

HOW TO HELP SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS

1. Don't fool yourself-some of your teenagers have been sexually abused. Some of your students have experienced abuse in the past. and some of them are currently being abused. You stand little chance of helping your teenagers deal with their abuse if you refuse to embrace the statistical realities.

2. Kids need someone safe to talk to about their abuse. How many teenagers are waiting for an adult who's ready to listen? Don't assume they know you're available -tell them.

3. Know how you will react to a report of abuse. Every state has a child abuse hotline number for ministers, healthcare professionals, teachers, counselors, and others. In some states ministers are classified as Mandatory Reporters-that means you're legally obligated to report abuse to the authorities when it's reported to you. You must have these numbers and be ready to use them.

Reassure abused teenagers that you'll be right by their side throughout the ordeal. They'll have to make a police report, and there may be more interviews to come, Teenagers realize that reporting their abuse to you will have serious ramifications-by the time they talk with you they've decided to be brave about it. Still, they'll need your strength and presence to make it through the difficult process.

4. You'll be very unpopular with some in your church and community. Except in rare cases, others besides the accused abuser will be very upset that an abuse has been reported, Most sexual abuse happens in families, so you may have parents, grandparents, and siblings furious that such scandalous accusations have been brought against their loved ones. Simply, this is the price you have to pay for doing what you must do. Remind family members that passing along reports of abuse to authorities is part of your job, and you wouldn't be serving God or the church if you failed in this area. Still, you'll make permanent enemies as you advocate for abused children and teenagers, so brace yourself.

For more information and statistics on child sexual abuse go to www.prevent-abuse-now.com.