

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ADULT GROUP

What About Sex Abuse?

Discussion Leader Preparation Information

Thank you for being a discussion leader for the important topic of “Sex Abuse.” The discussion guide has been created to be used with a group of adult participants. You don’t have to be an expert in sex abuse matters to be the discussion leader for this topic. What you do need is a willingness to help a group of adults talk about a difficult topic—difficult for people in general and difficult for the church.

The first component of this guide includes discussion guidelines and information which will be helpful for you to have before you meet the group of adults for the first time. The preparation material may raise some questions for you and we encourage you to seek enough answers to feel comfortable beginning the discussion. REMEMBER: **You will be the discussion leader and you don’t have to be an expert in sex abuse matters in order to lead this discussion.**

A caution Having just said that you don’t have to be an expert in sex abuse to lead a discussion, let’s acknowledge one possible difficult situation and suggest a solution if it arises: ***In any group of ten or more people, there is likely at least one person who has been victimized sexually—as a child, as a spouse, as a victim of date rape, or in one of the many ways children and adults are victimized by sex abuse.*** A second kind of victim who could be in your group is an “indirect victim”—the spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling, or friend of a person who has been directly victimized. A discussion of sex abuse sometimes triggers reactions from victims. As discussion leader, you don’t have to be the expert who helps a person with their experiences of sex abuse; however, as leader, you would do well to know in advance the telephone numbers of local crisis lines or referral sources where victims of sex abuse can find help. You don’t have to be the expert—you can be a caring friend.

- A. Talk to your minister about being ready to take a referral if someone in the group is upset.
- B. Have the phone number ready for your local or area sexual assault center: Phone-- _____

A reward: Most people will thank you for leading a discussion on the topic of sex abuse. It is like the elephant in the living room that no one talks about but is impossible to ignore. Many people will be interested in the topic as it affects children, grandchildren, friends, and themselves. And finally, the church will appreciate the discussion you are going to lead—sex abuse exists in the church and ***having this discussion about sex abuse***

will help you and others feel good about sexual safety of children, youth, and adults in your church.

Sex Abuse Overview

It is almost impossible to read a newspaper, watch a TV news cast, tune in to a TV talk show, or see a movie or TV show without being confronted with reports of sex abuse in one of its many forms. The topic of sex abuse seems to be a constant in our lives--whether it is about the Catholic Church, Scouts, a youth organization, a trusted school teacher, an abusive parent, a controlling spouse, a Protestant minister, or a stranger in the neighborhood.

Sex abuse comes in many forms. The victims are children, youth, and adults. The perpetrators are boys and girls, men and women, family members, trusted friends and adults, strangers, and anonymous electronic sources. This discussion guide is designed to assist in looking at sex abuse from the point of view of a community of faith. **The end goal is to have children, youth, and adults (a) be aware of abuse risks, and (b) be able to resist abuse.**

Objectives/Goals of the Discussion Time:

1. Participants will describe their understanding of various forms of sex abuse;
2. Participants will learn about frequency of sex abuse incidents in their own state and/or locale;
3. Participants will learn about local resources for response to sex abuse;

4. Participants will have an opportunity to raise questions about sex abuse issues; and
5. Participants will learn about sex abuse indicators and potential responses.

The first three goals or objectives could be covered in a single session for a discussion group. Goals four and five could be covered if there is more than a single session. The probability is high that a group of adults who begin this discussion in a single session will find they aren't through with the topic in one meeting and will want to continue. If, as discussion leader, you have some control over the number of sessions devoted to this topic, we would encourage you to try and schedule two or three, at least. Or, you might be able to arrange the discussion for an extended period of time—perhaps your church has afternoon or evening discussion times which can be longer than the usual hurried 35 or 40 minutes of class time on a Sunday morning.

Two leader outlines will be provided—one for a single session and one for a multiple-session discussion.

Good wishes to you. And thank you for what you are doing for your congregation in particular and for the church in general.

