in the head with it and apologized profusely.

Good times.

This wasn't the only time I created a teachable moment like that for my kids.

One day I was erasing my whiteboard just before school let out for the day. My 7<sup>th</sup> graders were packing up and stacking chairs while I inadvertently ended up erasing something that I needed for the next day. Something may have come out of my mouth that rhymes with "Oh, split!" I went ahead and erased the board clean, making a mental note to grab my notes from my lesson plan book and rewrite it. When I turned around, every single child in my room was frozen in whatever position they were in when I said what I said, their eyeballs were wide as saucers, and they were looking at me with their mouths completely agape.

"What?" I said. I hadn't even realized what came out of my mouth.

One young man said, "Mrs. Martin, we're all sure you meant to say, 'Oh, shoot.'" God bless his gracious little heart. The kids all nodded in agreement, and the light of understanding shone upon me.

Oh, split.

The bell was about to ring to dismiss them for the day, so I wasted no time in telling them to please go home and let their parents know what I said and that if any of them wanted to call or come in and yell at me, that I would take whatever I got because I, in fact, said a swear. I made sure they knew that some teachers would ask them not to tell their parents, but I could never, ever do that because there are really bad people out there in this world who want to hurt children and they should never keep a secret for an adult, especially to protect them from getting into trouble. The same boy who spoke up before said, "I don't think we're talking about cussing anymore."

I said, "We're not. We're talking about you kids taking action to protect yourselves against something really bad happening to you. If any adult—and I mean

any adult—asks you to keep a secret, you’d better go straight to another adult that you trust and start singing like a bird.”

To my great relief, not one parent called the school or came to yell at me, thank the Lord.

It is important that adults understand the process a predator uses to silence their children, but equally important is that adults talk to their kids about what the grooming process looks like and feels like. I’m sure I’m repeating myself, but statistically, 9 out of 10 children never tell anyone about being abused. It’s high time we started figuring out why those numbers are so horrifying so that we can equip our kids with the tools that they need to protect themselves.

Here’s how they’re groomed. This is the process that a predator will use to make sure that your child is in the 90% of kids who will never tell you what is happening to them.

**#1    *A predator will make your child feel as if the two of them are good friends.***

Let me tell you something. I spend my life with 12- and 13-year-olds. I think they’re the greatest people on the planet. I enjoy them and love them and laugh with (okay, at) them and support them and invest in them.

We are not friends.

We are *friendly*, but we are not friends. I am a 51-year-old, menopausal woman with a life of her own and has no business being BFF’s with tweeners who don’t even drive.

When an adult seems to *need* the attention or validation of children, one must wonder to what extent they lack the social skills to create meaningful relationships with people their own age, people with whom they should have more in common. This doesn’t mean he or she is a pedophile or a child molester, but I would certainly be keeping a close eye on this.

I would be especially wary of any adult that singles a child out or wants to bestow gifts or give treats to a particular child. If your child shows up with some new toy or gadget or treat, make sure you can account for where it's come from. If it seems inappropriate to you, return it to the person who gave it. Your child may well throw a wall-eyed fit. Use that as an opportunity to assure your child that it is your job to protect her or him from harm.

People who prey on children will look for a need or any vulnerability your child may have. I promise you, they will find it. This is part of the selection process that I mentioned earlier. Single parents who are heroically raising children without a lot of support are particularly vulnerable to those who might appear to be genuinely kind and, out of the kindness and goodness of her heart, or his, offer to step in and help you—at no charge. Could be legit. Could be grooming.

Perhaps your child doesn't have a lot of friends. He or she may be in an awkward stage at the moment or doesn't seem to have much in common with peers. A predator will seek out any child who seems isolated or has trouble making friends. Be extremely vigilant about the people who is given access to your child. These kids are precisely the ones who are targeted, and a child molester will likely have several children in the crosshairs at varying stages of grooming at any given time.

The bottom line is that predators will look for any apparent need your family or your child may have and stealthily step in to fill that need for the purpose of ensnaring him or her—and you. This brings me to my next point.

***#2 A predator will foster a good relationship with you as well.***

If your child, God forbid, is ever taken advantage of, there is a 90% chance that you already know the person since, as I have stated, 90% of kids who are abused are victimized by someone he or she already knows. He or she has groomed *you* as well: built trust, said all the right things, shown kindness to your family, done favors for you, and acted with the utmost appropriateness. Otherwise, chances are that he or

she is actually related to you. They have been given access to your child because they are family. So, whereas people outside the family work to earn your trust, relatives are largely trusted automatically unless there is a history of abuse in your family.

Sometimes other people are given proximity to your child based solely on their position in the community without having to prove themselves at all. Youth pastors, other clergy, Sunday School teachers, coaches, teachers, principals, babysitters, mentors, tutors, camp counselors, directors of programs, and any number of people who come with some sort of magic title that allows them to work with young people. Kids do have to go to school. We put them in gymnastics and soccer and give them drum lessons. We send them to church camps and sports camps. We hire tutors for them. We leave them with the 16-year-old girl who lives down the street. Much of the time, our kids are fine, living their lives and happy as clams until you tell them to eat their green beans and, for crying out loud, please go clean that dredge you call your room!

But we have to let the truth of this issue guide our decisions and not just passively assume that there's a good chance that everything is going to work out fine so we let *that* guide our decisions.

Remember that chapter back there where I suggested we put every single person who has access to our child on notice, so to speak, and let them know kindly and respectfully, but absolutely seriously, that we are a very close family who takes this issue to heart and will protect our children at all costs and we foster open communication with our children and we will believe them and immediately report abuse of any kind, so watch out, Buster, because we are vigilant?

Yeah, *that* conversation. Have it with all these people straight out of the gate before they even have a chance to engage in any sort of selection process that may result in your child being chosen.

Believe me when I tell you, I would LOVE for a parent of an incoming student to walk into my classroom at the very beginning of the year and NOT assume that I'm safe because I'm a woman and NOT assume I'm safe because I'm a school teacher and tell me, "Hi, Mrs. Martin. So wonderful to meet you. Listen, it's not personal—we have this conversation with everyone who has access to our child..."

I'm waiting, I'm waiting, I'm waiting.

In fact, I would probably give their kid all A's for the entire year just because their parents are so darn smart for having that conversation with me, their kid must be a bona fide genius.

It is so daunting to walk that fine line between trust and mistrust. You want to give people the benefit of the doubt and show your children all the good there is in the world, but we never want to be duped into something that would be devastating to our family. There is a saying that might be helpful to strike that balance, so I will say it to you: Be wise as serpents. Be gentle as doves. Having these preemptive conversations is wisdom. Having these conversations without judgment for the person you're talking to is gentleness.

### **#3    *A predator will engage in activities with your child that incrementally 'push the envelope'.***

The adult will engage in activity that at first seems fun and perhaps adventurous to your child. Exciting. A little daring. Then more daring. Then something that pushes the envelope—maybe even a little naughty. Nothing disastrous. In fact, it will seem so benign to your child that it's hardly worth mentioning—and your child likely won't mention it.

You won't even know.

Starting from a place of innocence is the very thing that is so insidious about this whole process because the monster already knows where she or he will eventually arrive if not thwarted by people who can figure it out and stop him or her. Your child's

innocence is what makes him or her so precious, and it is the very quality that makes him or her so vulnerable to these degenerates. Child molesters count on the fact that your child is designed to love and to trust.

After all, special friends who understand each other are ‘safe’ with each other, right? And I promise you, your child thinks this is the safest they’ve ever been. Those little arguments in the morning when you’re yelling at them to pull those socks out of the dryer that they were supposed to fold last night but didn’t and get to the bus pronto because, you swear, if you have to drive them to school one more time, there’s gonna be trouble, buddy?

Yeah. He understands just how that feels. It’s tough when your parents are all over your case. How hard is it to be a little patient? Geez, he’s so sorry that had to happen.

When you were ten minutes late to pick your child up from school and they were late to baseball practice and the coach yelled at him?

She feels so badly about that and just doesn’t understand how any parent could forget their own child. She certainly wouldn’t.

Especially when there is so much love between them which has been proven with gifts and toys and treats. In fact, children could easily be led to believe that they *owe* this person. They want the treats—all kids do. So a child certainly wouldn’t want to sabotage the relationship, right? Especially since their special friend is such good friends... with *you* as well.

The pedophile has just set the stage for *secrecy*.

**#4    *Once a sense of loyalty has been established, a predator will begin to increase the level of affection, desensitizing him or her to touch between them. The adult will tell your child, “This is just between us,” or “Let’s make this our little secret,” or “It’s just a game—our game.”***

This is why I tell kids that the first thing they should do when any adult—and I mean *any* adult—says, “Don’t tell your mom or dad,” that they need to tell their mom and dad. But I can’t really be the one to drive that home.

This step is absolutely pivotal. Depending on what the child decides to do—tell or not tell—will determine whether or not he or she is molested.

This is it.

Right here.

This is the point that all of that open communication you’ve built with your child is tested. Hopefully things will work the way they’re supposed to. Your child may confide in you that this individual has asked them to keep something from you, but he or she know that’s not the agreement that the two of you have made. They might even remind you that you promised that they wouldn’t get in trouble. So you listen. You hang on their every word. You wrap them up in your arms and tell them how very brave they were to let you know this. They most certainly are not in trouble, and you are so, so proud of them for doing the right thing. Your child begs you not to be mad at their friend because she or he really loves this adult. That they weren’t really doing anything wrong. Everything is fine—they’re just telling you about the secret part. You ask the appropriate questions in a non-threatening, conversational manner, and your child speaks freely. You take the time to listen to anything else they want to tell you and you smile and nod without one hint of rage on your face, and tuck your child in to bed just like any normal night.

Then you go into your bathroom and puke your guts up until you’ve got dry heaves.

You want to call the cops, but what crime has been committed? None. The adult was merely *kind* to your child and was only trying to help. The child confided in him or her. What were they supposed to do? Rebuff your child? They care about your



child. You've got it all wrong. You've misunderstood. What you think is going on certainly isn't going on at all.

Don't you believe it.

At this point, the crazy mom writing this book right now, who is slightly nauseous just from writing that crap, wants you to circle your wagons. If this individual is a coach, teacher, youth pastor or the like, and has a supervisor or a boss, then I would bring that person into a very frank, one-sided conversation as soon as humanly possible along with your spouse or life partner, if you have one, and make sure that you address this both personally with the would-be offender as well as the agency he or she works for.

To be clear, you are not there to have a conversation. You are not there to listen to anyone. You have no interest in what they have to say. You are there to inform:

- The relationship between your child and this person is over. No goodbyes will occur. This is not negotiable.
- If the individual is a coach, then either the coach will leave the team immediately or the child will, but they will never be put in the same space ever again. If the individual is a teacher, the child will be removed from their class immediately. The same goes for a Sunday school teacher, youth pastor, camp counselor, what have you.
- If any attempts are made to contact the child from this point on, you will not hesitate to obtain a protective order, and if that is breached, you will absolutely get the police involved.
- They should make no attempts to contact you to 'work this out'. It's worked out. You've just worked it out for all involved. No discussions are necessary.

You're done talking. Now walk right out that door.

Some parents might prefer to send a letter with all that. Do what seems best for you. Some parents, however, might want to slip away quietly and avoid the confrontation altogether—just take their child and slip out of the situation. But please muster the courage for some sort of cease and desist. Stepping up and calling this behavior out may raise the appropriate red flags—which is why it should be done in the presence of the employer or pastor or boss. Many organizations have a protocol for protecting children where it has been stated in a code of ethics that adults are not to have secrets, bestow gifts, or foster ‘special’ relationships with any of the children in their care. If that is what has occurred with your child unbeknownst to the organization, that would be very valuable information for a supervisor to have.

So what if... *what if* the person was totally, 100% innocent and really, truly, from the bottom of their hearts never meant any harm, so help them God?

Well, what do you want me to tell you? Tell them that your kid has no business being around somebody that stupid.

I’m not even remotely kidding. You are *done* with that person.

Period.

Because here’s what’s more likely. Right after you walk out that door, the person you’ve accused of grooming your child for some insidious intention will be pleading their case to the powers that be and shoveling the biggest load of cow manure down the throats of whoever’s in charge. That person will quite possibly swallow it by the bucketful because who wants to believe that they brought in a child molester to care for or teach or coach children. It’s much more palatable to believe that YOU ARE THE CRAZY MOM (OR DAD). Besides, the reputation of the organization is at stake here. It’s best, it may very well be decided, to put this whole awful business to rest and move on. Maybe send a few emails to the rest of the staff restating the importance of close supervision. It’ll all go away soon...

But you have done right by your child. Having said that, let me say that there is a very good chance that your child will feel betrayed by you.

Oh, who am I kidding?

Your child will feel betrayed by you. They may throw fits, scream, yell, stomp around, stop speaking to you, and threaten to go live with Grandma in North Dakota. It's one of those 'Hate me now, thank me later' conundrums. Your child feels good with this person. Your child is convinced they are completely and utterly safe with this individual—they've never been safer! But whenever there is a rift created by this individual between you and your child, you need to get that child out of there and away from this person. Kids are wired to *want to trust*, and when someone manipulates that, it harms that child on the very deepest level. This is a deal breaker. Probably the worst thing you could do is dig your heels in and pull the 'I-Am-The-Parent-And-I-Am-In-Charge' card. At this point you are going to have to get outside help in the way of a therapist to help you work through the process of having them trust you again. There's no two ways about it. It's going to take a while. It's going to suck. This is a hard season. Keep at it. Rebuild. You have done right by your child.

That is how these things are supposed to work. May I remind you here that some of these situations can absolutely be averted entirely if you preemptively put people on notice that you are uber-vigilant and are equipping your children to advocate for themselves. However, if your child doesn't disclose this information, here are the next steps. Buckle up. This gets bad... quickly. But you have to understand how this works. Take a deep breath. If you're getting triggered right now, then you stop reading and get to a safe mental and emotional space. Call your therapist. Follow any prescribed regimen you have in place for times like this. If you're getting triggered and you don't have a therapist, put this book down right now and make an appointment with a professional who can help you.

For the rest of you, here we go.

## **#5    *A predator will begin to sexualize the relationship.***

If your child does not disclose to this point, hugs will become cuddles. Cuddles will become tickles. Tickles may become wrestling or back massages. Massages become the nightmare. This is so utterly confusing to children and young people. They often cannot even put the experience into words. Your child may feel ashamed and embarrassed and totally befuddled. So many emotions are zipping through them at this stage. They truly love their offender, but children sense that maybe they've done something wrong. They don't want this person to get in trouble, and they don't want to get in trouble themselves. For teenage girls being groomed by older men, they may feel as if they are truly in love. Teenage boys being groomed by adult women may feel the same way. They may not tell you because they don't want to lose this 'love' they're experiencing perhaps for the first time in their lives.

This is likely the stage that the perpetrator may 'accidentally' expose her- or himself or expose your child to pornographic pictures or videos, ever increasing the level of shame and decreasing the chance that he or she will ever tell.

[Transition]

I have talked to grown men whose youth pastors who perpetrated on them when they were teenagers and then held their hands and prayed for Jesus to forgive them—teenagers who were taught by these men to greet one another with a holy kiss. Their parents had no idea.

Even more horrifying is when a child is not confused about what's happening and realizes that this is all very, very wrong—but the offender has made some sort of threat, and wham! Your child is ensnared in the net of someone who knew from the very beginning that this is where they would arrive.

Premeditated.

Intentional.

Orchestrated.

What used to feel so good to the child now feels like hell, and they are not equipped to pull themselves out of it. To rescue your child from this stage, you have to watch for any change in their behavior.

[insert behaviors here – signs of trauma – school/home behavior]

**#6    *A predator will do whatever they have to do to maintain control and sustain the relationship.***

Rewards/Blame/Threats

Maybe the perpetrator ups the ante and doesn't merely threaten your child with the possibility that they'll all be in trouble. Maybe the perpetrator says that he will harm your child or you or their best friend or their new puppy.

This is an evil that the rest of us can barely wrap our heads around especially if you haven't been through it. However, understanding this process is critical in helping you protect your children. This is valuable insight into the workings of an evil that roams back and forth seeking whom it may devour—no two ways about it.

Be vigilant. Be informed. Be proactive. And if you have more advice and helpful hints about the conversations you can have with your kids, add them here. I would love to start a conversation about this.

# EIGHT

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## Kids Hurting Kids

Let's talk about kids who hurt kids. Not too many people want to talk about that but it needs to be addressed, so let's do it.

I talk to a lot of people about abuse. Many people tell me their stories of suffering, and you would be shocked at how many people have admitted that they were bullied mercilessly and/or straight up abused—be it verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually—by siblings, cousins, children of friends or neighbors, or “friends” at school.

The abuser is not an adult.

- A five-year-old boy being forced to perform sexual acts with older boys in a garage
- Brothers forcing themselves on their sisters and vice versa
- Younger children being made to do things that humiliate them while older children laugh and point
- Hazing among older children in band or other clubs/organizations

Darkness to Light quotes a Finkelhor study from 2012 called *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*, which says that 40% of kids who are sexually abused are abused by other kids who are older and, obviously, more powerful.

It happens all the time. I know you don't want to talk about it. But we have to.

First let's make the distinction between kids playing 'Peeky-Peeky' or 'You-Show-Me-Yours-And-I'll-Show-You-Mine' and legitimate sexual abuse between minor children. Sexual behavior that occurs with children very close to the same age, size,

and strength that is borne out of curiosity is not something that should cause alarm. Those situations are, indeed, a time for intervention and education especially since the children involved may be confused and somewhat baffled. It's a time to set boundaries and have really good, safe, and CALM discussions about what has occurred. These children should never be shamed in any way. They should be allowed to speak freely about what happened and how they felt and then you can gently redirect them.

