

A PROGRAM AND SERVICE OF
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RISK RETENTION GROUP, INC.



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Protecting children means never minding your own business

Approximately two years ago, my wife and I were on a business trip and we decided to walk through a shopping mall during some of our free time. Our otherwise pleasant experience came to an abrupt end when we witnessed something that, even today, disturbs me. In the open—for everyone on the same level of the mall to see—a mother was beating her screaming child.

When I write “beating” I mean beating. This was not a “swat” on the rear that I occasionally received as a small child. This beating consisted of repeated slaps to the child’s head, blows to the child’s back, and slaps to the child’s bare legs.

We both felt compelled to walk toward the adult and the child. While walking toward them, we couldn’t keep our eyes away from the scene. As we neared the mother, one of us asked, “Is that really necessary?” The mother, who was holding the child in the air with one hand so she could easily strike the child with the other, looked at us with rage.

“Mind your own %#\$@*^& business,” the mother yelled at us. We continued to stare at her until, finally, she put the child down, grabbed the child by the arm, and walked away. Leaving, she muttered where we could “stick” our “self-righteousness.”

To this day, I am glad that we stuck our self-righteousness into her business. We interrupted something that a child should never have to experience from any adult—much less from her own parent. Although our actions created a confrontation and drew unwanted attention, it spared the child from continuing trauma—even if it was only for a brief moment.

The point of this training bulletin is simple. Most of us were taught to “mind our own business.” And, for the most part, that behavior has served us well. But when it comes to child abuse—including sexual abuse—minding our own business is what often allows abuse to continue. The abuser counts on us to mind our own business and not to ask questions.

When parents know the abuser, minding your own business is more difficult, because it is assumed that a parent is in the best position to protect their child. However, in some instances, the perpetrator has groomed the parent so that the parent routinely ignores obvious warning signs—physical or otherwise. In other instances, the perpetrator has so much influence over the parent—often in the form of intimidation—that the parent is afraid to come forward.

In the video, *A Time to Protect God’s Children*, a victim recounts how the person who abused him always visited with his mother at church, and was very nice to her. Another victim, who was abused by a teacher, recounts how she couldn’t come forward because of a fear that her parents would side with the teacher (perpetrator) who claimed to be helping the girl improve her grades. The victim feared that if she did say something, her parents would only think that it was an attempt to avoid her tutoring session.

We know from our training that perpetrators provide warning signs (e.g., excessive touching, unusual or excessive gift giving, etc.). We also know that a perpetrator cannot abuse a child unless they can lure the child to a private location—a home, or even a private room or rarely visited location in a public building. When we see these warning signs, we must make it our business and report what we know.

Remember, it takes an entire community of adults—looking out for and intervening in suspicious adult-child behavior—to prevent child sexual abuse. When you consider the ramifications of child abuse and its long-term contribution to a number of other social ills, it’s easy to understand why protecting children is everyone’s business.

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