NOTES:

1. The most powerful words you can give a victim of sex abuse are, ***“It is not your fault.”*** Children are not physically able nor are they mentally or emotionally able to refuse the advances of an adult abuser. Adults can be manipulated into becoming victims of sex abuse by clever and very socially skillful persons. Children often don’t report abuse and when adults discover they have been victimized (e.g., the “innocent affair” wasn’t so innocent; or, they discover additional deception or other victims), there usually is a huge amount of self guilt and shame which prevents them from reporting the abuse. For both children and adults, the response words are, “It’s not your fault.”
2. The expression “sex abuse” is used in this outline instead of “sexual abuse.” Many experts would say there is nothing “sexual” about rape, pedophilia, or incest—those are abuses of power. It just happens that the power abuse is tied to sex. Persons reserve the word “sexual” for the positive concepts in life.
3. Although the majority of perpetrators are male and victims female, abusers are both male and female and victims both male and female; therefore, when you think of sex abuse, consider male-female, female-female, female-male, and male-male (abuser-victim) situations.
4. When asked, “Why do people victimize?” The answer is, “Because they can.” Perpetrators are often highly effective and socially skilled individuals who very cleverly cultivate and groom their victims. Most sex abuse comes from trusted persons rather than from unknown strangers; therefore, “stranger-danger” lessons for children don’t go far enough. It is better to have children receive “good touch—bad touch” lessons and to develop ways they can report uncomfortable experiences to a trusted person (even if the source of discomfort comes from a family member).
5. Shame is a very powerful controller which prevents many cases of sex abuse from being reported. Victims who finally come forward, some times years after the event, need good counseling resources to help them work through the years of shame they have carried. Even small children can believe they were somehow responsible for what happened to them.
6. Every child should have the opportunity to have a discussion with a trusted adult about “safe touch.” Parents and grandparents can do this with a simple illustration—“No one should touch your private parts—the parts your swim suit (or underwear) covers.” Parents and grandparents and teachers can use a variation of this concept for instruction.
7. Every child should have someone they know to whom they can go to tell that they have been touched. Parents, grandparents, and teachers can initiate this conversation with questions such as, “If someone touched you or your private parts [use the names common in your home], who would you tell about that? Would you tell even if the person said not to tell?”
8. In the case of clergy sexual misconduct, experts in the field of sex abuse do not use the term “affair” if clergy relationships are outside of marriage. The point is that clergy and congregants are not in an equal power relationship; therefore, clergy who have sex outside of marriage with members of the congregation are described as “abusers” and the relationship is not described as an “affair” (which assumes a consenting relationship between adults of equal status).
9. Victims of sex abuse frequently show signs of withdrawal, isolation, unexplained fear of certain places, changes in friends or associates; and children and youth will show changes in grades and mood. These are changes similar to those early signs of substance abuse. Instead of asking, “What’s wrong?” ask, “What’s going on?” or “Who can you talk with?” Share your observations and your concerns: “I’ve noticed you’re not smiling much lately and wonder what is happening with you?”
10. The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has established a procedure for handling charges of sex abuse by clergy. Clergy sexual misconduct is a “chargeable offense” [in the language of the *Discipline*—viz. ¶ 161(h); ¶2702]. When clergy offend, the victim, a member, or

another clergy person should report that offense to the District Superintendent who will initiate a process of investigation of the offense. The church does not quietly “transfer” the clergy person to another church. In the years 2008-2009, every clergy person in Oregon and Idaho attended a day-long workshop focused on issues of “boundaries”—including appropriate and inappropriate sexual boundaries and discussion of consequences of crossing those boundaries. The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference policy on sexual ethics can be found in the conference *Journal*. It is also on the conference web site at <http://www.umo.org> .

11. *Safe Sanctuaries* is the title of a comprehensive set of policies and procedures which has been adopted by the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference and subsequently by over 60% of the churches in the Annual Conference. The document is available on the conference web site and includes sample procedures for screening church workers, raising awareness, developing safe facilities, processing complaints, and supervision practices. The goal of *Safe Sanctuaries* is to assure that every child, youth, and adult is safe.

Resources for Study

The following resources are all available on the web. The list could be distributed to discussion participants for their own research. If you have more than one discussion session, different people may want to report on what they find in surfing the web using one or more of the suggested links. A caution: It is possible that if you begin a web search Googling terms such as “sex abuse,” “child abuse,” “pedophilia,” “date rape,” “affairs with clergy,” or any of the many search terms you might use, that you will discover some web sites which you would rather not have popping up on your computer screen—another discussion topic!