It's when there is a sexual encounter between minors with some years between them—when the offender is an older child, when she or he is in a position of authority such as a child who is put in charge of younger children—that there is a breach. It is when an offending child is stronger physically and mentally and exerts that power over another child. It's also when children the same age or older join forces to perpetrate harm on a single child.

Adults may hesitate to report incidents of abuse when both victim and perpetrator are minors, especially when they both come from the same family. I cannot think of anything more difficult. But you must.

You absolutely must. Even though the rifts in your family will be deep and wide, you must, not only for the sake of the victim but for the sake of the offender. The chances of the older, more powerful child in this situation reoffending is considerably higher without professional intervention. Do not let that child's parents convince you that they will take care of the situation. They aren't equipped to handle the situation. Nor are you. You need to have an independent, objective third party conduct a thorough investigation, make the proper decisions in regard to charges (this may or may not happen) or refer the family to advocates who will educate and perhaps provide therapy to all.

You must check the laws in your state, but in Idaho juvenile offenders are not technically 'convicted' if found guilty in a sexual crime against another child. They are

‘dispositioned’ which means the court will make decisions in regard to what will occur as a result of the crimes he or she committed. Idaho is actually very protective of young offenders. If they are under 14 years of age, they are not required to register as a sex offender. If they are over 14, they will be registered as a sex offender until they are 21. At that time prosecutors can petition to the court to have them continue to register as an adult if they feel it is necessary. Mandated counseling and some type of restorative justice may be imposed. It all depends on the charges, the impact on the victim, and how redeemable the court feels the situation is. You need to research how your state handles situations like these. I would love to hear what you find out, so contact me on my website: [www.daisyrainmartin.com](http://www.daisyrainmartin.com) and let me know.

Just know this: to sidestep reporting a child would be to deny the offender a chance at rehabilitation. The chances of this child growing up to reoffend in the future is high, especially if it is mishandled or not handled at all or, Lord forbid, the offender is coddled and eventually convinced by his protectors that she or he is actually the victim. That would be catastrophic. Allowing a professional third party to come in and help is likely the only way your family has a shot of healing. And buckle up because you’re facing the hardest circumstances you’ve ever faced in your life. My heart goes out to you if you are in this situation, and I am so, so sorry you are facing this.

But there is hope. Take every right next step. Don’t try to do this on your own. Ultimately, your number one concern is the healing of your child. I know I don’t have to tell you that. There is life outside this tragedy, but you definitely need help to get you and your family on your way. Get that help no matter what anyone says. You do what’s right for you and yours.



# NINE

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## Social Media

Technology hates me, I'm not even gonna lie. I'm 51, what do you want me to tell you? My millennial has smacked his forehead too many times to count over my patent ineptitude in all things audio/visual, media, and Internet. Even as I write this, I'm waiting on him to transfer some video footage from my little camera to my laptop (I've at least managed to figure out how to stick it on the tripod and record something) even though he's shown me how a bazillion times. To my credit, I can do my own editing, such that it is. All I can say for myself is that when he plug the thingie-things into whatever thingie-things they belong in, something opens up on the screen and the film magically starts downloading. Or uploading. Or whatever kind of loading it does. When I try to do the exact same thing, my computer flips me off and then goes to the bathroom and flosses its teeth before it takes a nap.

The struggle is real, my friends.

So I'm going to write a chapter here for you about social media and how to keep your kids safe on the Internet. How's that sound?

Actually and thankfully, you don't have to be a social media teckie-guru to lay some basic ground rules for your family. And realistically? I could write all about the latest apps and games and sites and which ones to watch out for and what they're doing and how they're a danger to you kid and the second this book gets published, everything I've written is completely irrelevant because the little honey biscuits will be on to a whole new set of apps and games and sites that we know absolutely zilch about. Social media is a living entity. It is ever-changing. Who can keep up?

Trends show us that kids will all be on some site, some app, and as soon as all the adults hop on, the kids hop off. They're way ahead of us. Unfortunately, the only ones who are as quick as the kids to get on these sites are the creepers. The Internet is where 'stranger-danger' is a huge threat. But before we even get into all that, let's get into all the fun and exciting and STUPID things kids can do online all by themselves!

The Pew Research Center tells us that 92% of teens 13 – 17 go online every day and 24% of teens are online almost constantly. Common Sense Media tells us that kids multitask while they're using social media and believe they can do fourteen things at once like listen to another person, suck down a Dairy Queen Oreo Blizzard, do their math, walk and chew gum...

As a teacher, I can tell you that they're not as effective as they think they are. In my classroom, students are allowed to use their phones because there are times I want to take advantage of the fact that they have the wisdom of the world right in their back pockets. My kids call the dictionary, 'Siri's great-great grandmother' and ask if we used those back when fire was invented. They're unbelievably sassy and think they're so hilarious. Every year someone asks me, "Mrs. Martin, aren't you afraid that one of us is going to be on Instagram or something when we're supposed to be working?"

Every year I tell them, "I don't know. Are you afraid that if I catch you that I'll dangle you over the balcony and shake you down for your lunch money?"

Their eyes get large and they want to know, "Would you really do that?"

I smirk and say, "You don't know, do you? Tell you what... you do you. I'll do me."

I'm not going to claim that my kids *never* get sneaky and spend class time on social media, but I loom over them enough that I make it incredibly difficult, and they do the work I ask them to do or they can spend those 52 minutes somewhere else—like the principal's office—so there you have it.

Therein lies a suggestion: *loom*. It's not practical to stand over their shoulders and watch their every click for the 23 hours out of every 24 that they're on social media. There are other ways we can loom, and we don't even have to be sneaky about it. Let your children know that you have 100% access to your phone. *Your phone...* that *you let them borrow* because you are a good and kind and generous parent and they should feel free to lavish copious amounts of gratitude onto you throughout their entire childhoods and into their adult years.

Every device in your home belongs to you—even if your child has worked and earned the money to buy a device, it's still your data plan and bill. Do not hesitate to monitor those devices. Everything that happens under your roof is your business. No minor children should expect privacy. Sorry, not sorry.

Some parents believe that they should have access to diaries or journals and some feel perfectly entitled to sneak around after their children and secretly follow them on outings with their friends in different cars to see if they're up to anything... I'm personally not that crazy, and I never tried to catch my kid in the act of doing something bad. I'm not about all that, and I'm not talking about those kinds of things. I am saying that anything that happens on an electronic device, however, is fair game for you, and they should be handed over to you whenever you ask for them. I'd be totally upfront with them about it too since they'll probably figure out what you're up to when you ask them for their passwords, which is your very first order of business. I think this conversation could be quite easy:

“Hello, my angel. You remember that talk about how it’s my job to keep you safe from pedophiles and child molesters and your regular garden variety creepers?”

“Yes, Dad. Of course, Mom. How could I ever forget this conversation that we have fourteen times a month whether I need it or not?”

“Well, I’m reading this really great book right now called, *Monsters Under the Bed: Practical Steps for Keeping Our Children Safe from Sexual Predators...*”

“Of course you are.”

“And this really smart, funny, and very informative lady says that we would be completely remiss if we didn’t also protect you from online dangers as well as dangers in real life. So we’re going to need all your passwords for every social media site you’re on.”

“You said this lady was smart?”

“Yes.”

“Is she crazy?”

“She absolutely is, pumpkin. We just love her. And we want you to know how very precious you are to us and that we would...”

“I know... you would die a thousand deaths if anything ever happened to me. I got it. I hate my life. And I got it.”

How hard is that? An eye roll here, an exasperated breath there—we call that ‘practicing our H-sounds’ at our house.

Here’s what you’re looking for as you’re looming. Please know that this is not an exhaustive list. In fact, share this with other parents and add to this list as time goes on because, as I said, all of this is an ever evolving entity.

- How many online ‘friends’ does your child have? Go through them and find out:
  - How do you know this person?
  - Have you ever seen this person face to face? Where? When?
  - Of all of these people you’ve accepted as ‘friends’, how many would you call your close friends?
- Check the privacy settings on everything and make adjustments. This could take a while. You could spend a whole weekend just inventorying all this. Do this every 4 – 6 months because every time an app updates, the privacy settings go back to the default settings, and no one calls to let you know that. It just happens automatically.
- Inventory all the apps on all their devices. Ask your child to open them up and tell you how they work and how your child, specifically, uses them. Your child might just be excited to show you all the wonderful ways these apps are used—some of them are pretty amazing! Have the appropriate conversations as you go through each one. Thank your child for teaching you and making you a more informed parent and compliment them on being so tech savvy. Celebrate the moment by taking them to Taco Bell.
- Inventory all the apps that have been *installed* because they may have added an app and then deleted it. Make sure to have them explain what those deleted apps do as well.
- Really foster that love/hate relationship you have with Google and teach your child to do the same. Vacillate between cursing its very existence whilst pondering what you would ever do without it. Because you need to know that Google tracks the bejeezus out of us *and* our kids. They know precisely:
  - Where we go
  - How we get there

- How long we stay
- How long it took us to get wherever we went
- Whether we walked or drove or got on a plane
- Where we ate
- How long it took us to eat
- Whether we went to the movies or the bank or a store

Has a coupon suddenly and inexplicably popped up in your email right for a store you just happened to walk into? Yeah. Me too. Coincidence? Come on. Consider the pros and cons for your family in regard to that GPS, and export that Google data for all the good that might do. Be sure to look in the appendix for the video called, Surveillance Capitalism Google Tracking. Big Brother is watching—admittedly because he wants to sell you things—but still.

How can we track our children and know where they are but keep others from doing it? Check your phone companies and service plans, folks! There are also apps for that which you can find in the appendix as well. Look for the YouTube video called... and this is brilliant... *10 Apps for Paranoid Parents*. I'm sure it's already calling your name, right?

Kids should never 'accept' or grant permission to share wifi. Kids should never take their phones to bed with them at night—there are about a thousand and one reasons for that. They'll be on it long into the morning hours. Watching a screen for that long is wreaking havoc on their brainwaves and ruining their eyesight and causing insomnia. When students are so tired in my classes that they can hardly keep their eyes open, the first thing I ask them is whether or not they take their phones to bed with them. They do. In fact, keep your child's phone overnight and for 3 – 4 hours in the morning and watch it. You heard me. Watch it. See what messages and pictures come in from their friends. See if your child is getting cyber-bullied. See who their

‘friends’ are and what they’re all about. That’s when you will know for sure what kids are doing. Remember... *It’s your phone*.

There’s a couple of websites listed in the appendix of current apps that are popular with kids right now and probably won’t be in ten minutes because the adults will get on them and there will be an immediate and irreversible mass exodus of teens and tweens. However, this list is important because of the *types* of apps they are and they *types* of things they do, even if the names and graphics change. Today they’re called Snapchat and WhatsApp and Omegle. Tomorrow they’ll be called something else. Just pay attention to the kinds of things they’re used for and be aware of the inherent danger of similar apps coming down the pike. Here are some of the types of apps you should caution children against:

- Apps that immediately delete content. Kids take pictures of themselves doing something they shouldn’t and send it to all of their friends for bragging rights or to show how very cool they are or whatever. Then the evidence conveniently disappears. Of course, kids can screen shot anything, but you get why this would not be a good idea.
- Apps that allow for anonymous ‘confessions’. This is a cyber-bullying free-for-all, y’all.
- Apps that randomly choose strangers to connect your child to. Pretty gosh darn self-explanatory.
- Apps designed specifically for bullying and drama. Why anyone would use their mad tech skills for such a crappy purpose in this world is beyond me.
- ‘Vault’ apps are camouflaged to look like calendars or calculators or other apps. If your child has a *duplicate* of any app, find out why. These apps allow your child to create folders to literally hide pictures, videos, files, and text documents. When you go through your child’s apps with them, make them

open up every single one. Don't skip something because you think it looks like a calendar or maps or a calculator. If you click on a calculator that seems like it does more than just calculate, keep investigating. See if that 'calculator' is really a 'vault' where your kid can hide things she or he doesn't want you to see.

- Tracking apps that shows your child's friends (as well as complete strangers) the exact locations where everyone is throughout the day. Snapchat has such a feature called Snapmap. Find the video link in the appendix on how this one works. It's called *10 Hidden Snapchat Maps Features*, and it's a child molester's dream. You'll pee your pants.
- Remember, too, that just because you're monitoring Facebook (if your child is even still on Facebook) that doesn't necessarily mean your child is not on Messenger. Geoff and his wife Janesse have deleted their Facebook accounts, but they're still on Messenger. We use it nearly every day.

In fact, I just used Messenger in the middle of writing this chapter to ask Geoff about game systems since kids get online to play video games with all kinds of people that they know or don't know. (You knew that, right?) I asked him if he had any suggestions for keeping kids safe. As it turns out, he did:

- Game consoles are much easier to maintain control over than computers. He said to go ahead and get your kids the best, most expensive game systems out there.
- Disable certain chat privileges so that your kids aren't talking to adults. There are several layers of parental controls, so they can still talk to their friends if you set it up that way.
- In general, be aware of the parental settings and how they work.



- Finally, search the Internet for ‘work arounds’ because your kids can and will try to ‘work around’ the parental settings you have set. Stay ahead of those little buggers. They’re adorable, but they can be slick and they’re way slicker than you or me. If and when your child is slick, unleash the kraken.

Do you need a drink? Honestly, put this book down and go get something. Make some popcorn. Walk around the block. You’ve hung in there a long time with me, and we haven’t even gotten to the creeper section yet.

I’ll wait.

Doo-to-dooooooooo...

I think I’ll go to the bathroom real quick...

Still not back?

Nope...

Dum-da-da-dum...

Dum-da-da-dum...

I’ll go check the mail...

Hmmm, got another 20% off coupon for Bed, Bath, and Beyond... that’s cool. Am I even old enough to get these AARP applications? Why do they keep sending me these things? Don’t you have to be like... 85?

Dum-da-da-dum...

You’re back? Awesome! Let’s talk about those online stalkers!

I went to a training hosted by the Family Justice Center in the town I live and one of the detectives that got up to speak asked this very fabulous question. “We all

know what to do with the creepy guy in the white van at the park. Why don't we know what to do with friend requests on social media?"

And, no. We don't pull the creepy guy in the white van at the park out of his vehicle and beat the liver out of him. We want to! But we *resist* because we are not vigilantes and we don't condone vigilante justice and we understand that we need to be free to raise our children so that other people don't have to do it for us.

We discussed earlier how we look at our kids' friends lists. Have your child delete anyone they really don't know and especially ANYBODY that they've never met face to face. Pedophiles use social networking sites to systematically:

- Gain knowledge about a victim
- Figure out their precise location—and I mean *precise*
- Contact the victim and start grooming

After that, the grooming process they use is exactly the same as we've already addressed. And just like some parents believe the 'pretty little lie' that their 3-year-old would never go off with a stranger because you've talked to them about that on many an occasion, you ought not to doubt that your 12-, 13-, 14-year-old and older would have social media accounts you know not of, send sexual pictures, meet up with a stranger or someone that they just met on social media.

Here's a chart that shows the results of a study done in 2016 by Hinduja & Patchin called Sexting among Middle and High School Students. They took a national sample of 5,539 12- to 17-year-olds and found out how many of them, by age, sent and/or received sexually explicit texts.

	Average % Sent	Average % Received
12-year-olds	5.5	8.7
13-year-olds	9.1	14.6
14-year-olds	10.5	16.5
15-year-olds	13.8	21.6
16-year-olds	15.3	24.3
17-year-olds	18.5	26.3
Males	14.2	19.6
Females	10.0	17.7
Total Average	12.1	18.7

Statistically staggering. Bear in mind that teens can absolutely be charged for sexting—*unless* that child has been preyed upon.

Do you think that a child molester is going to ‘be themselves’ online? Oh, no. These people have several fake profiles, and their victims think they’re the same age, maybe a little older, and have so much in common. Your child will describe these ‘friends’ as being so nice, super sweet, a really good person. They could tell you all about how much they love their new puppy—the pictures are so cute—and how he drives a 2014 Ford Focus that he paid for himself from working at Red Robin bussing tables.

And it’s all a colossal load of crap.

Coby Persin is your go-to person to scare a colossal load of crap out of your child if they even *think* about meeting someone that they’ve been communicating with online. Find him on YouTube or get the links to some of his videos in the appendix. With the permission of parents, he creates fake profiles on social media, contacts their

kids, and pretends to be around their age. After a few days he asks them to meet him somewhere or asks kids where they live so they can hang out. Kids are very deliberate in making sure their parents aren't home. Of course, their parents aren't home—they're with Coby praying to Jesus that their child isn't about to do what they think their child is about to do which is to get in the car with somebody they don't know or give out their address or meet up at the park. These kids fall for the charade, and their parents jump out and start yelling at them with these thick New York accents that totally make it even more traumatizing!

Every kid in America needs to see these videos. Oh, my goodness gracious. You've got parents pulling their kids into creepy white vans, jumping out of closets, having come apart on kids... I've watched these videos and my blood races every time even though I know that these kids are entirely safe the entire time. What's most frightening is that parents swear that they have talked to their kids until they're blue in the face—like I'm sure you have. And still, they do not connect the dots. So give them a visual! Watch these videos, declare your eternal love for them, and bawl your eyes out together.

I'm so conflicted as a parent watching the kids in these videos because they must be traumatized. I wonder if they need therapy after being scared out of their ever-loving minds and knowing that they've caused their parents so much anguish. Sweet little baby Jesus on a bicycle, it makes you rethink at what age your children can be left alone.

There is one more thing I want to talk about, and you may need to take another break before we talk about something called 'sextortion'. Remember that chart above where you learned just how many 12- to 17-year-olds have sent or received sexually explicit pictures? Imagine that a child sends something like that to a

boyfriend or girlfriend. Then they break up and out of revenge, the other child threatens to send that video out to everybody in the school. Unless...

