

**To: District and State Collaborative Network for
Developing Comprehensive Systems for Learning Support**

From: Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor

11/13/11

Re: Should Schools Be Doing More About Child Abuse? (Thinking about the news from Pennsylvania)

In reaction to the Penn State crisis, sexual abuse response and prevention in general and also the specific role schools should play will be in the news for a while. There are many facets to this. From the perspective of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports, this includes a careful look at the effectiveness of *systems* in place that are responsible for protecting children. And as the Pennsylvania situation underscores, there is a need to ensure that institutional pressures do not get in the way of immediate action to assist children and their families.

While a review at schools is logical, it will be important to avoid this becoming yet another special initiative (as too often happens when a problem becomes a notorious focus for the media).

The key concern with respect to development of a comprehensive system of learning supports is to ensure that there is an appropriate focus on matters such as child abuse and that the focus is mindfully embedded into the overall system.

An important networking consideration is sharing resources about such matters.

Sharing

We assume that network participants are thinking about all this and that many of you are aware of resources that should be shared related to the following:

- (1) Besides reporting obligations, what else should a school be doing? (e.g., How does the learning support system at the school, district, state and federal levels address the matter and help mobilize effective action at the local level?)
- (2) What system improvements are needed with respect to current interventions to assist children and families? (system procedures for reporting, reporting accountability, and providing feedback about actions taken)
- (3) What procedures are in place to ensure that institutional pressures do not get in the way of immediate action to assist children and their families?

Please share what you can in terms of resources, ideas, insights, comments.

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Yesterday, network participant Anita Killea shared the following:

“I was reading some of the comments made by others in the Network, and couldn't help but think about the recent events at Penn State. I wonder if you have been contacted by

members or others who are making connections to what has allegedly occurred and why there is a need to connect schools and communities much earlier, engaging all child-caring systems, and actually 'talking' about this sensitive area. Will this latest news permit you to address it as it relates to school mental health and community stakeholders? As one of our members, John Garcia, Arizona College Network, stated, "Education is not the responsibility of the schoolhouse, it is the responsibility of the community." With that being said, how do we tie this issue to school mental health and to all child-caring systems and institutions that have a direct impact on children?

I realize what we are talking about is extremely sensitive, but it only points to a 'mindset' that is a challenge to break. Are we dealing with powerful systems that, because they find it difficult to discuss, are in some ways supporting continued neglect and abuse? Why must we wait for horrific events to happen in order to address childhood sexual abuse?

I have been thinking so much about what could be done early on, i.e. parent training sessions before infants leave the hospital on what constitutes abuse and neglect; in schools where developmentally, age-appropriate classroom lessons can be taught, and where all educators and parents can be trained as well. What are your thoughts? What more can we be thinking about? Doing? Connecting SMH? We must create more awareness. Sadly, the recent events do in fact create an additional entry point by which SMH can and should be utilized. We need to make a case for this topic to be made a part of essential programs and services as well."

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Our Center's weekly Practitioners' Listserv, which goes out tomorrow, represents an effort on our part to share some resources across the country. For your information, the gist of what it contains is appended below.

From the Practitioners' Listserv emailed 11/14 and put online at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner.pdf>

While reports of sexual abuse related to Penn State have raised national awareness, we know communities across the country have had similar experiences where those trusted to help children violated that trust. In each case, multiple levels of intervention are needed, including:

- >follow-up with children who were victimized
- >investigation to see if there are other victims
- >support for a wider range of children and families who become alarmed
- >support for those who work with children (in schools, in community organizations).

As a result of the current media blitz, local, state, and federal agencies likely are reviewing their protocols, procedures, programs (e.g., related to reporting, monitoring, education about child abuse, prevention).

And so are we.

This week's listserv is devoted to focusing on both current and future needs.

Perspective Shared by an On-the-Scene Colleague

In keeping with our Center's mission, we contacted colleagues working in the Penn State area about possible resource needs and lessons for the future.

Here is a portion of one response that captures so much:

"Thank you for your caring concern. There is so much going on it is very confusing, disturbing and over-whelming. It all is problematic on so many levels, some of which are, 1) the affected children and their families (how to support them) and the mission of so many professionals and other adults to protect children in every way every day, 2) the root of the problem within Sandusky, 3) that PSU as an individual institution is so much a part of so many of our lives in many ways, 4) that parents give over their children every day to adults with trust and expectation they will be protected, respected and developed in respectful ways, 5) that children are continuously vulnerable to the character and action (sometimes inaction) of the adults who happen to be in their reach, 5) the local concern and seemingly shared guilt by PSU association, and of course, 6) the outrageous media sensationalism and grasping of 15 minutes of fame by individuals in that field, and 7) the recovery and improvement of a large university and its 'family'. Bottom line - we just do not have universal, fail-safe, effective systems in place to grow and develop all children to be healthy and respectful adults. Additionally, we do not have systems in place for developing and supporting really effective and ethical leaders. Without such impossible systems, life is left up to the flaws of each of us as human beings....

