



FAQs

Debunking Common Myths¹

As your Committee gears up to introduce its child safeguarding efforts to your organization's leadership, staff, and community, it is a good idea to anticipate the types of questions or resistance they may encounter. This tool dispels some of the more common myths about child maltreatment and child protection, and provides your Committee with talking points to address them.

MYTHS VS. REALITY: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON CHILD PROTECTION

Myth

Acknowledging and discussing the issue of child maltreatment might frighten parents or cause them to believe that this issue is a particular problem for the organization.

Reality

Child maltreatment occurs in all communities and is relevant to all institutions that work with children. One of the first steps to creating a culture of safety is to engage stakeholders in the conversation and seek their participation in institutional abuse-prevention efforts. Rather than assuaging fears by avoiding the topic, institutions that refrain from communicating with parents send a message — potentially inaccurate — that they haven't spent time addressing the issue. Parents increasingly select institutions that acknowledge the problem head-on and can communicate concrete steps they have taken to prevent and respond to maltreatment.

Myth

1. This material is excerpted from *Child Safety First: Closing the Gap in Best Practices for Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse of Minors in Jewish Organizations*, published in 2017 by Jumpstart Labs in partnership with Sacred Spaces. You can access the full report here: http://jumpstartlabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/JumpstartReport6_ChildSafetyFirst_Summer2017.pdf

Best Practice 2
Create Opportunities for Community Dialogue

Goal 2
Engage Board/Leadership

OBJECTIVES
Prepare the Child Safety Committee for common resistance they may encounter when introducing your child safeguarding efforts.

AUDIENCE
Child Safety Committee

TIME
10 minutes to review

It is developmentally inappropriate or immodest to speak to children about their bodies, sex, safe boundaries, and abusive touch.

Reality

Age-appropriate education should be informative and empowering, not scary. The fact is, children who do not learn about their bodies and sex from parents and teachers, will still receive this education from peers or online. Institutions and parents can partner to frame information in a manner that is accurate and developmentally sound rather than leave children to figure it out for themselves. In addition, predators report specifically seeking out children who are uneducated or naïve, so that they can “educate” them themselves.² Though children should never be expected to defend themselves from abusive advances by older, stronger, more sophisticated individuals, educating children allows them to recognize boundary violations and unacceptable behaviors when they see them. Research shows that children who receive abuse-prevention education are more likely to disclose maltreatment and receive the help they need.³

Myth

Children will tell us if something bad happens to them. The fact that we have not received any disclosures of child maltreatment in our camp or school indicates that this is not an issue here.

Reality

Children are reluctant to disclose maltreatment.⁴ When abuse is perpetrated by an individual within an institution who is in a position of responsibility, many children keep their silence for a decade or more.⁵ In fact, not only do most children conceal their abuse, but when questioned, they will deny its occurrence and protect their abusers, for fear of not being believed, of getting into trouble, of being hurt, or of losing someone — often the perpetrator — whom they care about.⁶

2. As one offender states “Parents shouldn’t be embarrassed to talk about things like this — it’s harder to abuse or trick a child who knows what you’re up to”, while another advises: “Teach children about sex, different parts of the body, and “right” and “wrong touches”... parents ... if they don’t tell their children about these things (sexual matters) — I used this to my advantage by teaching the child myself.” Elliot, M., Browne, K., & Kilcoyne, J. (1995). Child sexual abuse prevention: What offenders tell us. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19, 579-594.

3. See p. 181 of Finkelhor, D. (2009). The prevention of childhood sexual abuse. *The Future of Children*, 19, 169-194. Retrieved from www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV192.pdf.

4. Cashmore, J., Taylor, A., Shackel, R. & Parkinson, P. (2016). The impact of delayed reporting on the prosecution and outcomes of child sexual abuse cases. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney. Retrieved from: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/policy-and-research/our-research/published-research/the-impact-of-delayed-reporting-on-the-prosecution.

5. The Australian Royal Commission analyzed information from 1,677 private sessions, and found that on average, it took victims of child sexual abuse within YSOs, 22 years to disclose the abuse. See: Australian Royal Commission (2014). Interim Report: Executive Summary. Retrieved from: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/about-us/our-reports/interim-report-html/executive-summary.

6. In a study of 116 cases of confirmed sexual abuse, almost 80% of the children initially denied the abuse or tentatively disclosed. 75% of those who disclosed did so by accident, and over 20% of the children ultimately recanted their disclosure even though the abuse had occurred. Sorensen, T. & Snow, B. (1991). How children tell: The process of disclosure in child sexual abuse. *Child Welfare League of America*, 70, 3-15.

Myth

Children frequently lie; their reports of maltreatment by trusted wonderful people are simply manifestations of this tendency.

Reality

It is rare for children to falsely claim that they have been maltreated, while abusers almost always lie to cover their abusive behaviors.⁷ The overwhelming truthfulness of children can be explained by the dynamics of the abuse itself; it is far easier for a child to lie by denying the occurrence of abuse than to lie by providing the intimate details necessary to allege maltreatment. Children must overcome tremendous pressure, and even threats, to disclose abuse. Abusers, on the other hand, have nothing to lose and everything to gain by denying the abuse and painting the children as liars. Unfortunately, because child victims are far less articulate, possess fewer civil and social rights, and are not nearly as powerful, their disclosures, when they do occur, are often dismissed.

Encountering other myths you'd like us to debunk? Email: Aleinu@JewishSacredSpaces.org.

7. See for instance, Table 3-3 of Child Maltreatment 2012. Children's Bureau (Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, retrieved from: www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2012.pdf, indicating that in only 0.2% of the 3.8 million cases of child abuse reported to Child Protective Services in 2012 did children make intentionally false reports.