Imagine that a child sends something like that to a boyfriend or girlfriend who wants sexual favors or now they want to go 'all the way'. And if the child doesn't want to, she or he is told that if they don't do what the other wants, everyone on their friends list will get that picture. Or all the pictures.

Those scenarios involve actual kids. Now imagine that a very scary adult has created a fake profile online and appears to be around the same age. They lie. They take your child through the grooming process. They say nice things. They convince your child that they really, really care about them. The conversations get flirty and fun and, since they obviously like each other, maybe they should take this to the next level.

You think, how on earth can they feel like they're in a relationship? They've never even met in person! It happens all the time.

Your son or daughter is persuaded to send photos or even a video and BAM! That predator now has every bit of leverage they need to manipulate the situation any way they want to. I have included a very haunting, very frightening PSA in the appendix.

When you talk to your children about this particular brand of evil, please promise them that they can come to you if they are caught up in this web of depravity. They don't know. They don't. You've told them and told them, and they still don't get it. Promise them you won't get mad at them. Promise them they won't be punished. Promise them that you will do everything in your power to protect them. Don't shame them. They're ashamed enough already. Put your arms around them and promise

them that there is nothing—absolutely nothing they could ever do to make you stop loving them. Ever, ever, ever.

Please don't watch these videos all at once. I'm even having a hard time right now as I write this because I've been working on this book and talking about incredibly dark and horrible things for hours at a time. I'm feeling particularly spent from this chapter. This stuff isn't easy. I try to be funny sometimes for you, yes, but mostly for me because this sucks.

But here's what I know—we can make this world safer for our children. So I will end this chapter by saying this. This is a labor of love for you and for your kids. Hope Givers the world over will linger in these dark places so that we might shine light to liberate who have suffered.

Ultimately, I do believe that people are good and that the world is, by and large, a wonderful place. But we must not allow fear or apathy to dictate the choices we make about whether or not we step up and get involved in making a difference on this planet. There is risk. There is sacrifice. This is the truest truth. But I implore you to join me and many, many other Hope Givers who are committed to going into the dark places and rescuing people from harm. Their lives will be changed—and so will yours.

# TEN

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## Reporting

People have a lot of opinions and notions about notifying Child Protective Services or filing a report with the police in regard to domestic violence and, specifically, child abuse in general. There is a spectrum of confidence (or lack thereof) in these agencies to act in the best interest of victims. The level of frustration is equal to the level of disappointment when what we think should happen doesn't happen. People who have reported, then, start to form paradigms of those who work in these agencies, that they are lazy or they don't really care about victims or that they are so incredibly overwhelmed by their workloads that they are simply unable to fully serve in the capacity that is expected.

While there are people in every profession that, for whatever reason, are ineffective or inept, and social workers are certainly loaded down with near-impossible duties and responsibilities, here is something that many people don't consider. It usually comes down to the letter of the law. These agencies must adhere very strictly to the laws that are on the books at the time of the incident. They cannot even cast a shadow outside of the law. So I think that society thinks that they can do more than they can actually do, and the ones most frustrated and heartsick than any of us when a victim is not fully served, not fully protected, are these dear souls who are on the front lines and see the darkest of society every day.

For example, the Family Justice Center here where I live have seen many, many cases of teens who have left home because they're being abused and stay with friends, couch surfing until they wear out their welcome. They're considered

homeless, but they still go to school because they know they need a high school diploma to get ahead. If they disclose abuse at the FJC, it is reported. An investigation occurs, but if there is no physical evidence, the police take them back to their parents. Do the cops believe the victim? Yes. Do they cops want to take them back to their abusers? No. Does the law say they have to? Yes. It's frustrating on so many levels. It's not that the FJC and the police are lazy or they don't care or are so overworked that they don't have time for every victim, so kids fall through the cracks. All too often, it's because the statutes determine what can or cannot happen. So while it is important to support agencies like the FJC to make sure they have the resources to serve victims, they can only go as far as the law allows. Those in the community who are frustrated at the 'efforts' of law enforcement or social services really ought to investigate what the laws are and whether or not certain laws need to be changed—or maybe the *lawmakers* need to be changed. If people feel that passionately about providing the appropriate care for victims, there's much that can be done in educating ourselves, increasing awareness, and campaigning and voting for the causes we believe in. We can change things.

We all must be part of the solution for these social systems that we've put in place, and we can change things for children who are being abused by reporting every incident of abuse we encounter. Every. Single. One.

As a public school teacher with 26 years in this industry, I have made my fair share of phone calls. Who I call first depends on a couple things. If I'm concerned for the welfare of a child for any reason, I call Child Protective Services. That agency might be called something different where you live such as Health and Human Services or the Department of Children and Family Services. I remember an incident several years ago when a child had been left at home alone for a week. The parent had a medical condition that needed to be treated, and the 12-year-old child had to fend



for themselves for a week while the parent was treated. I didn't feel like a crime had been committed, but I was concerned that the child was spending the night with different sets of neighbors and pretty much on their own so I called CPS who went out and took care of the situation. In fact, in that circumstances, I suggested that the family needed some assistance which they were able to do.

However, if I have come by information that a crime has been committed involving a child, I file a report with the police first. My first phone call is to my school's resource officer. Since my school serves two different towns, I will give him the address of where the crime allegedly occurred so that he can contact the department that has jurisdiction. An officer from one of the two towns will call me back, and I will tell that officer what I know. When that phone conversation is over, I immediately call CPS and file a report with them as well. Where I live, these agencies work very closely with one another, but I still do not leave it to any other human on the planet to connect with other agencies. I tell the police that I'm about to file a report with CPS, and I inform CPS that I have already filed a report with the police. They take it from there.

The last phone calls are to my boss and our school counselor to let them know I have reported an incident of child abuse with the proper authorities. I have worked in a school where a teacher went first to the administration about information she had that a child was being abused at home. She was told, "Okay, hold on. Just relax. Let's not jump to conclusions. Let's get the parents in here and see what's going on."

I flipped my lid.

The law says that teacher, as a mandatory reporter, is required by law to report. Period. She was told by her boss *not* to report. She was in a catch-22 situation

at that point. I assure you, my boss is amazing, and he is very thankful that I am so conscientious about keeping kids safe. He would never work against me like that, but I've seen it happen. It's infuriating. Furthermore, to call the child's parents in after that child confided in someone at school that they considered to be safe is such a breach of trust. That child will have many years of therapy over that betrayal, and the bill ought to land on that administrator's desk because they should pay every penny of it.

I wondered if any research had been done on how many mandated reporters, teachers in particular, actually did what they were supposed to do and through nothing but kismet was referred to a wonderful Hope Giver by the name of Victor Vieth. He is the Founder and Senior Director of the Gunderson National Child Protection Training Center and is completely on board with eradicating child abuse in America in three generations and wrote a beautiful article to which I have included a link in the appendix, *Unto the Third Generation: A Call to End Child Abuse in the United States in 120 Years*. He cited a study that had been done by Maureen C. Kenny in 2001 called, *Child Abuse Reporting: Teachers' Perceived Deterrents*. I am mortified to tell you that in this particular study, teachers' willingness to report abuse fell frighteningly short of what is expected of them. Mr. Vieth tells us:

*In a survey of 197 teachers, these educators were given two hypothetical cases of abuse. In the first hypothetical, the teachers were asked if they would make a report when a student tells them a stepfather has been touching their genitals. In the second hypothetical, the teachers were asked if they would make a report when a student tells them that another teacher was touching their genitals. Only 26% of the teachers said they would report the first instance to the authorities and only 11% said they would report the second incident to the authorities.*

Is he kidding me right now?

He means to tell us that even teachers who are mandatory reporters overwhelmingly do not call when given an intentional, purposeful disclosure such as this directly from the victim?

That is exactly what this is saying. Think about this with me. I've read several sources that have indicated that teachers make the lion's share of calls to Child Protective Services. But the Kenny survey suggests that said lion's share is more like a mouse's share. This cannot be, my fellow teachers. If you see something, say something. If you hear something, say something. You must not remain silent or, God forbid, cover something up for a fellow teacher. No one wants to be on the wrong side of right when it comes to child abuse. Report, report, report.

This is one of the most important things I can tell you about reporting:

### IT IS NEVER YOUR JOB TO INVESTIGATE!

Please keep that in mind and let that one unvarnished truth be your North Star in every decision you make. Make that your mantra. Repeat it over and over again in your head until it becomes part of your DNA. That is how critical this is for a couple of reasons.

First, you're simply not qualified. There are people who are trained to investigate, and that's not you. It's not even me, and I've been advocating for children for many, many years.

Second, any investigating you do can totally screw up the real investigation done by professionals in law enforcement and social services. Your words, your actions, and your decisions could absolutely make it impossible to bring charges against guilty parties, and that would be a travesty. I hate to say know your place, but... know your place in all this. Your job is to report. Period. Let the people with the experience, the know-how, and the guns do what they're trained to do.

Third, the more a child has to repeat their story, the more susceptible they are to suffering serious emotional and psychological damage to the point where they could possibly recant the entire incident out of sheer exhaustion from having to go

over it again and again and again. I'll talk more about this in the next chapter, but suffice to say that we who aren't trained professionals don't know how to conduct a legitimate forensic interview that will minimize the risk of further traumatizing the victim.

Who is required by law to report? It depends on your state. The statute here in Idaho (Idaho Code 16-1605, in case anybody's interested) states that anyone over 18 is a mandated reporter, so pretty much all of us—as it should be. However there are certain professionals who are specifically named: clergy, teachers, daycare workers, counselors, interns, coroners, social workers, doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals, or *any other person* who suspects abuse is obligated to report it within 24 hours to the appropriate agencies. This means the police and/or CPS. If people fail to do so, they could face a criminal misdemeanor charge. Teachers, specifically, must adhere to a code of ethics which includes reporting child abuse, and we can lose our teaching licenses if we fail to report. Other professions also have certain ethical standards to which their employees are expected to adhere.

There was a debate among our very own staff as to whether or not teachers could fulfill this requirement by reporting it to our school counselors. The answer is unequivocally no. The law in this state—and you need to investigate the laws in your state, but they are relatively consistent—is very clear about the professionals who can report to a supervisor within their organizations. In Idaho, those people are: a physician, resident, intern, nurse, day care worker, or social worker. That's it, folks. Teachers are not on there. Teachers and clergy and counselors and, apparently, the coroner in this state must file reports with the police and/or Child Protective Services. A teacher who goes to the school counselor to report now puts the counselor 'on the hook' as well and then they both have to report within 24 hours. They can, however, do it at the same time with one phone call. However, if

a teacher finds out about abuse at, say, 9:00 in the morning and tells the school counselor at 3:00 that afternoon and goes home for the day assuming that the counselor is going to report it, that teacher is out of compliance by 9:00 the next morning and could technically be charged with that misdemeanor, even if the school counselor calls it in by noon, which is within the allotted timeframe for *them*.

See how this works?

Let's talk about the exceptions to this law for clergy which is very interesting. The law in Idaho says that ministers may be exempt from reporting under very specific circumstances:

- The church has to qualify for tax-exempt status
- The confession has to be made directly to the minister
- The confession has to be made in a manner or context that requires confidentiality on the part of the minister in order for him or her to adhere to canon law or church doctrine

So if a victim comes to the minister, that minister is required by law in this state to report it. If a victim's parents or friends come to the minister with information, he or she has to report it. If the *perpetrator* comes to the minister and happens to mention that they have a problem abusing children, the minister has to report it because it wasn't done in the context of a private confession for which he or she was seeking help. If the conversation happens in the lobby between services with people standing around, the minister has to report it.

But get this... If a perpetrator does happen to come into the pastor's office privately for the purpose of confessing the 'sin' of child abuse, relying on the pastor to be 'pastoral' according to canon law and church doctrine, that pastor can still report

it. The law provides that he or she isn't required to report; nor does the law *preclude* that pastor from reporting. They can search their own hearts and do what they believe is right.

You might be thinking that there is never a circumstance that a pastor should not report. I'm with you... except for one thing. How about those homeless teenagers that are crying out to anyone who will listen that they're being abused at home, but there is no physical evidence so they are returned to their parents again and again. What about the possibility that one of these victims could come to a pastor with that sort of confession? And the pastor uses this exemption to keep these children safe?

There are different kinds of disclosures. A purposeful disclosure is when a child tells you (or one of their peers) outright that they are being abused. Then there are accidental disclosures when their friend decides to tell a trusted adult or if a perpetrator is caught in the act of abusing a child or if a medical exam reveals evidence of abuse. Sometimes a child will come to me and *almost* disclose that they have been abused. These are called tentative disclosures. They clearly want to tell me something, but they're afraid. I've been told, "What would happen if I told you something really bad? What would you do?"

I tell them very honestly, "I am required by law, specifically called out by law as a teacher, in fact, to report any information that a child is being abused, is hurting themselves or has already hurt themselves or is about to hurt themselves or someone else or about to commit some sort of crime. And even if I weren't required to do it by law, I would still do it because it's the right thing to do."

They are duly informed at that point, so they know full well what I would do if they told me something awful. Sometimes they say, "Well, I can't tell you."

I say, "What would happen if you told me?"

Sometimes whatever comes out of their mouth at that point is enough to make the appropriate calls. I may not have all the pieces of the puzzle, and it's not my job to put that puzzle together—remember we do not conduct investigations, right? It may not be enough for CPS to investigate, but every time we call, another piece of the puzzle is added to a child's file. I've called before about things that seemed not-quite-right to me and found out that the child I was calling about already had a file with social services as thick as the Old Testament. Every piece of information is important. That's why it's essential for all of us to call with our particular puzzle pieces without hesitation. Someone in the proper agencies may be building a case—we cannot withhold what we know. Don't assume that nothing is being done. The authorities may already be working these cases that you are only finding out about now. Be part of the solution.

Remember the statistic that 1 in 10 children are molested, but only 1 in 10 children report it? And even then they don't always tell an adult—children who pluck up the courage to disclose often only tell a friend. Only 30% of *those* cases actually go to court. So 30% of the 10% of the 10% of kids who are being abused will ever see their abusers charged. Don't tell me we don't have a fundamental, systemic, cultural problem here. It's pandemic.

To be sure, there is risk involved when we pick up the phone and report that a child has been abused. I'm so personally vocal about all this that if and when I report incidences or suspicion of abuse to the authorities, it's not too difficult for the accused to figure out that I was the one who picked up the phone. I've come to school to find hostile messages on my voice mail from parents whose child I called about the day before, demanding that I call them back immediately and how could I report something when I had no idea what the circumstances were and why weren't they notified that a report had been made about their child and I should have minded my

own business because now they have to deal with this and it's ridiculous and I was totally out of line and it all could have been avoided if I had just talked them first and how could I do this to their family and I better stop sticking my nose in things that have nothing to do with me and who do I think I am and don't I have anything better to do than ruin people's families... these are pretty long messages.

And I don't call back. I *can't* call back. To return that parent's phone call would be interfering with an ongoing investigation at that point, and I can't do that. I have to leave them in their fury and go about my day making sure kids know that what makes a verb transitive is that it is followed by a direct object. (Just kidding—I don't subject kids to that level of grammar.)

I called CPS on one guy who showed up at my school screaming, "Where is Daisy Martin? Where is she? I'm here to take her out!"

He didn't mean dinner and a movie.

I called on another guy who wasn't arrested right away, and I was looking over my shoulder every time I went out to the parking lot, believe me. He was finally arrested, and I breathed a little easier, but then he got out on bail and I was looking over my shoulder again. Now he's doing eight years to life, so we're a bit more relaxed now until I have to call again for a different child.

And I will have to call again for a different child.

It sure doesn't suck to have my Viking-Dane-82<sup>nd</sup>-Airborne-Army-Ranger-Crazy-Man-Husband working at the same school with me every day, I can tell you that.



This stuff isn't easy. But we are the only hope our children have. It takes a phenomenal amount of courage for them to confide in us about something so painful, so horrible. We must show courage too.

In Harry Potter, the greatest Hope Giver I've ever known, Neville Longbottom, stood by himself between the Death Eaters and the children. That is what we are required to do by everything that is right and good and just in this world—stand between the Death Eaters and the children. We need to take the Sword of Truth and cut off the head of the snake of child abuse. We need to be brave.

You can do that for a child. Our children need all of us working together to keep them safe. None of us gets a pass.

## ELEVEN

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### If the Unthinkable Happens

First of all, let's just stop for a second.

If you are reading this, and your family is in the midst of this chaos right now, I just want to tell you how very sorry I am that you are going through this. This particular nightmare feels like the end of all that is good and right and fair. There are so many feelings of rage and guilt and shame and despair and helplessness and fury. Let me sit with you right now and simply soak with you in all of that muck and mire. We must sit with one another in our suffering for however long it takes before people can begin to awaken once again to Hope. Hope Givers do not try to talk people out of feeling their pain. We're not about cheering you up. We will not splatter you with 'happiness' to try to convince you to put your arms around life again.

We will simply sit in it with you, put our arms around you, and wait for you to breathe again.

You're thinking, *Daisy, you don't even know me.*

I have met you a thousand times.

You're thinking, *We've never met. What you're offering is impossible.*

I sit with you in your suffering every morning and offer up prayers for all kinds of people I've never met but already love and care about and hope for.

You're thinking, *You don't even know my name. You don't know what I'm going through.*

All I need to know about you is that you're hurting, that you have been wronged, that your family didn't deserve this, and that you need someone to stand in the space between you and Hope, between you and Mercy, between you and Justice and advocate to all that is holy and good on your behalf. I don't need to know your name. I don't need to know the specifics. I don't need to have seen your face. All I need to know is that you are suffering, and I will stand in that space for you.

I can only hope it is enough. I'll keep advocating for you until it is.

