



For the  
Children's  
Sake...



[www.ohmin.org](http://www.ohmin.org)  
Spring 2010

Office Phone: 269.383.3597  
Email: [office@ohmin.org](mailto:office@ohmin.org)

**OHM** will be a featured guest on "Focus 4" aired on the Cornerstone Television Network on Good Friday, April 2 at 1:00 pm and 7:00 pm, EST. To see what station carries this program in your area, follow this link: <http://www.ctvn.org/where-to-watch.asp>.

We have been invited to discuss National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April. Did you know that:

- One in five American families is involved in some form of child abuse.
- 90% of child abuse cases involve someone the family knows and trusts; 68% involve family members themselves.
- Deaths from child abuse are on the rise – 3 a day in 1998 to nearly 5 a day in 2007.
- About 30% of abused children will later abuse their own children, continuing the cycle.
- Abused kids are 25% more likely to experience teen pregnancy, 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 30% more likely to commit a violent crime, 25 times more likely to develop alcohol addiction. Two-thirds of people in treatment for drug addiction report being abused as children.
- The estimated annual cost resulting from child abuse in 2007 was \$104 billion.
- During the 30 minutes our inter-



## For the Children's Sake...

By Mark Bonham, OHM Executive Director

view airs, somewhere in the U.S. 15 children will be molested, and 180 reports of child abuse will be made (one every 10 seconds).

Child abuse is a family issue and prevention is a family obligation. A safe home is one where parents are fully aware of and are dealing well with the abuse that they, themselves, have experienced. Without denial or

minimization, dads and moms have to be willing to look back at their own childhood, honestly face what happened, name any abuse that is there and take initiative to address it.

In Matthew 18, Christ makes it clear how he feels about children and child abuse. "Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me...do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." He has a dire warning for "anyone who causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble (NASB)." He pictures a perpetrator with a giant millstone around his neck, drowning in the depths of the sea. He calls on us all to change and become like little children, humble and receptive, if we are to be a part of his kingdom.

It is for the children's sake that we tackle the tough issues of abuse and harm with adults. We are determined to stop generational abuse. We invite you to join us.

# Years Later...

By Amy Anderson, OHM Leader Training Director



The long term affects of abuse often show up in a variety of ways:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Sleeplessness
- Marital dissatisfaction or divorce
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Loneliness
- Emotional numbness
- Obesity, binge eating, purging
- Body aches and pains
- Contempt, anger and rage

Unfortunately, many individuals fail to realize that many of the struggles in their adult life are a direct result of childhood abuse. They focus on current symptoms and seek immediate relief. This rarely leads to long term change.

What can be done to curb the effects of childhood abuse? What can be done to protect the next generation? What does Open Hearts Ministry offer that supports our nation's efforts to prevent child abuse? At OHM, our focus is on the adults healing from the damage of abuse and wounds. In addressing healing we look at past damage, the ways it has impacted our lives, and the directions we have gone in response to the damage. Talking about stories of pain and hurt is an important element in the prevention of child abuse.

Consider the words of one 55 year old man: "My life has changed dramatically since I've gotten involved with Grace Groups. Things that kept me from looking at past issues of

abuse in my own life were covered by shame, pain, and embarrassment. I never talked about my abuse in my own life and didn't see the need to. The anger I carried inside me was directed at my family. I was verbally abusive, using words that were directed to hurt and cause pain. This caused fear and low self esteem in my children, just as it had with me when I was a child. Today, because of changes I made, I have many opportunities to model healthy behavior for my children. I own how I was in the past and want to do whatever it takes to stop the generational effects of abuse. I have been given another chance in my own family life because of Open Hearts Ministry and Grace Groups."

As we invite fathers and mothers to tell their stories in a safe and nurturing environment, we contribute to the prevention of future child abuse. One overarching characteristic of abuse survivors is the inability to feel our feelings deeply. Telling our stories opens up our hearts and minds to inner healing and to experience a broader range of healthy emotional responses. If we haven't retraced our own journey of pain and damage of abuse and begun our healing journey, we will be dulled to the pain of our children. Children need parents who are loving, caring and attentive.