Abuse Prevention: <http://www.umoi.org> is the web site for the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference. If you click on the “For Local Churches” link, you’ll find a drop-down menu that includes “Abuse Resources” with information about Safe Sanctuaries and more.

Phone hotlines: <http://www.boystown.org/national-hotline> (1-800-448-3000) is a web site and phone number operating 24/7 for crisis calls.

Domestic violence: <http://new.abanet.org/domesticviolence/Pages/Statistics.aspx#prevalence> is a web site from the American Bar Association which reports studies indicating rates of spouse abuse, stalking related to current or former partners. [25% of women and 7.6% of men have been raped or assaulted by a current or former spouse or partner sometime in their lifetime.] Statistics for Idaho can be found at <http://www.isp.idaho.gov/>. www.ndvh.org is a web site about domestic violence. You can search this site by state to get information on organizations and response groups.

Sex abuse: <http://kidscenter.org/Statistics.htm?m=2&s=335> is a web site providing statistics on rates of sex abuse for the nation and for Oregon. <http://idahochildrenstrustfund.state.id.us/prevention.asp> is a web site providing statistics and prevention information for Idaho. <http://www.accessidaho.org/> is an Idaho state web site—enter your question of interest in the “search” box—e.g., “sex abuse statistics”—and you will find a lot of statistical information and official reports.

General Board of Church and Society: www.umc-gbcs.org takes you to a U. M. web site which has regular articles about sex and sexuality. Search for “Sex and the Church” by Linda Bales Todd.

The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church: search the index for words like “sex abuse,” “pornography,” “teens and sexuality,” “clergy sexual misconduct,” etc.

Abuse Awareness Month: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/> is a government web site with an enormous amount of information on child abuse. It includes suggestions and strategies for parents, teachers, and others. There are activities for children and information for adults.

Crime Statistics: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/> and <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/> are two web sites which report hundreds of different kind of statistics about all kinds of crime. Both sites can be overwhelming in terms of the amount of material they present—click your way through to find what you want.

Registered Sex Offenders: <http://www.familywatchdog.us> lets you locate sex offenders in your community by address

Boy Scouts of America: <http://scouting.org> is the primary BSA web site. Enter “abuse prevention” in the search box and you will find several good resources for adults and for youth.

Girl Scouts of America: <http://girlscouts.org> is the primary GSA web site. Enter “abuse prevention” in the search box and you will find several good resources for adults and for youth.

Other Denominations

The Presbyterians have abuse awareness/prevention materials on their web site at <http://www.pcusa.org/>. Put “abuse prevention” in the search box and see what you get.

The UCC web site www.ucc.org with "abuse prevention" in the search box takes you to a book by Haugen and Fortune which is a study for adolescents. There is also a UCC web site with an electronic survey for different age groups. Most of their material looks like it has been developed in collaboration with Marie Fortune and the Faith Trust Institute.

The Lutheran web site www.elca.org with "abuse prevention" in the search box provides a lot of material. The Lutherans have been recognizing April as abuse prevention month since the early '80s.

The Baptist church web site (www.abc-usa.org) didn't have much. When I searched for "abuse prevention" I did turn up one interesting headline of an article: "Lauran Bethell Speaks About Sexual Exploitation at the New Baptist Covenant." [actually, it was a speech at the covenant, not abuse at the covenant--so much for sloppy headlines.]

The Episcopal church www.episcopalchurch.org has an interesting policy statement with safeguards for personnel, but very little specific information about incidents other than in the records of the church reported in news articles.

The UMC web site (www.umc.org) with "abuse awareness" in the search box provides links to a few relevant articles, but most are news reports or articles which appeared in various places rather than curriculum guides. (disappointing). The UMC web site does have a long policy statement "Children and Poverty" which emerged from a bishop's initiative several years ago. It seems to equate abuse with poverty (oversimplification on my part, I suppose).

LEADER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ADULT GROUP

What About Sex Abuse?