There is Hope, my friends, that Life will unfold again for you and bring with it every manner of joy and peace, wonder and grace. Take heart. Your life can be full again.

If the unthinkable happens in your family and your child discloses abuse either intentionally or unintentionally or, God help you, you happen to walk in on your child being harmed, the way you respond can set the tone for everything that comes after.

***Your number one job at this point is to prevent any further trauma to your child.***

There are many do's and don'ts you need to know. Many of these are going to seem impossible. You cannot envision in your wildest imagination that you could ever do what's on this list, but you must. You love your child enough to do this, I know you do.

1. **Do not freak out.** If you do, your child will probably be frightened and shut down completely. They may feel like you are angry with them which

is not the case. They're already confused as it is, and if you blow up, they will take that upon themselves because children will always find a way to believe it's all their fault. They don't know any better. You must remain calm. Breathe. Wrap your child up in your arms and tell them how very, very brave they are and that they did the right thing by letting you know. Assure them that you believe them and are going to do everything in your power to keep them safe.

2. **Believe your child.** Your mind is whirling right now. You almost can't wrap your head around what your child is saying to you. You are vacillating back and forth between what you think you know about the accused and trying to reconcile that with the words that are coming out of your child's mouth. You are wondering if your child is telling the truth or maybe even confused. *You are looking for that magical explanation to convince you that this is not happening because your brain is trying to reject the horror of it all.* But it is happening. These *are* the words coming out of your child's mouth. And if you have had the conversations with your child that they can come to you, that they can trust you, that they are safe with you, you'd better not drop the ball now because I promise you, that will be years of therapy for them. *You must believe them.*
3. **Report the abuse immediately to the police.** Even if this is a family member or someone you thought was a good friend. In fact, statistically speaking, this is exactly who you are reporting.
4. **Do not confront the abuser.** Let the people who have guns strapped to their belts do that. And if you do have a gun, you REALLY should not be confronting the abuser. Your child needs you on their side of the steel bars so that you can continue to raise them and love them and make

sure they get through this. You can't do anything if you get arrested for doing all the horrible things you want to do right now, and you cannot fight two legal battles. Be 100% committed to fighting your *child's* battle—do not create any additional battles for yourself. I know you're quite willing in this moment to spend the rest of your life in prison to make sure that this person never hurts your child again, but then who will raise your child? Because you won't be. I'm sorry if that seems harsh, but it doesn't serve anyone for me to mince words here. Make the choice right now to physically stay with your child through this ordeal.

5. **Don't 'tip your hand' to the offender that you have discovered the abuse.** Don't give the offender a chance to circle their wagons and present any sort of defense to you. Predators are slick, and you've been groomed right along with your child. They will only muddy the waters in your mind. Report the abuse to the proper authorities right away, as has been stated. Ring that bell so that it cannot be unrung and while you wait for the professionals to come in and take charge of the situation, do not be in any sort of proximity to them. If you live together, either take your child and go somewhere safe or lock them out, barricade the door, and call the cops. Don't answer your phone. Don't listen to the messages they leave on your voice mail. Do whatever you have to do not to talk to them until the authorities speak with them first.
6. **Do not try to record the child's disclosure.** This can colossally screw up any investigative efforts by law enforcement. If all works as it should, a highly trained professional will conduct a forensic interview with your child. These individuals know precisely how to bring the truth out gently—truth that can be used effectively in court. You cannot be in the room with your child so reassure them that the person they speak

with cares about them too and wants to help make things right. They are training to minimize the trauma to your child.

7. **Minimize the number of people who talk to your child and don't ask them to repeat their statements to others.** If your child tells you they've been abused, you be the one to report it and make sure that the next person your child speaks to about this is a professional and literally no one else after that. Your spouse or life partner will absolutely want to know as well, but *you* be the one to convey the information and not in the presence of your child. Making the child repeat their story over and over can have disastrous results. In a training with the Family Justice Center here, we heard about a little boy they called Henry (not his real name) who disclosed to his teacher at school. The teacher brought Henry to the counselor where he had to tell his story again. The counselor told the principal where he had to tell his story again. The principal called the SRO where he had to tell his story again. The SRO notified Health and Welfare where he had to tell his story again. Henry's mom picked him up from school since the school notified her that her boyfriend had allegedly molested her son where he had to tell his story again, and Henry had to endure the third degree on the way home. She called a family meeting where he had to tell his story again. Then she went around to each child—some kids were hers and some kids were his—and asked if her boyfriend had been touching any of them. Then the boyfriend was brought in where Henry had to tell his story again, this time in front of his perpetrator—his very large, very angry, very indignant offender whose primal sense of self-preservation was in full swing. The authorities took over and every child in the house was removed including the perpetrator's own biological children who had

not been abused by him and placed in foster care. Henry's step-siblings called him a liar and they became very hostile toward Henry. And you know what? Henry recanted the entire thing because he simply couldn't stand up under the weight of all that pressure. Don't make your child repeat themselves. It can be disastrous.

8. **Do not talk about the abuse in front of your child.** In fact, don't even do it if your child is in the house or has gone to bed. Little ears can hear you, and you don't want to take the chance of them internalizing the anger that you would invariably convey as you let out all your emotions. Imagine if your child heard you say, "I'm going to kill [the abuser]! I'm going to rip them apart with my bare hands!" Your child would be very conflicted overhearing this because it is very likely that she or he still loves their abuser. You heard me. As sick as that is, your child is designed to love and trust adults—they aren't able to turn that love to hate or disdain the way we can. That's what makes them beautiful. That's what makes them vulnerable. If they believe that you will make good on your promise to 'end' their abuser, they will believe it is their fault if something bad happens to the accused and that they were wrong to tell you. Fault equals blame. Blame equals shame. Shame equals tons more therapy.
9. **Cooperate with the agencies who are working with you.** I hope to all that is right in this world that there are advocacy services available where you live because your entire family needs help that you could not otherwise provide for yourselves. Take advantage of every resource. These agencies can streamline the advocacy for your family. Some organizations like our own Family Justice Center is a miraculous place where victims can have the forensic interview conducted, get a medical

examination if needed, file police reports, obtain protective orders, get counseling from therapists who are highly trained in dealing with sexual trauma, and a myriad of other services all in one location. Having to go to the police station and then Health and Welfare and then the hospital and then to a counseling center and wherever else you can get some help can increase the level of trauma in and of itself. Reduce this as much as you possibly can for your child.

10. **NO FAMILY MEETINGS!** No family meetings. Ever. No family meetings. Did you hear me? No family meetings. Ever, ever, ever, EVER! Say it with me: NO FAMILY MEETINGS!
11. **Do not try to mediate between your child and their abuser.** This is pure folly and falls under the umbrella of NO FAMILY MEETINGS!
12. **Do not ask your child why they didn't tell you sooner.** Laud them with praise for telling you as soon as they did. If this question occurs to you, then I would have you go back and review every step of the grooming process until you have the answer to this question as to why they didn't come forward before now. Refrain from saying anything accusatory to your child or they will feel shame—and shame is a very, very debilitating emotion. Your child should be championed for coming forward.
13. **Do not ask your child why they didn't run away or fight back or tell their abuser to stop abusing them.** Again, do not 'should' all over your child as in, "You should have done this" or "You should have done that." To ask these questions insinuates that your child did something wrong and could have prevented what happened to them. Make it crystal clear in your mind that there is absolutely nothing your



child was *capable* of doing that could have stopped what happened.

Reinforce their innocence at every opportunity and lavish them with love and praise and reassurance.

14. **Rebuild.** Let's be honest here. There is no way to tell whether or not charges will be filed or that prosecutors will take this case. If there is not enough evidence for a conviction, those in the legal system may choose not to bring the case to court for the simple fact that if they can't prove these allegations are true beyond a reasonable doubt, the victim will not be served. It's not easy to prosecute cases with only a victim's statement. Acquittals for offenders are never in the best interest of those who have been harmed by them. A vindication like that causes so much more trauma that has to all be ironed out later. So start ironing out the things you can. This is done with a trauma-certified therapist who will work with the whole family.
15. **Be patient.** The wheels of justice move slowly, and there are many reasons for that. Even if prosecutors do take the case, the defense attorneys will ask for court dates to be delayed, and they will be granted those delays. Prepare for this. It is a legal tactic that is almost always utilized. The more time that goes by, the harder it is to convict someone, but not always. Sometimes more victims will come forward and strengthen the case. This is why I say to organizations over and over and over again to inform everyone who has ever been served by them that allegations have been made and to please cooperate with the ongoing investigation. Additionally, victims must have time to get to a place where they can emotionally, physically, mentally, and even spiritually prepare for all that follows. They need counseling. All this takes time. So work with your counselor to come up with a plan as to how you and your

family will sustain yourselves until this is over and how you will continue living life to the fullest regardless of the outcome.

16. **Live.** Give yourself permission to be happy. To exist fully in those moments where you can laugh and forget for a while all that looms over you. To move on from this and suck the marrow out of life. To seek out those things that are good and pure and right. Be free to love more fully, more tangibly. You are entitled to this. Your child is entitled to this. Acknowledge their pain—don't dismiss it. Let them feel all the feels and feel the feels with them. Sit with your child in their suffering as I described above, for it is the only way they will be able to embrace Hope again. You embrace Hope too. Give it to your child like you give them ice cream and kisses and high fives. Give Hope to your child in the same way you give them Love and Kindness and Joy, freely and generously. They might drop it or throw it to the ground. That's okay. Be angry with them in those moments. Then try again soon. At some point, they may hold it in their hands for a while before they toss it away. That's fine too. Eventually, they may get used to how it feels again and hold it closer to their hearts. Keep at it. And don't forget to offer these things to yourself as well.

Janelle Stauffer gave me a list of variables that can absolutely reduce the amount of trauma your child may go through and shorten the need for therapy. If these events occur, she says that you all could be in counseling for less than a year. However, if the opposite happens, it can take literally years upon years to sort out the mess.

1. **The Disclosure Experience.** When the child comes forward with what has happened and the trusted adult has a calm emotional response

and believes them, the chances of a quicker recovery are high. If the trusted adult gets angry refuses to believe them, and believes their abuser instead, therapy could take many years. If it is an entire organization who chooses to protect and defend their abuser to preserve their reputation over the victim, we're talking possible decades of therapy.

2. **Supportive Caregiver.** If the child has someone in their life who they can count upon to go to any length to defend them, support them, and to walk through this journey with them, the chances of a quicker recovery are high. If they have no one to advocate for them in that way, if they have to navigate through hostility and blame by themselves, therapy could take many years.
3. **Offender admitting guilt.** Good luck with this. This is a tough one. It does happen, though, and when it does the chances of a quicker recovery are high. But as long as the accused never owns up to what they've done, it puts the victim in a position of always having to defend the allegations, whereas it should be the accused who should be the one in defense mode. It's just another form of manipulation, and this can extend therapy time a long way.
4. **Offender is Punished.** If the legal system gets the conviction they are after and there is vindication for the victim, the chances of a quicker recovery are high. However, if nothing ever happens to the accused and that person never has to answer for their crimes, the feeling of injustice can create a very deep wound in the victim. They may even feel as if they are not worthy or valuable or that good things are for other people, never for them. Therapy will take longer to unravel this.

5. **Duration and Severity of Abuse.** This is quite mathematical. The longer a child had to suffer is one variable, and how egregious the offenses were is another. Together, these two factors can cause decades of treatment. However, if the abuse was cut short by someone who was astute enough to recognize what was going on and intervened on behalf of the victim, the need for therapy can be greatly reduced, especially if the perpetrator did not have time to escalate the level of abuse.
6. **Relationship to the Offender.** Simply put, the closer the biological and/or social relationship to the offender, the harder it is for the victim to sort that out in their minds and hearts. If the perpetrator is a biological parent, the victim will invariably ask, *How could they do this to their own child?* This will require a lot of help. If the relationship was merely a social relationship or a person more distant from the child, the therapy time can be greatly reduced.
7. **Discontinued Association.** If the child has to continue to live with the person who has abused them or is subjected to be in close proximity to the person for extended periods of time, this will greatly increase the need for long term therapy. However, if the person is removed from the child's life permanently and they don't have to constantly deal with the reminders of what happened or try to navigate their way through having to continue a relationship with that person, therapy time can be greatly reduced.
8. **Streamlined Advocacy.** I've already addressed this above, but anytime we can reduce the number of places a child has to go or the number of people the child has to explain what happened is ultimately more beneficial for the child. It's when a child has to endure repeating their story and reliving the experience and being carted from place to

place to place where people are poking at them and demanding more information and subjecting them to all manner of expectations that it becomes overwhelming and exhausting and more traumatizing which will require more therapy to work through it all.

9. **Trauma Focused, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.** In the years I've been advocating for victims of abuse of all kinds, I've literally known people who needed therapy to help them recover from an unqualified counselor who has tripped every trigger they had, resulting in a 'flooding' of flashbacks so that they don't merely remember the experience, but actually relive it right there on the couch. If a counselor is unable to prevent that flooding, I would be willing to bet they don't know how to rectify the situation once their patient is in the throes of fight or flight or freeze, let alone provide assistance in walking through the flashback. Not all therapists are trauma certified or trauma informed and qualified to effectively bring resolution and healing and closure. I cannot express how vital it is to seek help from someone who knows what they're doing. I would not, for about a million and one reasons, suggest that you go to your pastor for help with this. Believe me when I tell you that I understand your pastor may tell you a very heartfelt story about how he received the anointing of God on his life and a call to ministry when he was 12 years old at church camp—in a highly suggestive, emotionally charged environment that could also be chalked up to bad pizza—because I was raised in this tradition. So I get it. And for all the good in the world he does (and I'm sure he does) and for all the people he's fed (and I'm sure he has) and for all the souls he's saved from eternal hellfire and damnation (I don't even know what to do with that one) he is not equipped to navigate you through this for the simple

fact that he has not been trained to do so. That's not an insult. That's not a jab. That is not a slam on the church. It's simply a fact. I understand and fully anticipate getting a bunch of flak for writing this, but I've just seen too much harm done not to address it straight on. I implore you to seek help with a therapist who has spent years in school pursuing a degree as well as a license, studying for hours upon hours to show themselves approved for such a task as this, poring over peer-reviewed articles and case studies and theory and application to expertly and cogently help people who have been through what you've been through. The process of healing in these situations is not as simple as claiming healing and victory in Jesus' name and believing by faith that it's all in the past, as far as the east is from the west and all your worries are nevermore. Any pastor worth his salt will tell you the same. Good pastors who are well aware of their inadequacies will offer you spiritual support and absolutely pray with you for the healing that you need AND refer you to a qualified professional. You can believe there are a lot of good pastors out there. I can give you a huge list of clergy who are just as tired and heartsick as I am of seeing people walk away from their faith because the church completely mishandled their situation. Those are the pastors who legitimately have the anointing of God.

For those precious souls who are offended by what I just wrote, I just want you to know that I'm happy (albeit surprised) that you are still reading this. Please send all correspondence with your admonitions and corrections and warnings to: [thisemaildoesnotexist@yahoo.com](mailto:thisemaildoesnotexist@yahoo.com).

## TWELVE

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### A Few Words for Organizations

I suppose I've stepped in it now after pointing out the fact that pastors are not equipped to help victims of child sexual abuse navigate their way toward healing (unless, of course, they've done the academic and professional work to be qualified, licensed, and certified to help people who have suffered trauma) and called out those institutions that have mishandled instances of abuse by providing safe harbor for the perpetrators while shaming or dismissing the victims into silence. Truly, I wish I only heard stories of how the church rushed in like a flood to rescue these precious children, but I just haven't. Not that those instances aren't out there. I'm sure there are. Those just aren't the stories I hear. In fact, I have only ever known organizations, be they religious or academic or athletic, to do every single thing wrong that could be done wrong. It's as if these agencies have followed a list of what not to do and nailed every single item.

It is to these systems and institutions and the people within them and the people who run them that I would like to address in these next few paragraphs.

Penn State. The Catholic Church. Choate Rosemary Hall. All have been accused of covering up child sexual abuse. More recently: Michigan State. US Olympic Committee. US Gymnastics. The #MeToo movement has pointed fingers at people in Hollywood, Congress, the media, and Corporate America for maintaining a culture of sexual violence and exploitation against women and men, young girls and boys; for covering up those crimes; for silencing victims by demanding signatures on non-disclosures, preventing them from implicating the guilty parties with their

testimonies; for threatening to sue them; for *actually* suing them; for refusing to change the verbiage in your bylaws because you're afraid you might open yourself up for lawsuits if you were to explicitly state that a minister's license would be revoked by the denomination if he failed to report child abuse; for providing safe harbor for pedophiles instead of sanctuary for children who trusted you enough to tell you they were being molested; for threatening physical violence; for threatening to sabotage the careers of your employees; for hiring private detectives to gather dirt on your victims so that you had something over them if they were to ever reveal what you've done to them; for threatening extortion or blackmail; for paying out hush money in secret with tax payer dollars; for making ridiculous laws to protect abusers and silence victims by making them wait to file a report until they can 'cool down' for three months.

To say that you are all a bunch of douchebags doesn't even begin to cover it.

It makes me physically ill to think about the harm that's been done in this world as well as the harm that's been permitted to occur over and over and over. So before I address people who are in charge of organizations determined to do what's right and committed to those in their care—which I will get to in a moment—let me just say something to anyone among the entities I listed above—to anyone who has ever been complicit with crimes like these and helped monsters get away with these horrific acts. To every coach. To every professor and teacher. To every doctor. To every congressperson. To every producer and director, agent and actor and morning show host. To every media mogul. To every priest or clergyman or clergywoman. To every employer. To every employee. To every counselor. To every board member. To every television or radio host. To every headmaster and principal and president.