When we are bound up in shame, or shut down in numbness, we will

*continued on page 6*

# Finding Freedom from Painful Secrets

A Survivor of Childhood Abuse Shares His Story

I grew up in the 1960's as a young boy living in the suburbs of a mid-sized Midwestern city. My family consisted of 4 kids and two busy parents. My dad kept busy with work, church, and home projects while my mother was tired, frustrated and emotionally unsupportive. In my home I was overlooked and missed. I could be gone for hours without question.

In Junior High I became friends with an older boy who lived nearby. My friend's house and family were colorful, loud, and fun-loving. They treated me like one of the family, taking me along on outings. After a summer vacation my friend sexualized our friendship by convincing me that it was important to be "prepared" for our sexual future with women and so he practiced on me and I practiced on him.

I felt dirty, ashamed, and confused about what had felt both pleasurable and repugnant. I broke off my friendship and pulled away in shame. My parents wondered why I no longer went to his house. I spent more time alone in my bedroom, keeping my actions a secret. Later I tried to drive away my feelings of powerlessness by attempting to seduce two people who I considered weaker and smaller than me. The abused had become the abuser and I hated myself. I vowed that no one would ever know my secrets.

In the following years I tried to hide

from my past by using drugs and alcohol, working too much, keeping busy at church. Nothing worked. In failing to deal with my past I settled for being nice, refusing to share deeply and honestly with my wife. Finally, 25 years later, I was referred by a friend to a Grace Group where I shared my secrets and worked to understand what freedom was available to me when I trusted God with my story. A year after Grace Group, I attended SALTS training sponsored by OHM and became a local group leader. I believe in the power of Grace



Groups to promote healing for those with a wounded past. As I continue on my journey for healing and for living out of the truth of who I am in Christ, it is good for me, my wife, and my children.

I have learned that my parents were not supported well by their parents. When a mother or father faces the damage of their past, they are opening up new possibilities with their children and the next generation. Preventing the abuse of children often begins with healing the wounds of the adults. Breaking the patterns of the past begins with me. All things are possible.



# Innocence Stolen; Dignity Restored

A Survivor of Childhood Abuse Shares Her Story

**M**y daddy took me to his friend's house in the afternoons while he and mom were working. There were no toys or good activities in this old man's dark, little house. He molested me. Something awakened in me. I began doing to myself what he did to me. I couldn't stop. There came a point



when he stopped, but I felt ashamed and sad. I got the message that I should not tell anyone. I felt, as a five year old, that it was my fault, and that, because I could not stop the evil, I was evil.



I ached to tell my mother, but the words stuck in my throat. Even after coming to Christ, I still felt like a bad person. I suffered from depression. I was left alone a lot. The TV was my closest friend. When I was 11, I had a panic attack and finally told my dear older sister about the sexual abuse. She hugged me and said she would help. She took me to see a counselor twice. It helped a little.

I finished college, married a great guy and we had two beautiful children. We went overseas as missionaries and led others to Christ. But on the inside I still felt like the bad one. To make up for it, I tried to make everybody happy. I stuffed my depression and overate for comfort. I prayed every day and begged God to help me do better. Nothing helped.

When I came to my first SALTS training I felt fear and shame. But I began to have real hope when people talked about what I had felt all my life. As I told my story and people responded, the shame began to melt away. I heard the abuse was not my fault. My childhood innocence had been stolen. I came to realize that I still had dignity, and that I did not have to live in shame any longer. My fear of God and people's rejection lightened as I understood more of His acceptance and approval. When I struggle today I am reminded that God accepts my weaker parts just as much as the strong ones. I can finally say I am glad to be me.

When parents don't get help for their own issues they open the door for their children to be victimized. Children are protected when parents emotionally connect with them, know the signs of abuse and know how to respond if abuse does happen. I am committed to helping others who, like me, have suffered from childhood abuse. I want the Grace Groups I lead to be a safe place to be embraced and recover.