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SINGLE SESSION

Materials Needed

1. *Bible*, blank file cards and pencils, white board with markers or newsprint with markers, phone book with Yellow Pages, copy of local church or conference "Safe Sanctuaries" policy;
2. Samples of news reports about sex abuse for a one- or two-week (could be longer) period before the discussion begins;
3. Resources selected from an internet search or from local media [described below]; and,
4. Copies of "Resources" (list of web sites) and "Notes" if you choose to use them as handouts.

Preparation and Procedure

Make certain that the room is arranged so people can be comfortably seated for discussion and so they can see the white board or newsprint you will be using.

1. **INTRODUCE YOURSELF.** Even if everyone in the group knows you, it might help if you introduce yourself in relation to the topic for discussion—"Sex Abuse"—as the discussion leader, not an expert on sex abuse (this may help you and the participants).
2. **THE TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION.** Even if the topic—"Sex Abuse"—has been announced in advance, state the topic again and emphasize that this is a discussion group, not a debating society. Suggest the guidelines of (a) sensitivity to what is being said, (b) respect for differences of opinion, and (c) caring concern for others. Ask that people treat the discussion in a confidential manner and to keep what is said in the room "in the room."
3. **GOALS.** Post the first three goals on the board. If you wish to post the additional two goals and flag them for possible discussion in future meetings if they are to be scheduled, do that. It might prompt interest in additional discussion.
4. **HANDOUTS.** I suggest that you not distribute handouts until later.
5. **REMINDER.** Using the statement about the probability of having one or more victims of sex abuse in any group of ten or more people, remind people to choose their words carefully. Before speaking, people might test their words with the statement: "**Is what I am about to say something that I would say or ask if I knew that a person in the room had been a victim of sex abuse?**"

And remember, “victims” can be direct victims (a victim of spouse abuse) or secondary victims (a grandparent, friend, or parent of a child who has been victimized).

Discussion Time

ASK PARTICIPANTS:

WHAT TOPICS OR ISSUES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE TOPIC OR THE WORDS ‘SEX ABUSE’? Be ready to make a list of responses as people mention them. *Don’t start discussing a topic when it is first mentioned*, encourage the group to generate a list. If someone starts to expound on a topic, suggest that they “hold that” till later and ask “what other topics can we put on this list?” If a topic is suggested which you don’t think belongs on the list, accept it for the moment and say, “We can come back to that later.” The list your group might generate could look like the following:

child abuse
sexual assault
rape
domestic violence
Tiger Woods
Bill Clinton
Politicians

Clergy misconduct
internet sex
cyber porn
pedophilia
sexual harassment
texting and sexting
flashing
etc.
etc.

Add other items to your list as the group develops them. If anyone asks what an item means, ask persons in the group to define the term. If someone says that an item is not abuse, suggest that it remain on the list anyway for the time being and that you will come back to it later. Explain that the list is open and people can add to it as the discussion continues.

ASK: IS THERE ANY TOPIC ON THE LIST WHICH NEEDS DEFINITION?

ASK: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER YOU WERE TOLD ABOUT ABUSE OR STRANGER DANGER WHEN YOU WERE CHILDREN? WHO TOLD YOU? Make a second list of the childhood experiences. If time permits, a second list can

be made about childhood knowledge of various forms of sex abuse, sex education (“Who told you and how old were you?” etc.).

ASK: WHAT IS BEING TOLD TO CHILDREN TODAY ABOUT VARIOUS FORMS OF SEX ABUSE? WHAT ARE YOU TELLING YOUR CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN? [make a list of responses]

Finishing the First Session

If your time is running out, then distribute the handouts and encourage persons to explore the web sites. Some may want to meet a second time to discuss their findings.

SUGGEST: THIS EVENING, TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR PHONE BOOK AND SEE IF YOU CAN FIND CONTACT NUMBERS FOR RESPONSE CENTERS. IMAGINE THAT YOU OR A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY HAD BEEN VICTIMIZED. HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT WOULD IT BE TO LOCATE THE PROPER RESOURCE? ARE THOSE NUMBERS AND CONTACT AGENCIES POSTED ANYWHERE IN THE CHURCH? SHOULD THEY BE?