Damn your silence when you were *told*. Damn your indifference when you were looking the other way. Damn your inhumanity when you were ignoring the cries of victims whose souls you helped destroy. And damn your pathetic excuses that you



didn't know... you didn't realize... certainly no one would ever think that you could have ever...

*Shut up.*

Shut your damn mouths. You didn't bother to speak on behalf of these victims when you should have, so don't you dare to try to speak now. The time to plead your case is over. You missed it. You pissed away your opportunity to be heard when you couldn't be bothered to advocate on behalf of these victims. No one wants to hear one word from you now. Or ever. The fact that your derelict actions have been exposed is an answer to the prayers I and many others have been praying to happen for decades—that Almighty God along with law enforcement would sweep like holy fire through anyplace where the vulnerable are being oppressed and lay bare what evil has been allowed *by you* to destroy—for all to see. You are fully exposed. The world knows now exactly who and what you are. Live with that and know, in the deepest part of your terminally dark hearts, that there is nothing you can do to erase the complete lack of regard you had for those who needed you to rescue them. May the very God who unmasked your sins have mercy on your eternal soul.

If you haven't been caught yet, and you're laughing at all of this right now, just wait. Hope is coming for you with a sword that has your name inscribed on the blade. It has been lit on fire, and the One who swings it will slosh through your guts after you are defeated. There's your Revelation with vengeance and with wrath. Let the knowledge that this is your inevitable future suck the very breath from your lungs.

FEAR ME... I'm a writer!

Whееееew. Okay, Daisy. Deep breath. Somebody needs to talk me off this ledge. For those of you who just got splattered with all that angst, I apologize. Unless, of course, you're jumping up and down and cheering right now because you're just as exasperated and indignant and DONE with all this injustice as I am. I'm sorry, but that just had to be said.

I don't care how long a person's been a Hope Giver, the battle takes its toll. Hope Givers come with healing in one hand and a sword in the other. Sometimes we're victorious, and sometimes we get cold-cocked right in the head and knocked clean out. We've given blows as good as we've gotten them. We've bled, and we've fled. We've been brave and been victorious, and we've cowered and lost. We've seen things out there in this world that most people who would rather sit behind their computers and try to effect change with just their keyboards (which isn't effective at all) could never stomach.

Forgive me if I'm a tad irritated and slightly twitchy, but I'm exhausted, if I'm telling the truth. The chapter on social media I wrote three days ago just about killed me. I was too long in the dark and had to call my A-Team of Hope Givers who always hold the rope for me as I plunge down into evil places so they can drag me back up in whatever condition I'm in. You know what I asked them to do for me? Pray. Believe me, their prayers availed much. They prayed while I popped a Xanax and watched cartoons until I fell asleep. Surprised? Don't be. I wrote a whole chapter in Hope Givers called, *Zoloft—When the F-Word Just Isn't Enough and the Wine Starts to Stain Your Teeth*. Yeah, Hope Givers have to medicate sometimes and then get told by those who have never stepped a toe onto the battlefield that we aren't demonstrating any semblance of faith if we imbibe. That's when we clock them in the head with our swords. Not the blade... the handle, for crying out loud! We only use the blade to liberate the oppressed—we're not allowed to slay the annoying. That's why we clip them on the head with the handles.

Not *hard*. Relax.

So forgive me. I cry. I throw fits. I have come-aparts of Biblical proportions. I drink wine and do yoga and pray to Jesus and do all kinds of things to abate the cost of living my life how I have decided to live it.

Incidentally, I am recruiting Hope Givers, so if any of this sounds exciting to you, I'll tell you how you can join. The benefits are amazing. Have you ever been resurrected? It's a game changer, for sure. You, too, can vacillate between thinking you're certifiably insane and being convinced that this is the only way to live your life.

Now.

Back to the business at hand. For those of you who are part of an agency or organization and truly good people who care about the welfare and safety of children and are absolutely committed to swinging your sword if you have to, let me come alongside you and do what I can to help you.

1. **Read every headline that has ever been printed about how religious, academic, and athletic institutions have handled allegations of abuse, and do exactly the opposite!** Seriously, there are so many examples of how badly these organizations wanted to protect their reputations by any means necessary. They resorted to corruption and ended up destroying any semblance of integrity and, as a result, the very prestige they sought to preserve. Fear motivated every decision instead of compassion for those who were harmed. Have you ever seen that part in the movie *Jaws* where the kids were pulling a prank and swam around in the water with a big shark fin pretending to be the great white shark that was eating everybody? Do you remember two separate scenes where these big, powerful guys mowed over the little kids on the rafts with no regard to their safety in their efforts to save themselves? That's what the institutions in the headlines did. Don't do that.
2. **Create a culture of safety among your employees, staff, and patrons.** This is accomplished when the leader of the organization has a vision, makes a decision as to what direction the agency is going to go,

and forms a plan as to how to get there. Policies and protocols are developed, shared with all involved, and implemented until the ‘feel’ of the place is distinctly different and improved and in accordance with the vision. It feels safer. The conversations reflect this. The leader opens her or his door and builds trust at every level.

3. **Have a protocol in place as to how your organization will prevent abuse from happening in the first place and how they will handle allegations of abuse. Then follow it to the letter every single time.** Practice this. Run through mock scenarios. Have employees take annual refresher courses and give them a nifty certificate of completion when they can pass a test demonstrating that they know what to do. Here are some suggestions that might be included in such a protocol of protection:

- Since 80% of all abuse happens when an adult spends one-on-one time with a child, implement a policy where that is not tolerated. Keep doors and window coverings open. Always have another adult or groups of children present. Don’t ever be with a child by yourself.
- No overnights or no shared beds with minors.
- No undressing with minors.
- No secrets between an adult and child.
- No ‘special’ relationships between an adult and a child. Exclusivity is not tolerated.
- No gifts to any one child or a select group of children. If you don’t have enough cupcakes for everybody, don’t bring any.

- Side hugs and high fives make the world go round. Kissing and excessive affection or touching makes the world stop so you can step off.
  - No inappropriate jokes, especially those that are sexual in nature.
  - No sharing of personal information about yourself that is not appropriate for a child or that would cause confusion for or garner sympathy from a child.
  - If a child reports that you ‘accidentally’ exposed yourself, you will be on purposely dismissed and reported to the authorities. Same goes with your hand ‘accidentally’ slipping onto their private parts.
  - This list is not exhaustive. There are many examples of these types of written agreements on the Internet. See what fits best with your organization.
4. **Train every person in your organization from the top to the bottom as to how to recognize the signs of abuse and how to report.**
  5. **If any employee breaches the policies or reporting protocol, terminate them immediately and revoke any license or certificate they may have with your organization.** This is not a hard one, folks. If you train your employees to follow your policies for child safety or they come by information that a child has been abused and doesn’t report, they put or keep children in danger. They’ve got to go.
  6. **If and when allegations of abuse are presented, stand with the victim throughout the investigation.** Do not try to go back and

forth between the accuser and the accused. You cannot serve both the victim and the perpetrator. I've seen this happen time and again in religious communities where the notion exists that grace and mercy need to be shown to both parties, and the victim needs to simply forgive the aggressor and the aggressor simply needs to... be thankful they're off the hook. We've gone over this. *If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor*, thank you Desmond Tutu.

7. **File a report with the police immediately.** Do not wait. Let it be known to the community that you took these allegations seriously and called law enforcement without hesitation. Your response to allegations of abuse needs to be automated. If a child says, A, B, and C, your protocol calls for D, E, and F. Period.
8. **Call for an objective third party investigation and cooperate fully with that.** Choate Rosemary Hall College Prep School got an administration in there who eventually did this. Mind you, 40 years of administrators failed to do this which is why I listed them with all the others. Once this was done, things got rolling. I read the investigative report and it was well done—because it was done by an entity that was not beholden in any way to the school. We should not trust efforts like, say, NBC who investigated the culture of sexual harassment at NBC and don't you know that NBC found nothing to fix at NBC. Wow. That stinks just writing about it. Seriously, my entire keyboard smells like it just farted and the more I click the keys the more I feel like I'm going to gag.
9. **Do your background checks and if someone shows up on the sex offender registry, don't hire them.** You wouldn't think that I'd have to type this out, but alas... here we are. Remember that story a few

chapters back that if I were to run naked through the cafeteria with a gun at breakfast and fire shots into the ceiling that I should never expect to work in the industry of children ever again? Well, guess what? Anybody who has been convicted of a sexual offense should assume the same. Please don't fall for their cockamamie story about how they were 19 and their partner was 17, but they were going to turn 18 in just a few months, but their parents found out and got mad so they pressed charges and now they're a registered sex offender for the rest of their lives when it was consensual sex and blah, blah, blah. Seriously, these people need a new lie. That one's getting old. Teachers who have lost their licenses in certain states from sexual misconduct with their students move to other states and continue to teach. ASK licensed employees straight up in the hiring interview if they have ever had their licenses revoked in other states. If they say no and you find out later that they have, the fact that they lied on the application or in the interview could be enough to dismiss them.

**10. Finally, and this is the most important one: Tend to the**

**victims.** Offer counseling by a trauma certified therapist for their family, first and foremost and at the very least. The rest comes down to basic human kindness: check in on them, get a food train going, buy movie tickets to provide an escape for them so they can stop thinking about what they're facing. Stand with them. This is easier than you may think. It doesn't have to be uncomfortable. Love is soft and warm and easy. So find the collective, warm chewy center in your organization and make life easier for those who need those hard edges softened. In church circles, it's called *sanctuary*. You don't have to have a steeple over your heads to provide it for those who need it.

Honestly. If you're reading this, I have no doubt that you truly want to do right by your parishioners, your people, and your patrons. And since that is the case, then you don't really need a list like this one to guide you because your heart is already guiding you. You are already committed to doing what is right over what seems easier in the moment, and I applaud you for it. You are not among those I railed against in the beginning of this chapter. So I will leave you with this: Thank you for being a Hope Giver. I will readily stand with you in this battle... because you stand with kids.



## THIRTEEN

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### Bullying – No Extra Charge for the Extra Chapter

Bones heal quickly. Emotions do not. Whoever came up with the ‘sticks and stones’ schtick is a... well, let’s not call names here.

As a teacher, my response when a child comes to me and tells me they’re being bullied is not to brush them off and treat them like they’re putting me out or make them feel like they’re wrong for telling me this. To be clear, the bully is the problem for being mean—the child who is attempting to advocate for themselves is not the problem so I don’t treat them like they are. Definitely start with that.

The first thing I address, as gently and as inflexibly as possible, have a conversation with the aggressor and shut down the bullying. In the most objective and non-shaming way, I make the bully aware of the process leading up to the possibility or charges being filed against them because that is totally legit. Kids have the right to go to school without being intimidated, threatened, harassed, or straight up afraid of being harmed. When a kid wakes up in the morning and can tell you exactly what is going to happen to them when they get on the bus because it happens every day or what is going to happen to them in the cafeteria at lunch because it happens every day or at any other given time or place; when a kid has asked the bully to stop; when a kid has tried to ignore the bully to make them stop and can tell you about all the times they’ve tried to get away from the bully, there’s a problem. That, in fact, is the very definition of bullying. It’s more than another kid making a rude comment about their hair or what they’re wearing and that’s the end of it. It’s more than when a friend

hurts their feelings. Bullying is the repeated and malicious maltreatment of one student toward another.

When the student who is being bullied finally plucks up the courage to tell an adult (after being admonished by adults for years to ‘stop tattling’ or ‘you two need to work it out yourselves’ or ‘ignore them and they’ll stop’) the adult can pretty much determine who is the aggressor in spite of the fact that, in the spirit of true self-preservation, the accused attempts to deny, deflect, and minimize the charges to shift the blame to the one who spoke up for themselves. Except if you think about it, the person who feels the most *vulnerable* is the one who comes calling for help. I say help them. Have a very direct conversation with the bully and don’t pull any punches. Kids commit suicide over this. Kids have been known to ‘snap’ over this. So I let the bully know that if the aggression doesn’t stop, then I won’t hesitate to let our SRO know that a student would like to press charges—not that the bully is going to be handcuffed, read their Miranda rights, and put in the back of police car and hauled down to the station for a mug shot. I’ve never seen that happen in 26 years of teaching. I have, however, seen kids cited for bullying—it IS against the law, after all—and be given a court date so that they can stand before a judge and give an account as to why they felt the need to be so antagonistic to another student.

During this conversation, I do try to get to the bottom of why the student is being so contrary. People assume that bullies bully because they’ve been bullied themselves. That’s true for a portion of kids who bully. You want to know the other major reason that kids bully?

Because they like it. They like how it feels to have power over another person.

I think it’s only fair to explain that research to the bully and then simply ask them, “Which of those two explanations best describes you? Has someone bullied you? Because if that’s the case, I will help you, my sweet pumpkin. I will advocate for

you and have this same conversation with them and make them stop—even if it’s an adult. I have no problem confronting an adult on your behalf. But if you’re bullying just because you like how it feels to cause someone else to feel afraid of you or be intimidated by you, then you just say the word, and I can call the SRO right now. We’ll get the paperwork done before the bell rings. So which is it, darling? Which direction would you like me to go? I can do this either way.”

You’d be surprised at what kids have told me. Some kids start crying and tell me all sorts of awful things they’ve been through. If I can have the same conversation with the person who is bullying them, then I will. But more often than not, I go get the child they were bullying who came to me in the first place. I say, “Hey, so I found out that this kid who has been bullying you has been bullied too. And without getting into their personal life, I just want you to know that they are dealing with a little bit of anger, and you were targeted for whatever reason which isn’t your fault. They’re trying to work things out in their own lives and here we are in this situation with you being bullied. I’m wondering if you might be willing to show some grace and some understanding and possibly even forgive them for being mean to you and start fresh. Now you absolutely do not have to! If you are not in a good place and you need more time or you need this person to prove to you that they’re not going to be mean to you anymore, that’s totally legit. I’m just here to give everybody all their options.”

Most of the time the victim does show grace and chooses to put everything behind them and start fresh. You know why? Because children are magic! They are the very best of humanity which is why I am a public school teacher. They really are quite remarkable and ever so much better than we adults are. But sometimes the victim has been pushed to the end of themselves and is so frustrated that they cannot find it in themselves to relinquish that anger—at least not yet. And you know what? They don’t have to, and I let them know that they are well within their rights to maintain a distance from this person and set that boundary. They have complete autonomy!

From there, I let the aggressor know that reconciliation may come later or not at all—the victim gets to decide if and when that happens. I hope they do manage to get past the anger, but I will support them whatever they decide. So if the bullying behavior doesn't stop, then this individual is absolutely entitled to press charges at any point and that I will be the very one to call the SRO so that those charges can be filed. I have mediated the situation to the best of my ability. I have not blamed or shamed anyone. It is not my responsibility to investigate the matter and get to the bottom of it; therefore, if this becomes a situation that needs more attention by an adult, a police officer will be the adult that handles it.

Any questions?

Most of the time, putting the aggressor on notice and making sure they are duly informed about the law and what the next steps are is enough to dissuade the abuse from continuing. When it's not, I make good on my promises.

Notice that I didn't send them both to the principal's office? Why is that necessary? Am I not an empowered adult who can take advantage of a teachable moment and not pass them off to someone else? Besides, when I handle a situation, I have more control over that situation. I have worked for administrators over the span of two decades who, frankly, don't handle these situations effectively. I've seen people who should know better and are in a position to know better be completely dismissive of young girls because they think they're just being dramatic so they all get detention across the board without even being heard, and I've seen boys told to go outside and play and stop being knuckleheads because, you know, boys will be boys.

I could lose my religion over that excrement.

I think the most egregious travesty of justice is when an administrator (from several centuries in the past and not anybody I work for now so don't grill me because you think you know who I'm talking about because you don't) dealt with three very large boys who were bullying a girl on the bus who was probably half the size of the

biggest boy. Did I mention there were three of them and one of her? The individual who dealt with this situation punished her equally for her secondary actions that were in response to the three boys' primary actions. She got exactly what they got because when they pushed into a seat and trapped her, she came out scratching and cussing like a sailor.

Totally unbecoming for a lady.

Of all the ignorant, disgusting, sexist, misogynistic bullsh... sorry. Forgive me. Let me get myself together.

What this administrator failed to recognize is that this girl was in survivor mode—fight, flight, or freeze—with three huge boys looming over her, threatening her, putting their hands on her, and putting the fear of God into her. And why? They liked how it felt for someone to fear them, no matter how small. So they got in house suspension and so did she.

I DID lose my religion over that one. She was only doing what her instincts were directing her to do in a moment of terror. The course of action that was taken by the adult in charge was borne out of complete and willful ignorance and anyone who can't see what was wrong with that whole scenario shouldn't be in charge of children until they figure something out.

She was the one who went to the adults for help, and in the end, she got suspended right along with the boys who were tormenting her because at 12 years old, she was deemed equally guilty simply because she couldn't manage to... what? Bat her eyelashes and bake them something so they'd leave her alone?

Clearly I'm not over it, and I have no idea whether or not she is either or how that formed her opinions about the world and authority and men and her own self-worth.

We have to stop the bullying where we can, but the fact of the matter is, we cannot always be there with our children to watch over them and protect them. And

every single human being in every single school in America has been or will be bullied at some point in their lives. I wish it were not that way and somebody needs to write a book called, *Children Who Act Monstrously at School: Practical Steps for Protecting Our Children from Bullies*.

The second thing we have to do which is just as important as the first is to build resilience in our children.

This cannot happen if we are dismissive of their complaints. This cannot happen if we merely tell them to buck up, get over it, or handle it themselves. In fact, the first thing we need to do to build resilience in our children is to look them in the eye and tell them, “I’m so sorry this is happening to you. It’s wrong. You don’t deserve this. You shouldn’t have to be dealing with this. It makes me incredibly sad that you are.”

