



# CENTER PIECE

The Official Newsletter of the National Child Protection Training Center

## When Faith Hurts: Overcoming Spirituality-Based Blocks and Problems Before, During, and After the Forensic Interview (revised and expanded)<sup>1</sup>

By Victor I. Vieth<sup>2</sup>

*“You can make sense of sexual abuse and no God, or God and no sexual abuse. But how do you tolerate the two realities together?”—Diane Langberg, PhD<sup>3</sup>*

### Introduction

Much has been written about the short and long term impact of child abuse on the victim’s mind and body.<sup>4</sup> Each year, this literature is presented at hundreds of state and national child abuse conferences. As a result, multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) have greatly improved their abilities to investigate cases of maltreatment and to address a child’s physical and emotional needs.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the impact of abuse on a child’s spirituality is a topic often avoided at child abuse conferences<sup>6</sup> or in MDT meetings<sup>7</sup> – even though there are literally hundreds of research articles documenting the critical importance of spirituality for most of the children we work with.<sup>8</sup> This silence is even more troubling considering the frequency with which many perpetrators incorporate religious or spiritual themes into the abuse of children.<sup>9</sup>

Our reluctance to address spiritual issues inhibits our ability to interview and to otherwise work with children competently. This is because, for many children, the damage done to their spirituality is the overriding block that prevents them from disclosing or otherwise accessing needed services.<sup>10</sup>

This article offers several diverse definitions of spirituality in an attempt to highlight how complex the concept is. The article also includes an overview of the importance of spirituality for most children, the impact of child maltreatment on a child’s spirituality, and the role spirituality plays in coping with abuse. To assist MDTs in using this research in actual cases, there is a concrete description of six types of spiritual blocks that may impair a child’s ability to disclose

abuse. This is followed with a handful of concrete suggestions for forensic interviewers in assisting a victim in overcoming these blocks during an investigative interview. Finally, the article includes recommendations for MDTs in assisting a child in overcoming spiritual injuries or otherwise meeting the child’s need for spiritual development.

### Defining spirituality

The Oxford American Dictionary defines spirituality as “relating to religion or religious belief; relating to, or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.”<sup>11</sup> In one study, survivors of sexual abuse were asked to define the term “spirituality.” Fifty-nine percent of these survivors described spirituality as being connected or in a relationship with God or a higher power.<sup>12</sup> Twenty two percent of the survivors defined spirituality as being in touch with one’s true self or “feeling health in their soul.”<sup>13</sup>

Although typically thought of as pertaining to a relationship with God, spirituality means a great many things. According to some scholars:

Just saying the word can evoke strong reactions. For some, it connects with a deep reality, commitment, and set of practices that are grounded in thousands of years of tradition and divine revelation. For others, it evokes something new and creative—a corrective to the stodginess and rigidity of religion as they see it. To still others, it is a trendy catchphrase with little substance.<sup>14</sup>

## UP COMING conferences

### Child Abuse and the Law – An Online Seminar

January 25, 2011

Registration fee: None

Registrants will have the opportunity to develop a Child Abuse and the Law course curriculum for a law school in their region; the seminar will explore the Child Abuse and the Law course that is offered at Hamline University School of Law. Up to twenty law professors, with experience prosecuting civil or criminal child abuse cases, will congregate in an online meeting.

### Seminary Curriculum: When Faith Hurts

February 21, 2011

Winona, MN

Registration fee: None

Faith seminary representatives are welcome to apply and take part in a one day summit to learn the seminary curriculum already developed by NCPTC – *When Faith Hurts: The Role of the Faith Community in Recognizing and Responding to Cases of Child Abuse*. After the conference, NCPTC will continue to work with the attendees to implement the curriculum at their respective faith seminaries. Ten selected seminaries will be able to attend. Most expenses will be reimbursed to the attendees.

Please visit [www.ncptc.org](http://www.ncptc.org) for more information and to register for courses. Click on **Training Conferences**.



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## The importance of spirituality to children – particularly to vulnerable children

Whatever the precise definition, research documents that spirituality is of critical importance to most children. Indeed, a “growing body of theoretical and research literature suggests that spiritual development is an intrinsic part of being human.”<sup>15</sup> Research from UCLA’s Higher Education Research institute found that 77% of college freshman believed “we are all spiritual beings.”<sup>16</sup> Eighty percent of these freshmen said they had an “interest” in spirituality.<sup>17</sup> Some studies suggest spirituality may be particularly important to vulnerable children. In a study of 149 youth in an institutional care setting, 86% of these children considered themselves spiritual or somewhat spiritual.<sup>18</sup> As an example of the importance spirituality plays for some vulnerable youth, a teenage survivor of the sex industry told a journalist “I admit that I’m still struggling, even after six months away from the business...Because I dropped out of school I have few career options...Yet I know what God wants for me. I need to be healed.”<sup>19</sup>