# What to Do if You Suspect Abuse

By Mary Jane Hamilton, Leader Training Assistant

One of the most common inquiries Open Hearts Ministry receives is for information on what to do if you suspect your child has been sexually abused. It is important to talk with your child about sexual abuse and to give them tools that would protect them from becoming victims. But realize that even when you have explained to your child what abuse is and have empowered them with words or actions that will help protect them, abuse still happens.

While I have concentrated on the steps you can take to help your child when sexual abuse has occurred, know that these steps can assist with other types of abuse as well.

So what should you do if you suspect your child has experienced sexual abuse?

1. Tell them you are concerned about them and want to know if anyone has touched or harmed them.
2. Tell them if something has happened, you will not be mad at them and they are not bad.
3. Reassure them of your love for them and that you want to protect them from further harm.
4. Tell them you understand they may be threatened or were told to keep it a secret, but it is still very important they tell you the truth.
5. Tell them you understand they may feel ashamed but that be-



ing harmed is never a child's fault, and that they were not expected to know how to stop or prevent it.

6. Tell them you will protect them and help them if it happened. And you must. Your child is very vulnerable and can be in danger once the news gets out.
  7. Once a child discloses his/her sexual abuse, be very selective who you tell. Parents should never talk about the sexual abuse on the phone, or in front of the child. Many do not realize their response can cause more shame or pain for the child. It is important you take measures to assure their safety and their emotional and physical well being.
  8. If a disclosure is made do not act surprised. Remain calm and use words like "I believe you and I will make sure it never happens again. You are safe now." Never say, "Oh he/she just touched you. That doesn't matter."
  9. Realize that out of fear, children may deny the sexual abuse later. If that happens, reassure them that you are there for them and will protect them.
- If your child has been a victim of sexual abuse take proper action.



ing harmed is never a child's fault, and that they were not expected to know how to stop or prevent it.

ing harmed is never a child's fault, and that they were not expected to know how to stop or prevent it.

ing harmed is never a child's fault, and that they were not expected to know how to stop or prevent it.

ing harmed is never a child's fault, and that they were not expected to know how to stop or prevent it.

ing harmed is never a child's fault, and that they were not expected to know how to stop or prevent it.

# If You Suspect Abuse... *continued*

## ALWAYS:

- Believe your child.
- Reinforce your love for them.
- Confront those who abused your child and report the abuse to the proper authorities.
- Never put the blame on the child. They were powerless to prevent it.
- Reinforce they did right by telling you and that you are proud of them for telling.
- Provide proper medical care as needed.
- Don't subject your child to the abuser again. Be vigilant to protect them from possible harassment, threats or further abuse.
- Get counseling for your child and be an active participant in it yourself.
- Give them the opportunity to talk about the abuse with you. They may have more questions and concerns later on. Be ready to hear what they say.



*April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month.*

- Never say or even insinuate they are wrecked or damaged for life.
- Get educated on possible repercussions from sexual abuse. They may show up immediately or years later.

It is important for your child to see your genuine concern and watch you take the necessary steps to resolve the abuse issue. This helps to eliminate their shame. It reinforces their worth and that you can be trusted. You are becoming a great example of what should happen in these situations. The sooner intervention takes place the faster the child will recover from abuse. It will also help to eliminate any further repercussions from their abuse.

*(Thanks to Shirley Peterson for her due diligence and for allowing OHM to copy her material in this column. It is my hope and hers that this information will be helpful and put to use for the further protection of children.)*

*For more information see our web site at [www.ohmin.org](http://www.ohmin.org)*

# Years Later... *continued*

to notice signs of abuse in our children. We will be so preoccupied with our own self protection we will miss their cries for help. We will not be equipped to protect our children. Worse yet, we will become the ones who do harm to them.

Providing life-giving community where men and women regain awareness of their dignity, even as they address what has brought them to shame, is a critical part of Grace Groups and the mission of OHM.