No, this will NOT make sissies out of them—don’t even think that. You know what you’re communicating to them?

“You are valuable. You have done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment. You deserve better. You are worthy of better. You are worthy, *period*.”

Then pull them in for a very safe, appropriate side hug and let them know that you are in their corner. They are worth your time and energy to fix this for them. Of course, you’ll confront the offender, but you’re also going to let them know that they are in the same position that every single other kid at school has been in at one time or another. This happens to everyone—it’s even happened to us adults! They haven’t done anything to provoke this individual (or individuals) to target them. It has nothing to do with their shoes or their hair or how they tripped over a table leg at lunch. Bullies just pick these arbitrary things to hone in on to make life difficult for other kids. Tell them that their shoes are fine and there’s nothing wrong with their hair and you’re sorry they took a header into somebody’s mashed potatoes at lunch. That’s a rough day. But these moments don’t define us. These bullies don’t define us.

We have a future, and it is bright. Moments pass—the good ones and the bad ones. Life will be going great and BOOM! Something bad happens like it did today, and we feel really bad about ourselves. But then tomorrow, something good will come along and you won't feel the way you feel today. You'll laugh at something funny or get an A on some homework, and you'll recognize the fact, the FACT, that you are amazing most of the time. Except for when you're bad at something or maybe mediocre. The point is, you are a wonderful person with so much potential inside you and so many abilities and talents and dreams. People are a dime a dozen who will try to drag you down and make you feel like you're nothing. What are you going to do to be okay today? And tomorrow? And the next day?

I wish I could tell these kids that all bullying stops when we grow up because adults all realize how stupid it is to exclude people or look down their noses at people or ridicule them or what have you. But that's not true. So I tell kids the sushi story.

Sean-Martin and I went to a sushi bar that had only two vacant seats so we took them. Since I've never met a stranger and am friendly to a fault, I made some comment about squeezing together to the lady I'd be sitting next to. Lord strike me if I'm lying, she twisted up her face like I had leprosy, rolled her eyes, turned to her date and whispered something I couldn't hear, looked back at me to make sure I'd seen her (which I did) and turned around in her seat so that her back was to me.

I laughed my rear end off, right out loud. I turned to Sean-Martin and said, "Did you see what this girl just did? Oh, my goodness. I thought crap like that only happened in middle school!"

She turned back around and looked at me like I'd poked her in the butt with a pair of chopsticks. I just shook my head and said, "Bless your heart, honey. Bless your heart." Twenty minutes later she choked on a California Roll (not even real sushi, if you ask me) and I thought I was going to have to do the Heimlich maneuver on her.

Which I would have because I'm resilient.

We can make our children resilient too. Here are some of the ways we can do this.

1. **Know** who the biggest voices are in your child's life: friends, relatives, teachers, coaches, youth leaders. Make it your business to acquaint yourself with those who speak into your child's life and may be defining him with labels and co-building his identity. If you don't approve, step in. You can't help build resilience in your child if you are not aware of who is in his circle of influence.
2. **Take** your child's concerns seriously. Become a sanctuary that she knows she can rely on. However, concurrently teach her self-reliance by helping her realize that she is capable of finding her own solutions. Help her to become part of the problem-solving process. Value her suggestions and encourage her to have faith in herself. Allow her to venture out into those inevitable quandaries with a watchful eye. Intervene when necessary, and always be a soft place for her to land.
3. **Be** a strong voice of reason in your child's life. There are a plethora of other voices that influence him every single day that you have no control over. He is learning about how to deal with conflicts from sources you'd rather he not. Political parties show him daily how to find and exploit the very worst in anyone who has different ideas. Television shows aimed at young people show him how to grandstand and tells him that idiocy is what makes him cool. The news teaches him that people resolve conflicts with violence. If someone is texting in a theater, then by God, shoot him. If someone is walking through your neighborhood of a different color, then whatever you do, don't be civil. Don't be polite. Don't be friendly. Posture yourself a threat and don't back down. Do not ever underestimate the power of these



messages in the psyche of a young person. Be his voice of reason. Talk often of these situations and teach him civility, diplomacy, and respect.

4. **Help** your children to find, trust, and use their voices. Good riddance to the days when children were “seen and not heard”. Shame on that way of thinking! I shudder to think of the damage that has been done because people adhered to that wretched mindset. Teach your child to advocate for herself. Assure her that there is nothing wrong with paying attention to that inner feeling that was built inside her to help guide her in her decision-making. Show her she is allowed to set boundaries and to say no when she is not comfortable with someone or something without apology or excuse. Of course, children will not have this ability perfected right away. They will “speak their minds” about not eating broccoli. But keep at it. This is a critical skill.

Here’s how we can nurture Hope in children:

1. **Find** the beauty in every person and teach your children to do the same. This teaches them that all of us have value and worth. Correct your children when they are insensitive or harsh with their words in regard to others, and you must be mindful to do the same. Prejudice in any form can only perpetuate the fallacy that some people really are *better*. And if that’s true, then we’re all in trouble.
2. **Expose** your children to those in our community who need love and allow them to work their magic. Children should always be kept safe, but they should not be sheltered from people who are homeless or the elderly or those who are struggling in some way. Let kids help. Let them love. Show them how to be Hope Givers. They’re naturally built for it. It’s not until they are taught to distinguish between “haves and have-nots” or “us and them” that

hope begins to diminish and superiority and arrogance move in. Keep your children grounded in compassion always.

3. **Delight** in your children. Smile when they walk into the room. Give them your undivided attention when they are speaking to you. Teach them that their words and their voices and their ideas have a place in this world – starting with you. Your face should light up when they walk out of their schools toward your car or when they come through the front door. Tell them you missed them when they come home.
4. **Lavish** your children with affection. Kiss them. Hug them. Pat them on the back. High five them. Knuckle bump them. Give them the thumbs up. Wink. Smile to reassure them. Nod in approval. Make up hand signals that are uniquely theirs that send messages of love. Chase them down and squeeze them. You can't do this enough.
5. **Deposit** large sums in their self-esteem banks. This is not done by gratuitously lauding their every move or giving them treats the way you would a pet for rolling over. (Believe it or not, doing that is actually counterproductive.) When your child does something that makes you proud, make sure she knows that her accomplishment has impressed you. Your job is to always be looking. Don't pass up an opportunity to be her biggest source of encouragement.
6. **Look** for a particular aptitude your child may have. Maybe you've got a musician on your hands or a poet or an athlete. A writer or a gardener or even a jump-roper. Your child may have an uncanny ability to care for animals. You may have a checker champion in your family and not even know it. Whatever your child's passion or propensity for greatness, support it in any way you can. When the world is crumbling around him, he will always know he can go dance his troubles into the ground or build a model car.

Parenting isn't for sissies, that is for sure. But we can stand on a strong sense of hope that our children will find their way in this world. Their lights shine for us, and the better we guard that light, the more brightly our kids will illuminate this world.

Shane Koyczan is right when he says that life becomes a balancing act that has less to do with pain and more to do with beauty. Kids can't raise themselves. They need us. We have to do a good job, and that is the sobering reality. Therefore, we must have hope if we are to ever teach them to be Hope Givers in a world that is no less civil sometimes than nature itself where only the most fit survive. This is no time to bury our heads in the sand. This is the time to be vigilant and strong and hopeful, so that we can pass those traits to the ones we love the most.

*I'm not the only kid who grew up this way surrounded by people who used to say that rhyme about sticks and stones as if broken bones hurt more than the names we got called and we got called them all so we grew up believing no one would ever fall in love with us that we'd be lonely forever that we'd never meet someone to make us feel like the sun was something they built for us in their tool shed so broken heart strings bled the blues as we tried to empty ourselves so we would feel nothing don't tell me that hurts less than a broken bone that an ingrown life is something surgeons can cut away that there's no way for it to metastasize – it does.*

– Shane Koyczan

## FOURTEEN

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### What Can We Do as a Society to Eradicate Child Sexual Abuse from the Face of the Planet?

You know what? For the love of Sam Pete, stop trying to get out of jury duty!

HA! You didn't see that one coming, did you? I got that tiny dollop of wisdom from Detective Corporal JL Davis who works for the police department one town over. I did an interview with him not long ago, and he gave me a lot of great information for this book. He and his wife Sarah, who works for the Family Justice Center, are phenomenal Hope Givers and are so committed to serving every child in this valley any way they can. I'm so grateful to them.

And Detective Davis is not kidding about jury duty. You know why? Because what JL understands is the need for people to stop pursuing whatever will benefit themselves and start thinking about what they can do to make society better.

Sounds a bit contrary to how we've been socialized in this society to get ahead, get ahead, get ahead; to gravitate toward our own comfort above all else; to pursue life, liberty, and happiness, and make sure our rights are preserved—which is all well and good, I suppose—except when do we ever spend our time and energy contemplating what our *responsibilities* are to this country we love? At what point do we pause and sit down with one another and dream about the kind of society we could have if every one of us gave of ourselves and contributed something for the

betterment of the whole? So that when the need for jurors shows up in our mailboxes, we aren't immediately thinking of ways we can get out of doing this civil duty?

Many of us sacrifice something for the good of the whole. We can name those professions and nonprofits. But by and large, we live in a culture where individuals are reluctant to extend themselves for the benefit of someone else. Don't believe me?

Then why don't people report child abuse like they should?

Because there's risk, and people don't want to get involved. JL hears people say all the time how they'll report something only if they can remain anonymous, and they don't want to have to come to court and testify. Face it. We are not conditioned in our society to stick our necks out for one another—even if it's a child.

How many people at Michigan State turned a blind eye to Larry Nassar's vile assaults on children? So many people could have thwarted that entire cataclysmic disaster. But no one did.

We can do better. We have to do better. We have to start looking out for our neighbors, people we know, and people we don't know. Share a meal. Pay a light bill for somebody, a stranger even. *Sacrifice*. Be willing to do without *just one time* so that another may have something they need. Hopefully you'll like the way that generosity feels and you might even do it again. We can't just look out for our children—we have to look out for *all* children. All the time. Get involved. Speak up. Advocate for others—whether they vote like you or not. Volunteer. Donate time and money. That's right! Pull your wallets out. Grow a garden and feed the homeless. Teach your children to live this way so that they can teach their children who will in turn teach theirs. Be prepared to get involved. People in this country can't merely 'fight for their rights' without contemplating their civic, social, and moral responsibilities of living in this land where we are free to live and speak and move and have our being. People talk a

good game about how ‘freedom isn’t free’ as long as they’re not the ones who have to pay the price. I think people would have a little more room to talk when they’re not so averse to doing some of the sacrificing right here on our own soil. Identify your place on the spectrum between your own personal gain and what you’re willing to sacrifice for the good of the whole.

So that’s the first thing we can do as a society to eradicate child sexual abuse from the face of the planet:

- 1. Contribute to the good of the whole even if it means you have to sacrifice something to make it happen (And stop trying to get out of jury duty!)**

Here’s the second thing:

- 2. Demand sex education in every school in America.** Some folks may balk at this one but research shows time and again that students who receive formal instruction about how their bodies work and are educated about sex benefit in three ways:

- Teen pregnancy and, therefore, abortion rates decline
- Children are more likely to disclose sexual abuse
- Children are less likely to be exposed to pornography

Yep. Now even the most conservative among us can get behind those three things, right? When kids aren’t educated about sex, more teenagers get pregnant. The ripple effect of that is generational poverty resulting in a huge, negative socioeconomic impact on the community at large. Health and Human Services have their hands full for decades.

Remember that movie about the birds and the bees we all had to watch in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and the boys went with the boy PE teacher and the girls went with

the girl PE teacher and we all giggled through the whole thing? And the kids whose parents wouldn't sign the permission slip just forged their signature because they didn't want to go to the library? Yeah, we need to bring that movie back. Sex education in public schools has been on the decline for a while, and as a result, our country's children are denied valuable safety information as well.

There is an amazing effort by a woman named Erin Merryn who is working very hard to make sure every state mandates a child sexual abuse prevention and education program. She has convinced 35 states in our union so far to adopt "Erin's Law". Unfortunately, Idaho has not yet passed this law, but I hope to change this. Get her website from the appendix and see if your state is on board.

Because if the girl PE teacher stood up in front of the girls and the boy PE teacher stood up in front of the boys and they let all the children know that they have autonomy over their bodies and that no one should be touching the places where a bathing suit covers and if that is happening, then they need to tell someone, then maybe more kids would disclose abuse.

But if no one is formally educating children about how their bodies work in our schools, you know what the kids are all doing? They're Googling it. Now put this book down for a second and go Google 'sex'. You'll see and handy dandy definition. Very sterile. Nothing to be concerned about.

Keep scrolling.

Still lots of information that may or may not be accurate, but not precisely porn. Yet.

Keep scrolling.

See where I'm going with this?

Now Google 'penis'. I don't know what the top stories are as you are reading this, but as I type this and go back and forth Googling the things I'm telling you to Google, here are the top three stories in this moment:

*I broke my husband's penis during sex...* (Umm.)

*Little boy's foreskin ripped off penis after becoming trapped in escalator...* (Sweet mother of God!)

*Are Placentas, penises, and platelets the future of beauty?* (Wait... what?)

Keep scrolling.

Now think about what a kid might type into that search bar without the accurate terminology. Type in 'doing it'. And just to up the ante on this, click on 'Images' and keep scrolling. Or don't.

Now erase your history, post haste. Hopefully you know how to do that. If I want to erase my history, I have to go ask my millennial to help me, and that would just be colossally awkward, so I'll just hope no one is interested enough in me to ever check and see what I've been doing on this laptop.

But do you see? I know there are a lot of loud voices out there who rally against sex ed being taught in our schools, but those are the same people who say they don't want teenagers getting pregnant or having abortions and complain about 'lazy people' draining the welfare system and say that they don't want kids to be molested and they don't want kids looking at pornography.



Well? I can help out with that! And so can you. Help put sex ed back in schools. Also, make sure that your state legislature has passed Erin's Law.

3. **Pay attention and resist any and all cultural and systemic support of stereotypical gender role paradigms.** The whole "boys will be boys" and "it's just typical girl drama" has got to go. It can't be part of how we speak or think or live our lives.

Additionally, we must stop pigeonholing our girls into stereotypical roles such as having to be polite, unquestioning, subservient, acquiescent, and stop any nonsense that socializes them to believe they are inferior to boys. We need to stop teaching our boys that they must always be in charge, assertive; that they're 'not a sissy', not allowed to cry, or that they can't play with dolls. Good LORD! What are we afraid of? That they're going to be good fathers someday if they pick up a doll? For crying out loud! Stop the madness. Call that out for what it is in every arena of your life. Teach kids to be good to the opposite gender at every stage of their lives and model that behavior for them by demonstrating equality between the genders at home. Dad can do dishes and raise kids like a boss! Mom can have more education and earning potential than Dad and Dad can be totally cool with it. Neither gender lords over the other nor do they have the final say in the decision making simply because they are one gender or the other. That's ridiculous. Can we leave all that in the dust? Because it makes our girls believe things about themselves and boys that aren't true, and it makes our boys believe things about themselves and girls that aren't true. Let's teach our kids things that are *true*. We'll all be better for it. Because here's what is true about sexual violence: Men cannot do whatever they want with women's bodies just because they're physically stronger and can force sex upon a woman. We all know that. But look at our culture. Malala Yousafzai will tell you that she was not shot in the face by a man. She will tell you that she was shot in the face by an *ideology*.

And that ideology says that women are inferior to men. Don't buy into that ideology. Oppose it in our culture in all its forms. Resist traditions that emphasize female compliance and male domination or favor one gender over another.

4. **Don't get sucked into the 'Great Distraction'.** When people are more incredulous about insignificant matters than they are about whether or not children are safe in this world, they are not part of the solution.

So many people 'major on the minors' so to speak. It's astounding to me how so many groups of folks can manage to mobilize themselves about things that don't matter in the grand scheme of things. Social media provides us with so many opportunities to argue over such trivialities every single day and people get sucked right into it. And I'm not just talking about what color that stupid dress was or whether a person hears 'laurel' or 'yanny' or uses an Oxford comma.

(Of course, we should all use Oxford commas. Duh!)

I'm talking about folks who get absolutely irate over who should be allowed to pee in what bathroom or baking cakes for people or defending our right to say Merry Christmas. I'm positively flummoxed when I get on social media and there's yet another person demanding that The Pledge of Allegiance be recited in public schools when it already is and always has been or that they should put God back in the classroom when He never left it. I try to let people know that we do say The Pledge of Allegiance and especially love that 'justice for ALL' part and give students all across America a moment of silence where they can start their day off in prayer and invite God to guide them throughout their day, but why should anyone listen to me? I'm only coming up on three decades in the classroom. People know what they know and chase every wind that blows, you know why?

Because it's so much easier to try to change the world one snarky Facebook meme at a time than it is to ban together to end child abuse once and for all. Or hunger. Or poverty. Or addiction. Or violence. Or bigotry. Or misogyny. Or racism. Or war. Or rape culture. Or inequity of access. Or inequity of opportunity. Or hatred. Or human sex trafficking. Or systemic oppression. I wish people were as united and mobilized and willing to speak out and take action against that whole list of items and let the other stuff go. But those things are hard and, if we're being honest, they're dangerous. A girl could get hurt doing that.

And so could the boys.

But this is why I go out and speak to folks about becoming Hope Givers. Some people think Hope Givers are people who show up on the Good Ship Lollypop, carrying balloons and throwing glitter, singing Doris Day songs and splattering people with witty sayings designed to inspire. I don't know who those people are. I think those people are on drugs.

