



96 Percent of Children Who Report Sexual Abuse Are Telling the Truth

Sorting myth from fact in a world with pedophiles

By [Steve Volk](#) 12/22/2011

In Philadelphia, the [Joseph J. Peters Institute](#), a non-profit mental health agency focused on sexual abuse, tries to counsel sex offenders and educate the public to prevent further victims. Journalist Steve Volk interviewed Michael Stinson, MSPH, CHES Director of Prevention Services. Mr Stinson is responsible for developing and marketing community outreach education programmes to address the prevention of child sexual abuse. As an advocate, Mr Stinson sits on the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee for the City of Philadelphia and represents JJPI on the Law Enforcement Child Abuse Project (LECAP).

The views and opinions of the Australian 'National Child Protection Alliance' are well supported in the following interview:

Volk....."To what degree do pedophiles focus on any one gender?"

Stinson....."There are sex offenders, child molesters, who do not necessarily focus on any particular gender or even age. And stranger danger is a smaller percentage of child sex-abuse cases. The majority of cases really are children who are close, in some way, to the person abusing them. When we're talking about actual pedophiles, then we're talking about people, often, who go seeking victims. And they can be very difficult to treat because to them their behavior is not strange. It's part of the way they live, the way they behave, and peer pressure—other people thinking it's wrong, society declaring it wrong—has less effect on them."

Volk....."It's often said that most child abusers were sexually abused themselves, as children. True?"

Stinson: "No. People who are abused as children, somewhere between 20 percent and 30 percent of them will either become abusive themselves or carry a re-victimization pattern forward—meaning they will always see themselves as a victim in every situation. But certainly much less than half of sex offenders, who abuse children, were themselves abused as children."

Volk....."What behaviors should people look out for, from their children, to suggest they may be withholding information about being abused?"

Stinson: "What we like to get across to people is they need to be engaged with their children, all the time, so they can recognize when their behavior is off somehow. Some indicators might be they don't want to go to sleep. Or they don't want to stay asleep. Or they start having nightmares. Maybe they shut down at odd times."

They are there with you, engaged with you and whatever's happening, and then suddenly they just go blank and shut down. It could be because something has just happened, in the environment, that has reminded them of the behaviors that take place immediately before the abuse.

As for sleeping problems ... the process of getting ready for bed can be a sort of ritual that goes on around the abuse. The adult offender often does the same things. They put them in bed, they turn the lights down, they read them a story, and then maybe they say, 'Oh, I'm just going to lay here a while until you fall asleep'—and then the abuse occurs. That can spark a lot of changes in the sleep patterns of an abused child. Maybe they have flashbacks when they go to sleep, or nightmares.

Other signs can be regressive behavior. They stopped wetting the bed two years ago, and now they have started again. Or they start defecating again, in their clothes. Also, oversexualized behavior—doing things that are ahead of where they should be, developmentally.”

Volk.....”What is the proper first response we give a child if they tell us they’ve been abused?”

Stinson.....”Let them tell the story in their own language and don’t re-label anything. This part can be a little hard because sometimes the way children tell a story like this, it can sound fantastical. In young children, their brains aren’t developed yet, and they don’t know how to compartmentalize the story in the way adults would so. The beginning, middle and end may be told out of order or they connect things in odd ways.

Maybe they’d say: ‘I was put in the dark room, no one was around, and they were screaming at me, and then someone was touching me.’ That sounds satanic, and really odd. But the dark room may turn out to be their bedroom, and it was bedtime, and before the lights were turned out the abuser or someone else read them a story, and they screamed when they acted out what they were reading to the child, and then the abuse occurred. So, you have to let them tell the story in their own words and worry about sorting it out later. It needs to be authentic to the child.

Something else to keep in mind is that children do not generally spill out the whole story—it may take several hours or even days for them to share everything. What they do is, they tell you a little bit, and then they stop. The reason is because they’re waiting to see how you react: Are they going to get in trouble for sharing this story? Do you believe them? Once they see you believe them and they won’t get in trouble they feel safe enough to share a little bit more. What people need to know is that, according to the literature on the subject, if a child discloses abuse, about 96 percent of the time some sort of abuse did occur. That’s the figure—around 96 percent.”

Michael A. Stinson, MSPH, CHES Director of Prevention Services **Mr. Stinson** is responsible for developing and marketing community outreach education programs to address the prevention of child sexual abuse. As an advocate, **Mr. Stinson** sits on the **Sexual Assault Advisory Committee for the City of Philadelphia** and represents JJPI on the Law Enforcement Child Abuse Project (LECAP). **Mr. Stinson** has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, concentrating in health services administration, from the **University of Delaware** as well as a Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) degree from Arcadia University. He is professionally credentialed as a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) from the **National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (NCHEC)**.

www.jjpi.org, 9 Jan 2013 [cached]

Michael J. Stinson, M.P.H., CHES Director, JJPI Prevention Services 215.701.1560 ext. 23 mstinson@jjpi.org **Mr. Stinson** is responsible for developing and marketing community education programs to address the prevention of child sexual abuse. He sits on the **Sexual Assault Advisory Committee for the City of Philadelphia** and represents JJPI on the Law Enforcement Child Abuse Project (LECAP)