Take a minute or two to summarize some of the comments covered during the session. Better yet—ask two or three people to summarize what has been covered in the first session.

ASK: DO WE NEED ADDITIONAL TIME ON THIS TOPIC?

Closing Prayer (suggestion)

Dear God, we join together this day, knowing that many in the world have been victimized in many ways. We know the pain of that abuse runs deep, and many have turned away from You and have felt abandoned in their distress. Help us be open to the pain and suffering of others. Help us comfort those who suffer. Help us make a world where people don't have to victimize. Help us heal the wounded—the victims and the victimizers. Help us understand what needs to be done for us to nurture, comfort, care for, and love all Your children now and forever. Amen

LEADER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ADULT GROUP

What About Sex Abuse?

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SESSIONS

Preparation

If you have only one additional session, then before concluding the first session, ask participants what they want to focus on in your second (and final) session. If you plan to have two or more additional sessions, ask the participants in the first session which topics they want to make certain they cover in the second, third, or additional sessions.

Look for resources within the group of discussion participants. For example, let people volunteer to explore one or more of the web sites listed in the resource pages and be prepared to bring back comments and reactions to what they find. If you have people in your group who are technically savvy, they may want to set up a projector and walk participants through some of the web sites available which deal with the topics of interest.

Have people report on the ease or difficulty of finding phone numbers and referral sources in the local community (or beyond) for some of the issues which have been identified [e.g. sexual assault, counseling services for abuse victims, rape crisis centers, legal assistance for such things as restraining orders, sex addiction, etc.]. How can the reactions be collected in a way that would result in recommendations for the church or other groups?

Invite professionals from the community to speak to topics of interest which have been identified in preliminary discussions. For example, if the adults in the discussion group confess that they know little or nothing about text messaging or sending tweets, you might find an expert to explain—perhaps a teen in the church or a young adult who works in the schools. Experts on more specific topics—sexual assault, bullying, gangs, etc.—might be found among the high school or middle school faculty in your community. The county mental health agencies might have persons who work on sex abuse issues who could speak to your group.

A counselor, marriage and family therapist, or mental health worker could speak to the issue of marital fidelity and discuss how relationships with supervisors or with clergy are abusive relationships rather than “consenting adult” affairs. A counselor might address issues of cyber porn in the community and could describe various kinds of treatment programs available for persons with such addictions.

Finally, do your own research between the first and subsequent sessions. If the topic has been raised about whether sex abuse is a problem in your community or not,

find the answer either through your own web search, through queries of local professionals, or by having one or two members of the discussion group take this on as a special assignment.

Discussion

ASK: IS ANYONE HERE TODAY WHO WAS NOT HERE LAST TIME?

(If the answer is “yes,” **ASK: WOULD ONE OR TWO OF YOU HELP US OUT BY EXPLAINING JUST ONE OR TWO POINTS WHICH CAME OUT OF THE FIRST DISCUSSION?**)

(If the answer is “no,” **ASK: IN 60 SECONDS, WHAT DO YOU RECALL FROM THE FIRST DISCUSSION WHICH YOU IDENTIFY AS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR US TO BE AWARE OF?**) [If you have posted your summary sheets from the first session, highlight or mark the points mentioned in the 60 second summary time.]

(Depending on how you made assignments or requests from the first session, **ASK: SEVERAL OF YOU VOLUNTEERED TO LOOK AT SOME OF THE WEB SITES INCLUDED ON THE RESOURCE PAGE. WOULD YOU TAKE A FEW MINUTES AND SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU FOUND?**)

QUESTIONS: HOW SAFE DO YOU THINK OUR CHILDREN ARE HERE IN OUR CHURCH?

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU BELIEVE THERE ARE PERSONS IN OUR CONGREGATION OR COMMUNITY WHO WOULD BE SAFE TO TALK TO IF YOU WERE QUESTIONING A SEXUAL SITUATION IN YOUR OWN LIFE—FOR EXAMPLE: “IS THIS BEHAVIOR SAFE OR NOT”? “WOULD YOU DEFINE THIS BEHAVIOR AS HARRASSMENT?”

WHAT ELSE DOES OUR CHURCH NEED TO DO?

Close your session with prayer.