## The impact of child abuse on spirituality

There are a number of studies documenting the impact of abuse on spirituality. For example, a study of 527 victims of child abuse (physical, sexual or emotional) found a significant “spiritual injury” such as feelings of guilt, anger, grief, despair, doubt, fear of death, and

belief that God is unfair.<sup>20</sup> The same study, though, found survivors of childhood abuse report praying more frequently and having a “spiritual experience.”<sup>21</sup>

When the perpetrator is a member of the clergy, the impact on the victim’s spirituality may be even more pronounced. Clergy abusers often use their religion to justify or excuse their sexual abuse of children. According to one study, clergy in treatment for sexually abusing children believed that God would particularly look after the children they had victimized and otherwise keep them from harm.<sup>22</sup> Through their religious role, these offenders also engaged in “compensatory behavior” and believed that their good works in the community would result in God excusing their moral lapses with children.<sup>23</sup>

The religious cover used by clergy abusers is often communicated to the victims in a manner that irreparably damages their spirituality. Specifically, church attendance of these survivors decreases, they are less likely to trust God, and their relationship with God often ceases to grow.<sup>24</sup>

## The use of spirituality in the abuse of children

Not only does child maltreatment impact a child’s spirituality, perpetrators often use spiritual or religious themes in the maltreatment of children. In a study of 3,952 male sex offenders, 93% of these perpetrators described themselves as “religious.”<sup>25</sup> There is some evidence that “religious” sex offenders may be the most dangerous category of offenders. One study found that sex offenders maintaining significant involvement with religious institutions “had more sexual offense convictions, more victims, and younger victims.”<sup>26</sup>

Law enforcement officers and child protection workers have worked many cases where spiritual concepts are used in the maltreatment of a child. In one case, a protestant minister instructed young parents to spank even infants with a dowel rod and insisted that doing so was mandated by scripture. As the children grew, the parents continued to reinforce the belief that the physical abuse was sanctioned, even commanded by God.<sup>27</sup> In a highly publicized case, Father Lawrence Murphy sexually abused as many as 200 deaf or hard of hearing

boys and often used spiritual language or religious concepts in the abuse. For example, he told one victim that “God wanted him to teach the boy about sex but that he had to keep it quiet because it was under the sacrament of confession.”<sup>28</sup>

## The role of spirituality in coping with abuse

Some researchers have found that a victim’s “spiritual coping behavior” may play either a positive or negative role in the survivor’s ability to cope with the abuse and with life in general.<sup>29</sup> Victims of severe abuse may remain “stuck” in their spiritual development such as remaining angry with God. Children abused at younger ages are “less likely to turn to God and others for spiritual support.”<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, even victims describing a difficult relationship with God “still rely on their spirituality for healing.” Victims who experience “greater resolution” of their childhood abuse are able to “actively turn to their spirituality to cope...rather than attempt to cope on their own.”<sup>31</sup>

## Spirituality-Based Blocks

The spiritual harm resulting from child abuse may pose several blocks inhibiting the child from disclosing the abuse during a forensic interview. These blocks can be placed into at least six different categories.

*Perpetrator induced.* The perpetrator may manipulate a child’s faith in such a way as to convince the child that he or she is sinful. If a child has been taught that sexual conduct, even sexual thoughts are sinful,<sup>32</sup> the perpetrator may cite a child’s biological reaction as proof the child is just as sinful, if not more so, than the perpetrator. A child growing up in a church teaching that homosexual conduct is sinful<sup>33</sup> may be told by the perpetrator “You see how your pee gets big when I touch it? You’re gay. The pastor will condemn you if you ever talk about it.”

A child’s emotional reactions to maltreatment can also be manipulated. In one case, for example, a child recounted how she taught herself to initiate sexual contact with her father as a means of “getting it over with.” Manipulated by her father, the child came to believe that her initiation of sexual conduct was sinful and that, even worse, she was causing her father to sin.<sup>34</sup>

*Child induced.* Even if a perpetrator does not manipulate a child's faith as a means of keeping the secret, the child's own analysis of church doctrine may result in a block preventing disclosure. I once worked with a thirteen-year-old victim who was abused for several years by a man in the neighborhood. The child told me the reason she didn't disclose the abuse for years is because, in her faith tradition, all sexual contact outside of marriage is sinful. Accordingly, she was convinced her parents and her church leaders would condemn her to the same extent as the perpetrator. In another case, a seven year old child asked the forensic interviewer "Am I still a virgin in God's eyes?"<sup>35</sup> A survivor of clergy abuse reported she concluded God must be allowing the abuse in order to make her a saint and was certain that, eventually, the church would reward her if she patiently endured her suffering.<sup>36</sup>

*Doctrinal induced.* In many instances a child may correctly understand a church doctrine and that doctrine makes it difficult to disclose. An adult survivor once told me he was sure he was doomed to hell because he could not forgive his father. The survivor cited scriptural references of the need to forgive even horrendous wrongs<sup>37</sup> and said that, try as he might, he simply could not forgive the torture he endured at the hands of his father.