Hope Givers are simply this: people who intentionally and deliberately place themselves in close proximity to the suffering of others for the sole purpose—as well as the 'soul' purpose—of pouring hope into their lives. Hope Givers don't merely point to the silver linings around the dark clouds. Instead they sit with people in their storm and get soaked to the bone right along with the one whose anguish is so horribly debilitating. True Hope Givers may not be quite right in the head for doing something so contrary to our human nature that only ever wants to gravitate toward our own comfort and avoid at all costs anything that is distressing to us, but they're very right in the heart. Because a Hope Giver understands the wisdom of St. Augustine who said,

*Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are Anger and Courage.  
Anger at the way that things are,  
and courage to see that they do not remain as they are.*

Remember that Hope Givers go out into this world with healing in one hand and a sword in the other. They have found that holy balance between mercy and justice, and they walk humbly, and they do not waste their time majoring on the minors because they've looked Agony in the eyes and cuddled right up to Despair like a close friend. When we make the decision to share in one another's suffering, we position ourselves for the opportunity to experience a resurrection, of sorts, to see the light come back in a person's eyes and feel the warmth of their souls as it spreads throughout their being and they begin to embrace Hope once more. It sucks to be a Hope Giver, but at the same time, there's nothing like it because when you open your eyes on the other side of that battle and realize that, but some miracle, you are still intact? When you breathe in the fresh air of Hope and experience those kinds of resurrections? That is when fear no longer lays claim to your life, and you are truly free.

5. **Reflect and reprioritize.** Let's rethink what we deem important and what we spend our time worrying about and form a united front to tackle more urgent needs in this world. Together we can do so much. Divided we accomplish so little.

We can all get back to what Mr. DeNiro said at the Tony Awards when every child on this planet has enough to eat because Feeding America says that 6.6 million children on this planet die of starvation every year. Almost 20% of children in America live in poverty. Almost 16% of children lived in homes that are "food insecure".

We can revisit how incredibly stupid and demon-possessed the 'other' political party is when all children on this planet have equal access to education and opportunity. The National Center for Education Statistics reveals so much about equal access to education in this country. While dropout rates are diminishing (thank God

and public school teachers—yeah, I said it) the disparity in regard to race in education still exists in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Don't even get me started about where access to a quality education for females rank in relation to males worldwide. Because that's next.

We can all get back to what the Kardashians are up to when misogyny is completely eradicated. Million Women Rise estimates that a woman born in South Africa has a greater chance of being raped than learning how to read. In Lithuania 20% to 50% of those sexually exploited through prostitution are believed to be minors. Children as young as age 11 are known to have been prostituted. Every year, 2 million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are coerced, abducted, sold or trafficked into the illegal sex market. Two million females are killed at birth simply because of their sex. One woman dies every minute from pregnancy related causes, most of which are preventable. It is estimated that one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Among women aged 15-44 years, gender-based violence accounts for more death and disability than the combined effects of cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war.

Find these links in the appendix, read these statistics, and educate yourself about real oppression that is going on in this world and then decide what social ill you want to tackle, pick up your sword, and swing away. Be a Hope Giver. The greatest change in the world that you'll see is the one that happens in your own heart. And for all those who are already out there bringing healing to those who suffer and alleviating their pain by helping them change their circumstances, thank you. Thank you.

I know I've shared some opinions in this book that you may bristle at. Well? I guess the only thing I can say is, it's my book. I mean no offense. I'm just out to make the world a better place.

You can also probably tell that I weave some religious themes throughout my writing, and I want to be clear about the fact that I am not out to make anybody my

religion which really miffs the evangelicals, but what's a girl gonna do? Frankly, my religion is pretty messed up right now in this country (which might be another unpopular opinion right there) so you do you, Boo. After all, we're all doing the best we can and walking in the light that we know.

I love what my friend Chris Kratzer always says: *Grace is brave. Be brave.* What I'm asking of people requires courage. It requires compassion. It requires doing your homework and finding out what's truly true about what people face in this world. If we eradicate child sexual abuse from the face of the planet, we will absolutely conquer so many other societal problems like addiction and crime and poverty and lack and inequality. Child sexual abuse is the Powerball of all social ills. The butterfly effect of its annihilation will ripple out magically and miraculously, restoring humanity and healing our planet.

Can you just imagine?

I will wrap this up by sharing with you a prayer that I pray every day. Feel free to join me if you're so inclined or modify it to suit your beliefs or you nonbelief. But let's be of one accord in our efforts to seek something bigger than ourselves to accomplish something that is greater than any of us can do in isolation.

Father, thank you for everything you have given me. Thank you for being a good father. Thank you for teaching me that justice is not retribution. Justice is freedom for the oppressed. Thank you for teaching me to do what is right instead of what is easy. Help me to be brave. May the gifts you have given me be all that I have in my hands to give the world.

Jesus, thank you for everything you have given me. Thank you for being closer than a brother. Thank you for teaching me what true love is and what it means to sacrifice. Thank you for your grace and for your mercy, for your forgiveness and your example that shows us how to live. May the gifts you have given me be all that I have in my hands to give the world.

Holy Spirit, thank you for walking this journey with me. Thank you for being a good mother. Thank you for your comfort and your peace, your wisdom and your healing. May the gifts you have given me be all that I have in my hands to give the world as I walk with those you love.

Today I will love justice. Today I will show mercy. Today I will walk humbly. For that is your will concerning me.

Amen.

## IF IT'S HAPPENED TO YOU

I wrote this free e-book that I offered on my blog for several years, but I thought I would include it here for those of you who are part of the #MeToo movement. You didn't ask for this. You didn't plan on having to navigate through such misery.

Perhaps you have children and you are almost paralyzed with fear that what happened to you might happen to them. I understand. That fear can be debilitating. It's so horribly painful to revisit those dark places, and you'd rather just believe that everything will be fine on its own. But deep down, you don't believe that.

But here you are, holding this crazy book in your hands, written by a crazy mom who understands exactly what you're going through because I, too, would rather chew glass than go back and face my past.

Know this: I am so phenomenally proud of how brave you're being! And I believe in you. You can do this. You can live a life that is totally unencumbered by your past. Furthermore, you can be so free of all that has haunted you for so long, that you can eventually be in the place where you can go back into that darkness and rescue others. I and many others are living proof. It takes work. It takes honesty and transparency. It takes time. But you can do it. This horrible curse can end with you and go no further.

This is what I hope for you.

All my love,

Daisy Rain



I don't know you. You probably don't know me. But I feel as if I've had my arms around you, binding up your wounds for a thousand years. To acknowledge that you've been through hell doesn't begin to cover it.

I know.

Anne Lamott said that the most powerful sermon ever preached was, "Me too." So, for what it's worth...

...me too.

This isn't a sermon. It's not therapy. It's not a miracle cure. It's simple friendship.

Compassion.

Camaraderie.

Hope.



Hope is something I now have in an endless, perpetual supply in spite of the fact that I literally had no hope of ever becoming what I was meant to be, no hope of ever truly being whole, and no hope of simply living my life in health and peace and happiness. My mother's husband molested me from the time I was a toddler until I moved out at age 19. Yes, 19. My mother knew.

*She participated.*

It was a secret I was so ashamed of that I was prepared to keep it inside me forever – not only because I was petrified of my abuser, but also because revealing the most dehumanizing moments of my entire existence with anyone else was *unthinkable*.

My whole existence was fear. Fear that my secret would be discovered. Fear of my step-monster's retribution if I ever told anyone. Fear that I really was just...

*...nothing.*

People who haven't been through what we have can't wrap their heads around this. Even so, they still care, and they want to help. Lots of people are concerned about this issue, and there is a ton of support out there. I care, and I want to encourage you and give you hope. You are the reason I'm writing this.

***You.***

### **Numbers to Ponder and What it Means to You, Me, and the Rest of Us**

*Darkness to Light* is an extraordinary organization that works very hard to educate good people who want to help but just don't know what to do. There are heroes out there who are trying to change these numbers. Here are some statistics from their website: [www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org).

~One in four girls and one in six boys are the number of kids who are molested before they turn 18.

*Sometimes I count off the kids in my classroom and wonder...*

~The greatest risk to children does not come from strangers but from friends and family.

~30% - 40% of children are abused by family members.

*Sometimes I sit in an auditorium or a gym with families and friends of my students who are singing in a choir or playing in the band or orchestra or competing in a sporting event and wonder...*

Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to places where they can gain easy access to children: sports leagues, clubs, faith centers, and schools.

~In more than 90% of sexual abuse cases, the child and the child's family know *and trust* the abuser.

~70% - 80% of sexual abuse survivors report excessive drug and alcohol abuse.

*Because even after years and years, it still hurts like hell.*

Sometimes the pain and shame is so crushing that the pain surfaces in other ways: suicidal tendencies, anxiety and depression, eating disorders, addictions, promiscuity and prostitution.

*Darkness to Light* tells us that family structure is the most important risk factor in child sexual abuse. The breakdown according to d2l:

~Children who live with two married biological parents are at low risk for abuse.

~The risk increases when children live with step-parents or a single parent.

~Children living without either parent (foster children) are 10 times more likely to be sexually abused.

~Children who live with a single parent that has a live-in partner are at the highest risk: 20 times more likely to be victims of abuse.

~70% of those who molest children have between 1 and 9 victims.

~20% - 25% of people who molest children have between 10 and 40 victims.

~Serial molesters have upwards of 400 victims in a lifetime.

These are horrifying numbers, I know. But I hope this information helps you realize that what happened to us is an evil driven by forces outside of and much larger than ourselves. In no way are we to blame. We didn't trigger anything sinister in someone else. We were caught up in a web we did not create.

If you wouldn't blame or shame a child for engaging in sexual behavior with an adult, then you cannot blame or shame yourself. That wouldn't make sense.

Here's what makes sense: *you are innocent.*

## **The Chosen Ones**

Pedophiles reject kids all the time. Obviously, they don't want to be discovered for the evil that they really are. If a predator thinks a kid will tell...

*...he or she will pass on that kid.*

A certain daycare is not too far from where I live, and a former employee, a man in his early twenties, is serving time as we speak for molesting several of the children entrusted to his care. I know of two boys who came out of that daycare.

When the news broke, one of the boys' mothers – with her heart in her throat – began talking with her son about what happened with his teacher who had played in “interview” game with the kids in groups to select the ones he thought would be the most silent and compliant targets. They were then chosen to play *other* games with him by themselves.

Without asking leading questions, this mother very calmly and expertly navigated her way through a conversation with her five-year-old and extracted the information she needed. When talking about his teacher and his games, the boy folded his arms across his chest and dropped his head down. With tears in his eyes, he said dejectedly, “He never chose *me* to play Angry Birds...”

*He never chose me.*

That boy was not chosen. He may have just been lucky. Or maybe there was something about him that made him “ineligible” in the mind of the monster.

I know another little boy from the very same daycare who was not so lucky. He is on the autism spectrum and was non-verbal until he went to school. He had also been removed from his birth mother and placed in foster care. A very low risk for blowing the whistle and, therefore, a candidate in the mind of the monster.

*Eligible.*

This is the evil that people have a hard time wrapping their heads around. This is the evil that, at some point, chose us. We were selected. We were groomed. And we were violated.

But we are not without choices of our own. We are not powerless. If you feel powerless, it is a deception – one that perpetuates your own victimization. If you feel as if you are trapped in a cage, believe me when I tell you, the key to your release is in your own hands. Actually, it's in your own mouth.

*You must speak up.*

If an egg is broken from the outside, you have a mess. But if that egg is broken from the inside, you have a life that breaks free. Break through that shell of silence before what's happening to you breaks *you* and your life turns out to be a scrambled mess.

You are not chattel. You are not property. You are a reflection of Almighty God. That may or may not be a measure of comfort to you right now, especially if you don't believe in God – or it may not be comforting to you if you *do* believe in God but God is at the very center of your angst because of all you've endured. I understand completely.

We'll get to that.

If this is the case, let me restate: You are not chattel. You are not property. You are a reflection of all this is beautiful and pure in this world. You are entitled to happiness. You deserve good things.

If you are reading this and are currently being molested, my first choice for you would be that you get to a safe place and call the police immediately. Why? Because once you make that call, you can't unring that bell. It's no longer in your hands. Professionals need to take over at that point because you are the least qualified to navigate your way out of this situation. You need to be rescued. Today. Right this second.

Another choice would be Child Protective Services. Other good choices are school counselors or trusted and capable teachers. In fact, tell any combination thereof.

You need to tell someone who is in a position to rescue you – not just “help” you. This disqualifies your best friend (especially if you're both minors – sorry, but it's true), although you should seek comfort where it may be found. Comfort and rescue are two different things, and you need both. Right now.

Let your friends comfort you, but let the professionals rescue you. These are adults who know what they're doing. Furthermore, the adults in charge of your rescue

should also be able to offer some counseling, which you need. I needed it. I did it. It was extremely helpful.

If the authorities don't offer some sort of counseling option for you, speak up *again*, advocate for yourself, and ask someone. Keep asking until you get what you need.

I know I will get emails and Facebook messages that tell me all kinds of horror stories about how the police or CPS or schools have dropped the ball and adequate help was not given. This is not the norm, but if this does happen, *you need to keep telling people* until you find the right people who will do what needs to be done.

I remember speaking at Trinity Life Center in Las Vegas and signing books afterward and talking to people. A woman walked up to me and said with tears in her eyes, "I've never told anyone this – I've never said these words: I was molested by my grandfather when I was a little girl. I never told my family. I never told my husband who is dead now or my children. I've never told a soul." She was 70 years old if she was a day.

Could you please *not* be that person?

Now, maybe you were molested and never felt the need to tell anyone. You're happily well adjusted, living in health and peace, and completely unscathed – no wounds, no pain, no scars.

God bless you. You don't have to read anymore.

But if you're reading this and are still haunted by your past, may I encourage you to open up to someone? And might I gently suggest a professional who is trained in the area of sexual trauma? Counseling is amazing. Get you some.

If you can't afford it, I know an organization: [www.speakyoursilence.org](http://www.speakyoursilence.org), which offers an application for free counseling across the United States. If you are selected, you may receive 10 one-on-one counseling sessions. If that doesn't pan out or you can't afford it, get online or go to a forward-thinking church who is mindful about community service and social justice issues and offers a tried and true program for victims of child sexual abuse run by people who are sexual trauma specialists.

If what you're doing now isn't helping, *do something else*. Get some purchase on this journey to get your feet underneath you and find your groove. Don't give up on yourself.

Remember, I'm not just speaking to women here. I spoke to a woman recently who told me that since she was molested as a child, she was uber-vigilant over her daughters. It turned out that her sons were the ones being molested by a neighbor up the street. In the courtroom where Jerry Sandusky was tried for his crimes against children, grown men sat and sobbed when the guilty verdict was read. Grown men who had been brutally assaulted years previously were still mentally and emotionally and probably spiritually dealing with the horror of what happened to them.

Oprah once hosted an audience of 200 men who held their school pictures from the grade they were in when their own sexual abuse began. She interviewed Tyler Perry who shared the story of his own personal hell.

Our precious boys and young men are every bit as vulnerable as our daughters, nieces, granddaughters, goddaughters, and sisters to the sick appetites of those who would

prey upon them. If this horror has happened to you, sir, read on, speak your silence, and be free.

### **Buckle Up – This is Probably Going to Suck**

So. You called the police. CPS. Told your school counselor or teacher. The authorities have been notified, and the ball is rolling for your rescue. You're waiting now for your family to rally around you, pour accolades upon you for your bravery, support you wholeheartedly, take a stand against your abuser, and defend you with their very lives, immersing you in their undying love.

If you are one of the 30% - 40% who have been abused by a family member or even one of the 60% who was molested by a trusted friend of the family, you might be waiting a while.

Best case scenario: Your family immediately believes you and generously gives you all the support and love you need. They're ready to walk the journey of healing with you and do whatever it takes to keep you safe from here on out. I can't write too much about this because it wasn't my story.

More likely? Shock and disbelief will be what you are met with, and it will feel like the worst kind of betrayal.

I know this is a lot to suggest, but don't go screaming from the room yet. Keep your head about you and try to understand. This is a very barbed and jagged pill to swallow. Therefore, the shock and disbelief may be the initial response simply because the words coming out of your mouth are so unthinkable.

Not to mention the fact that your abuser will be vehemently denying all of it, throwing your entire family into a tailspin of confusion. You are up against his or her primal sense of self-preservation.

Buckle up.

You are the one who is about to be accused of all kinds of outrageous behavior in his or her effort to deflect the blame. Your family won't know which end is up.

It's not necessarily that they want to DIS-believe you. They just don't know how to believe that another family member or trusted friend is capable of such horror. Some family members will believe that you are lying simply because lying is something they can wrap their heads around – sexually violating a child is harder to accept.

There may also be people who are just closer and more loyal to your perpetrator. I have family members where this is the case. They don't believe me simply because they have a closer relationship with my abuser.

And let's face it – *he's slick*.

Pedophiles have perfected their facades. They navigate through their webs of deceit with unbelievable precision. They've likely been getting away with their behavior for years and have everybody snowed because they are expert manipulators.

You and I are not.

I have to live with the fact that certain members of my family will never believe me, nor will they support me. You may have to live with that too.

Not fun.

But the faster you come to grips with it, I think, the better off you will be.

There are 7 billion people on this planet. Move on. Find people who support you.

Worst case scenario: People in your family already know about the abuse and have *never* done anything to help you. When you bring it up, they try to shut you down as if *you're* the one stirring up all the trouble. It's as if they think that what's ripping up the family is not that you were molested, but that *you told*, and you are blamed for the demise of the family.

You may even face retaliation.

My own mother, who can't take the next co-dependent breath without her husband who molested all of her children, would LOVE for me to shut the hell up.

Well, that's not going to happen.

Buckle up right now for any number of things to happen.