There is the whole education component of how ALL adults need continuing education about keeping kids safe and acting with moral and authentic courage. There are the reporting channels that are not fail-safe that need improvement, but also awareness raising for how they should function. I know my training in PA taught me to simply report to my supervisor any inkling of inappropriate behavior. Indeed, in one educational setting, we were specifically directed to not contact the police for anything. That was to be the role of someone else in the organization.

We have a 'childline' service (telephone) where individuals can confidentially report, but I know lots of teachers worry about the follow-up and impact on themselves and their school colleagues as well as their employment. Once something is reported, there is little or no feedback, so people often really don't know if there was appropriate follow-up. So, yes, the current reporting systems need to be evaluated, marketed, trained and improved. Each individual has to have greater responsibility. It's not enough for me to quickly pass it along to my supervisor. I must take action and know how and what action to take. I must also have support in doing so. There is too much silence before these things hit the media.

In my years of early childhood education, we always did a lot of work with our kids around self-protection and reporting. I find that is missing systemically in our K-12 grades. Kids, unfortunately, need to have skills of self-protection and reporting. This is a missing link.

There are many lessons to be learned from this situation. I anticipate PA will (should) lead the effort for improving and providing regular training for all who work with children. I think PSU will definitely focus dollars, thought, and efforts. There should also be a parent component and the child component. The supports we put in place for children who have been abused have got to be sustained over time as appropriate. Seems we put in reactive support and then it is dropped.

... How can leaders sustain themselves, though only human, to be authentic, mindful, ethical, and moral especially in the daily grind of stress and diverging/ conflicting agendas? I think a lot of support has to be put in place in the form of training, mentor

coaching, reflective dialogue, and evaluation.

And for families who have the misfortune of experiencing such trauma in one of their children, how do they take care of themselves while taking care of their vulnerable, confused, and hurting child and overtime? At the kid level, I think we are doing better work around 'upstanding'. I think that's the new concept - being an upstander. We teach it in the classroom where we all take responsibility for each other. We all work to grow and maintain a safe environment for each member. How do we systematize such concepts and the skills kids and adults need to learn? It is the upstander - the observer, the inactive participant - who can make an educated choice to act on behalf of those who are vulnerable or unable to act on their own behalf. It continues to be set up in such ways that the individual must always be in an independent survival mode...."

Listserv Participants: Can you share a helpful perspective on all this? How prepared is your locale to handle child abuse? Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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>Resources for Raising Awareness and Support for Children Who Are Abused

Here are some resources that we try to share related to child abuse concerns:

- (1) *Facts for Families* – from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists – http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/
>#28 "Responding to Child Sexual Abuse"
>#9 "Child Sexual Abuse"

See appendix to this email for excerpts from these fact sheets.

- (2) *Stop the Silence: Stop Child Sexual Abuse* – <http://www.stopcsa.org/>
- (3) *Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse* – includes trainer's manual and training videos, as well as a Guide – <http://www.welfareacademy.org/childabusetraining/>
- (4) *Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape* -- <http://www.pcar.org>
(Their website indicates they have offered expertise to Penn State University.)

Listserv Participants: Let us know about other resources related to sexual abuse that you recommend to support schools, community, kids, families, and colleagues. Send to: Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Appendix

From *Facts for Families* – American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists – http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/

>Excerpt from "Child Sexual Abuse"

“Child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year, but the number of unreported instances is far greater, because the children are afraid to tell anyone what has happened, and the legal procedure for validating an episode is difficult. The problem should be identified, the abuse stopped, and the child should receive professional help. The long-term emotional and psychological damage of sexual abuse can be devastating to the child.

Child sexual abuse can take place within the family, by a parent, step-parent, sibling or other relative; or outside the home, for example, by a friend, neighbor, child care person, teacher, or stranger. When sexual abuse has occurred, a child can develop a variety of distressing feelings, thoughts and behaviors....

A child who is the victim of prolonged sexual abuse usually develops low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness and an abnormal or distorted view of sex. The child may become withdrawn and mistrustful of adults, and can become suicidal....

Child sexual abusers can make the child extremely fearful of telling, and only when a special effort has helped the child to feel safe, can the child talk freely. If a child says that he or she has been molested, parents should try to remain calm and reassure the child that what happened was not their fault....

Parents can prevent or lessen the chance of sexual abuse by:

- >Telling children that if someone tries to touch your body and do things that make you feel funny, say NO to that person and tell me right away
- >Teaching children that respect does not mean blind obedience to adults and to authority, for example, don't tell children to, Always do everything the teacher or baby-sitter tells you to do
- >Encouraging professional prevention programs in the local

**If you have ideas to share about any of the above,
please let us hear from you so we can follow-up with more
information for the collaborative network and others.
Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**
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