

Avoiding Our Own Penn State

We watched with sadness the accounts of unreported child abuse. Child abuse is not limited to one community.

Child sexual-abuse allegations astound and Americans are in disbelief. Anger fills the media with the question: "How did this go unreported for so long?"

"Stranger danger" is often overemphasized by those who would keep children safe from predators. Studies show that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused by the age of 18; sadly, 90% of victims actually **know** their offenders.

Child victims remain silent for fear that revealing the abuse will bring harm to them or those they love, loss of affection, and punishment. Child sexual abuse **crime** thrives in a climate of silence and secrecy – offenders rely on this fear. Why then are adult witnesses silent?

Tennessee law mandates reporting by every person with knowledge or suspicion that a child might be a victim. When child sexual abuse is reported, there is a collaboration in place to end the abuse, give the child a safe place to talk, and provide therapy services to begin healing. New Hope provides forensic interviews, medical examinations, counseling, and advocacy/support (at no cost to the child or family). Prevention efforts include Stewards of Children, a nationally-recognized evidence-based program educating adults on awareness and reporting abuse. For more information, please visit www.blountkids.org.

Here's one action we can all agree on: "If I see, hear, suspect, or in any way become aware a child is being abused, I will not keep silent. I will have the courage to help that child by reporting." Please join us in making this pledge to the children of Blount County.



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