You might be removed from your home and placed in foster care or with another family member. In fact, this is very likely if all goes as it's supposed to. If you do end up with family members, they are not allowed to try to pressure you to recant in any way. They cannot harass or threaten you, beg you, guilt you, bribe you... none of that. If this occurs, you must tell a victim's advocate right away. Hopefully, you have been assigned one.

After telling a police officer what happened, he or she will file a police report. You may have to see a medical doctor. You might have to give your statement to a district attorney and testify in front of a judge. These are not easy circumstances. Just take each step as it comes and lean on those around you who offer support.

Any one of these people should be able to provide resources, such as a counselor and a victim's advocate who is there to protect you from further harm or harassment. If you've not been assigned one, again, you must speak up and request one.

However your story unfolds, what I'm trying to say is, it will very likely get really crazy and hard before it gets better. You should know that. But none of what happens as a result of you reaching out for help is your fault. It's the fault of the man or woman who hurt you. Keep that in the forefront of your mind. You did what you had to do, and you were absolutely right to tell.

### **This is Not a Death Sentence – Don't Make it One**

I went to the sentencing of a man who molested many, many children over the years at his wife's home daycare. Before the judge nailed him to the wall for his crimes, mothers of his latest victims addressed the court to tell what affect this man had on their children and their families.

In a word, they were *despairing*.

These mother sobbed and could hardly get the words out. I sat behind them on my bench, listening and crying with them: for the violation that had taken their children's innocence as well as for the hopelessness they were drowning in. I wanted to scoop them into my arms and tell them, "This is not a death sentence! Don't *make* it a death sentence for your children! There is hope! You can get through this!"

As each mother broke down at the prosecutor's table, another person was sitting behind me *wailing*. It was the defendant's wife – the one who ran the daycare and served up these innocent babies to the sick and twisted appetites of her husband who was now sitting in an orange jumpsuit with shackles around his ankles.

*I wanted to hit her.*

She cried through every testimony – not for the children, but for her husband who was about to spend the rest of his life behind bars. After the mothers testified, the judge rendered his sentence and was literally screaming at the defendant from his bench:

"You are a sick and evil man! You are a sociopath! You are hereby sentenced to life in prison – you will *never* see the light of day! You will *die* in your prison cell!"

*I wanted to kiss him.*

I felt extremely validated that day. My perpetrator has never faced charges, and he never will. In fact, do you know what he does for a living? He's a cop. He also leads worship Sunday mornings for his church last time I checked.

Regardless, everything that is right and lawful is on your side. There have been people who fall through the cracks, but no good person with any sort of integrity has any tolerance for child abuse in any form. And many people are working hard to make life better for people like us.

Don't let what happened to you be a death sentence. Don't let it define who you are. It's probably a pretty good guess on my part that you might need to be renewed as a person by completely transforming your mind and the way you think about yourself deep down.

It's not easy to remember you are precious and you are cherished and you are worthy when you've been treated your whole life like you are not. When someone thinks so little of you that they are willing to satisfy themselves at your expense – to your profound detriment – and you must endure that treatment for long periods of time, it messes with your head. You do begin to believe that what happened to you is your fault. You may start to believe that you are expendable.

Replaceable.

Worthless.

Ashamed.

Furthermore, since you know how to operate in relationships as the one who just "takes it", you may seek out people who end up treating you badly or not cherish you like you need to be because you don't know who you are in a relationship that is healthy or how you're supposed to be. After all, what does *that* look like? You know how to behave and survive in relationships that aren't healthy, so that's what you do.

And there's your death sentence: perpetuation of abuse.

Believe me when I tell you: *There is a cure for shame, for humiliation, for despair.*

One solution is to stay single until you've had enough healing. This means you will have to muster up enough confidence to be self-reliant. Make your own money. Live on your own. BE alone. Figure that out. Get on your feet by yourself and stay on your feet. The minute your strategy for life becomes depending on another for your survival or sustenance, you are in trouble.

This is why I tell my middle school students to take advantage of the education they are given.

*Read. Study. Work. Try. Try hard.*

*Try HARDER!*

Don't stop until you get it right. Don't give up. Be relentless in your pursuit of becoming self-sustaining. It is key. Be smart with your money.

Choose *health*.

Avoid addictions and vices. Get help with that if you need it. But remember, being self-reliant doesn't mean being *isolated*. You do need people, but you need the *right* people. A counselor can help you find those people. A counselor can help you set strong boundaries and even cut ties with the people who have not earned or have lost the right to be a part of your life. Don't be afraid to say goodbye.

Start new. Start fresh. And do it often!

### **Have at Least One Good Come-Apart**

You might have to do something about all that pain inside you. It doesn't just go away. I tried for years to push it down as far as I could and ignore it, but we all know that doesn't work in the end. You might have something that triggers your anger (like I did) and all of that rage just comes pouring out, and you can't even control it.

This can have some consequences.

I'm all for purging the rage because when it's inside, you're the one who suffers the most. I just don't want anyone getting hurt in the process... especially *you*.

I was lucky. Somebody tripped my trigger, yet I was still able to avoid hurting myself, hurting my well-meaning friend, or burning down the entire neighborhood. Much of my rage was pointed toward God. (I promise not to get preachy here.) The way I figured, either God was too weak to rescue me or too cruel, and I didn't have a heck of a lot of patience for either one.

I think my atheist friends are surprised when they ask me, "How can a loving God allow such atrocities to exist on earth?" and I reply, "Yeah, let's chew on *that* for a while."

Because I get it. I do. I wrote a whole book about it, I assure you.

So when that well-meaning friend suggested in my darkest moments that we need to *just pray* about it, something snapped in me, and I raged like a tempest, triple-dipped in psycho. I broke out in a wall-eyed fit of Biblical proportions, screaming, crying, and



dropping the f-bomb a gazillion times, accusing God of cruelty and neglect, shaking my fists at the ceiling until I wore myself out in complete exhaustion.

Best.

Tantrum.

EVER!

I don't know what this would look like for you, but I want you to do this safely. Maybe some hospital would let you borrow a padded room?

*Unlikely.*

Maybe you could take some inanimate object that symbolizes your abuser out to the back yard with a metal baseball bat and beat the crap out of it?

*Closer?*

Whatever it is, it's not wrong to rage against what happened to you. It was *wrong*! You have every right to be angry. You just can't *stay* angry – it's too heavy to carry around your whole life, and your spirit was not built for that. You have to let it go at some point. So, get it out. Safely.

This brings me to the whole forgiveness issue. You may be anywhere on that spectrum. It's a process. You can relinquish a little bit at a time. I'm not sure you can just tell yourself that you've forgiven and call it a day. I'm a little suspicious of people who do that and seem to skip the *path* of forgiveness. But the bottom line is, unforgiveness and bitterness are like anger – our spirits are not built for it.

You never have to say that what happened to you was okay. It's not okay, and it will never be okay. But you can eventually come to the place where you release that person from your anger. You can eventually come to the place where you've stopped believing that the past could have ever been different for you.

And when you do move along that process of forgiveness, that doesn't mean you have to continue to have a relationship with that person.

People believe that forgiveness and reconciliation are one in the same. They are not. You can eventually and completely forgive your abuser and be reconciled to *peace* about what happened to you within your own heart. You don't have to subject yourself (or your children!) to his or her presence. You never have to embrace that kind of evil.

And what if your abuser miraculously changes? Fantastic. You *still* don't have to place yourself in his or her proximity.

*Ever.*

You can walk in health and in tranquility and in joy with good people who love you, and you can freely love those precious souls with complete abandon.

*It's glorious.*

## The Whole “God” Thing

I would venture to say you have some “God” issues. I would encourage you to hack those out if you still do, in fact, believe in God. If not, you can skip this part – no harm, no foul. But if you just can’t help but believe in a higher power, I’m sure you have questions for God.

It’s hard to believe that God is loving when you’ve been through what we have. It’s hard to believe that God knows you and has always known you and is working on your behalf, working for your good. It’s understandable to demand, “Then where *were* you?” Or better yet, “Where *are* you?”

*Because the world is still cruel.*

I’m not going to insert every lame, tired answer here. You’ve heard them all: we live in a broken world, you just have to have faith to believe, mankind has free will... blah, blah, blah. It’s not that I don’t believe those things, but it just doesn’t help to throw them out and think they’ll do any good. People are well-meaning, but they just don’t get it, do they? Here’s what I will say:

*Call God out. See what happens. Wrestle with God. Throw it down.*

See.

What.

Happens.

I have no idea what your journey will look like. I have no clue what answers God will give you. I know what God has given me, but your path will invariably be different. Be open. Keep walking. Ask for help. Try to recognize it when it comes.

*I am praying you’ll be all right.*

*I am praying you’ll conquer your demons.*

*I am praying you’ll be a light in this world.*

And if you choose not to believe in God or not to journey with God... we can still be friends.

## WITH GRATITUDE

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It is with great humility that I share some well-deserved recognition with those who have helped to make this book possible. People mistakenly believe that I am an expert on this issue, and even though there are definitely things I've figured out along my journey, I am merely resourceful and have been lucky enough to find some really smart friends who have joined me in my effort to eradicate child sexual abuse from the face of the planet.

First and foremost, I must give a standing ovation to Jeannie Strohmeyer and Criselda Valdez and all of those who work for the Family Justice Center for providing the training that accounts for a great portion of this book. The work you do for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault changes the entire trajectory of people's lives. It is truly God's work, and I am honored to walk alongside you. Thank you for introducing me to some of the world's bravest Hope Givers who are nothing short of heroes for me and so many others. Thank you, Detective Rob Fowler and all those who work for the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force for rising above the evil to which you are in such close and constant proximity. You are the most courageous among us. Thank you, Prosecutor Erika Kallin. Hope Givers come with healing in one hand and a sword in the other. Your tenacity, your ferocity, and your general badassery have liberated those who need us most. Thank you for swinging that sword. Thank you, Tamara and Anthony Pittz, not only for how you have protected children personally, but for equipping those in the community who are willing to join this effort to do the same. You are the Dynamic Duo and are greater than the sum of your parts. You are saving lives every day. And thank you, Christina Walker for all the work you do with the Guardian ad Litem Program. Truly, you are in

the trenches of this war every day. The courage and dedication it requires to rescue children is phenomenal. I am in awe of you.

Additionally:

To those who have stood solidly and unwaveringly for victims of sexual abuse; to those who have helped victims find their voices and tell the truth about what happened to them; to those who have worked tirelessly to gather irrefutable evidence; to those who have not backed down in the face of hostility and threat; to those who have become the scourge of their communities, their families, and people they thought were their friends for defending victims of child sexual abuse; to those who have enough faith to believe that your reward is in Heaven because it sure as hell hasn't been here on this earth, I am humbled by your commitment to the truth and to the victims who have found sanctuary with you. You make me want to be more brave.

To Detective Corporal J.L. Davis and his wife Sarah who make the world a better place just by being in it. Thank you for sending me every single one of your beautiful children. I cherish them and will always keep them safe.

To Janelle Stauffer who spreads hope simply by being awake. You have helped awaken many a suffering soul and helped them find their way. You are one of my most cherished Hope Givers. Thank you for being my friend.

To Robert and Malia Frazier and Rebecca Minnette for being so persistent in your commitment to provide sanctuary for children. It has been nothing short of inspiring to walk alongside you.

To Jessie Horney for Marco Polo-ing me my marching orders for what has turned out to be a great labor of love. I love you. Thank you for being such a good mama, such a good writer, and such a good friend.

To those who prayed for me when I got bogged down in the darkness from writing about such horrible things: Holly Chamberlain, Rod Querry, Jessie Horney, Rebecca Minnette, Jim and Dori Halbert, Robert and Malia Frazier, Devin and Deidre Farless, and James and Donna Wallace. Thank you for holding the rope.

For Dr. Donna K. Wallace without whom I would never have been published and who has poured her whole heart into so many including myself. I bring people to you to be healed because you are magic and because you are the very embodiment of love and compassion. Can't wait until my next glass of Riesling with you. And for James Wallace who has spent his years protecting children and preparing them to be Hope Givers in this world. Once a king in Narnia, always a kind in Narnia.

For Jeremy Soldevilla, who made publishing dreams come true for many people, myself included, I will always be so grateful and I will never write a book without your name in it. Godspeed, brother.

For Geoff and Janesse and Baby C. We will always be home for you. You fill our lives to overflowing and are doing such a fabulous job of adulting! Your Fa and I are so, so proud of you.

And finally for my Sean-Martin who continually worries about me while I worry about the world. What a long, strange trip it's been, yes? You've wrapped the world in silver foil...

## APPENDIX

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### INTERVIEWS

THESE INTERVIEWS CAN BE FOUND ON MY WEBSITE:

[www.daisyrainmartin.com/blog](http://www.daisyrainmartin.com/blog)

Janelle Stauffer – Licensed Clinical Social Worker & Therapist  
Specializing in Trauma and Attachment Disorders

Officer J.L. Davis – Detective Corporeal with the Caldwell Police  
Department

Subscribe to Daisy's SATURDAISIES blog and keep checking back as  
more interviews come available in the future.

## RESOURCES & STUDIES

CDC: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse within Youth-Serving Organizations—Getting Started on Policies and Procedures

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/PreventingChildSexualAbuse-a.pdf>

National Child Advocacy Center

<https://cacjctx.org/>

Darkness to Light

<https://www.d2l.org/>

One with Courage

<https://www.onewithcourage.org/>

National Children's Alliance

<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/>

National Sex Offender Public Website

<https://www.nsopw.gov/>

National Child Abuse Hotline

<https://www.childhelp.org/hotline/sponsor-hotline/>

Common Sense Media

<https://www.common Sense Media.org/>

Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center

<http://www.gundersenhealth.org/ncptc/>

Victor Vieth: *Unto the Third Generation—A Call to End Child Abuse in the United States in 120 Years*

[https://www.ndaa.org/pdf/unto\\_third\\_generation.pdf](https://www.ndaa.org/pdf/unto_third_generation.pdf)

The Guardian ad Litem Program

<http://www.nampa.com/list/member/third-district-guardian-ad-litem-8474>

Idaho Children's Trust Fund

<http://www.idahochildrenstrustfund.org>

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>

UC Davis: Facts about Homosexuality and Child Molestation

[https://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts\\_molestation.html](https://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_molestation.html)

The Abel and Harlow Children Molestation Prevention Study

<https://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pdfs/study.pdf>

Christianity Today: Sex Offenders—Coming to a Church Near You

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2010/fall/sexoffenders.html>

Christianity Today: My Larry Nassar Testimony Went Viral. But There's More to the Gospel Than Forgiveness.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/january-web-only/rachael-denholander-larry-nassar-forgiveness-gospel.html>



#### D. Finkelhor's Study: Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles

[http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV26\\_Revised%20Characteristics%20of%20Crimes%20against%20Juveniles\\_5-2-12.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV26_Revised%20Characteristics%20of%20Crimes%20against%20Juveniles_5-2-12.pdf)

Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute  
[Therapists in the US and Canada for youths who have sexually abused other children]

<http://www.cmrpi.org/pages/diagnosis.html>

Pew Research on Social Media

<http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/social-media/>

How Google Tracks You: Surveillance Capitalism Google Tracking:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWPNB-tmjD8>

10 Best Apps for Paranoid Parents

<https://www.parents.com/parenting/technology/best-apps-for-paranoid-parents/>

Safety Beyond Facebook: 12 Social Media Apps Every Parent Should Know About

<https://www.familyeducation.com/fun/mobile-apps/safety-beyond-facebook-12-social-media-apps-every-parent-should-know-about>

Teens and Social Media: 10 Scary Apps

<https://projecteve.com/teens-and-social-media-10-scary-apps/>

10 Hidden Snapchat Map Features

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YELRNbGvj8g>

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

<http://www.missingkids.com/education>

Hinduja & Patchin (2016) Sexting among Middle and High School Students

<https://cyberbullying.org/2016-cyberbullying-data>

Coby Persin: The Dangers of Social Media—Child Predator Experiment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jMhMVEjEQg>

Coby Persin: The Dangers of Snapchat—Child Predator Experiment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fg-LhgZLB8M>

Coby Persin: The Dangers of Social Media—Child Predator Experiment, Boy Edition!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4sHoDW8QU4>

(Parental Monitoring) mSpy Software:

<https://www.mspy.com/>

Sextortion Public Service Announcement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et5jMaNxnOY>

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States: *National Data Shows Comprehensive Sex Education Better at Reducing Teen Pregnancy than Abstinence-Only Programs*

<http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&featureID=1041>

Advocates for Youth [Sex Education in Schools]

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/component/content/article/450-effective-sex-education>

The States with the Highest Pregnancy Rates Have One Thing in Common

<https://mic.com/articles/98886/the-states-with-the-highest-teenage-birth-rates-have-one-thing-in-common#.LfvwKkeL9>

American Adolescents' Sources of Sexual Health Information

<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/facts-american-teens-sources-information-about-sex>

Erin's Law: Mandated Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs in Every State

<http://www.erinslaw.org/>

Feeding America Stats

[www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

National Center for Education Statistics

<http://www.nces.ed.gov>

Million Women Rise

<http://www.millionwomenrise.com/about-male-violence.html>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Daisy Rain Martin has been writing and advocating for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault more than twenty years. She lives in the Mountain West with her husband and enjoys spending time with her son Geoff and daughter-in-law Janesse.

In the summer months, when Daisy is not writing or speaking, you can usually find her in the garden growing the food she intends to can.

Daisy's other works include her comedic, spiritual memoir, *Juxtaposed: Finding Sanctuary on the Outside* and her second book, *Hope Givers: Hope is Here* which also includes a copy of her free e-book called, *If It's Happened to You*.

The book you hold in your hands is Daisy's final book in this advocacy series as Daisy pursues a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at Hamline University. She has decided to turn her attention toward writing Middle Grade and Young Adult Fiction and speak directly to kids through novels about advocating for themselves and being safe.