*Institution induced.* Sadly, many institutions of faith are more interested in addressing the spiritual needs of perpetrators than they are victims of abuse.<sup>38</sup> If a popular member of a congregation is accused of molesting a child, it is predictable that many members of the congregation will support the perpetrator.<sup>39</sup> Even if a perpetrator confesses to the crime, many faith leaders will urge reconciliation between the perpetrator and the child.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, many perpetrators count on the church's support. In the words of one child molester:

I considered church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians...They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people...I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words.<sup>41</sup>

The church's subtle, or not so subtle support of perpetrators may prevent children from disclosing or even cause children who have disclosed to recant.<sup>42</sup> A child victim, noting that both of her pastors and all of the church elders were supporting the father she accused of molesting her, asked me boldly, "does this mean God is against me, too?"<sup>43</sup>

*Religious leader induced.* Numerous studies document that, when a faith leader is the perpetrator of abuse, the damage to the victim's psyche is particularly pronounced.<sup>44</sup> For example, a victim of abuse by her priest reported that, given the importance of the Eucharist in her Catholic faith tradition, being abused by her priest was akin to being sexually touched by Christ.<sup>45</sup>

*Interviewer induced.* Sometimes, the forensic interviewer's lack of comfort with a child's spirituality may cause a block. We once had a case called into our Center involving an eleven-year-old boy who was going to participate in a religious ceremony in which he drank poison and picked up venomous snakes. This family, including the child, took literally the verse from scripture that those with a strong faith can drink poison or be bitten by poisonous snakes without being harmed.<sup>46</sup> An interviewer offended by this practice who communicates this feeling to the child may unwittingly cause the child to shut down during the interview. It doesn't have to be such an unusual case for an interviewer to cause a block. A law enforcement officer, who described himself as an atheist, reported that he was very uncomfortable with spiritual issues and would have difficulty working with a child who spoke freely of religious themes.<sup>47</sup> Given the officer's strong feelings, he was legitimately concerned about the possibility of unwittingly communicating his lack of comfort with a child expressing spiritual thoughts and thus causing a block to disclosure.

In overcoming spiritual blocks, the interviewer and the multi-disciplinary team may wish to consider the following suggestions for addressing this issue before, during, and after the forensic interview.

## Before the forensic interview

### *Look for clues*

Prior to conducting a forensic interview, the investigative team should closely scrutinize the report triggering the investigation and/or interview. In scrutinizing the report, look for clues suggesting there may be a spirituality-based block. For example, the child's initial disclosure may reflect his or her spirituality through statements such as "I think God is mad at me."

In addition to the child's previous statements, examine the setting the alleged abuse took place as well as any reference to a possible perpetrator. If the setting was inside a religious institution or the possible perpetrator is a member of the clergy or is otherwise associated with a religious institution, the chances for a spirituality based block are greater.

Even if the alleged perpetrator is not associated with the faith community and the abuse did not take place inside a religious institution, there may be other clues in the initial report suggesting the possibility of a spirituality-based block. For example, if the child attends a school affiliated with a faith tradition it is likely that prayer and other religious practices are a significant part of the child's daily experience. Many times, particularly in small communities,<sup>48</sup> the investigative team may know something of the child's religious practices. The team, for example, may know if a given child attends a particular church or participates in other religious activities. Even so, this is only an indicator, since the interviewer will not know how these religious activities or doctrines may have impacted a particular child or how a particular perpetrator may have manipulated these doctrines.





In one case, a father stood up during a charismatic church service and boldly confessed sexually abusing his girls. The pastor then asked the children to stand up and “confess” their role in this sexual activity. The pastor then pronounced God’s forgiveness on all the family members and instructed them to never again speak of the subject or risk the judgment of God. Although the children did not speak of the abuse, some members of the congregation were uncomfortable and reported the incident to law enforcement. In such a scenario, the officers knew even before the forensic interview that one or more of the victims may have a spiritual block. In this case, the children may fear damnation if they disclosed the abuse.<sup>49</sup>

#### *Select an appropriate setting for the interview*

If at all possible, the child should be interviewed in a children’s advocacy center<sup>50</sup> or another child friendly facility. In some jurisdictions, it may be necessary to conduct an emergency or preliminary interview at a child’s school, day care or home. Be cognizant, though, that if the child has a spirituality based block, and the setting for the interview is rooted in a faith tradition, overcoming the block may be more difficult. For example, a child believing God is angry with her over the abuse may have a more difficult time disclosing abuse in a church-affiliated school or even a home filled with religious symbols.

To illustrate this concern, consider this statement from a young victim: “When daddy does sex to me I feel sad. . . My Mister Jesus he just watched and he didn’t make it stop.”<sup>51</sup> For a child with this potential block, that is, concerned that Jesus “watched” the abuse and failed to intervene, it may be particularly difficult to be interviewed in a class room or home with a picture of Jesus prominently displayed. Such an image may remind the child that Jesus failed to protect the child in the past – and may fail to protect her in the future.

For the same reason, it may be wise for the interviewer to avoid wearing a cross necklace or other religious ornament during the interview. In one case, a child was sexually abused in a Christian boarding school and the perpetrator told her to “focus on the cross” on the wall during the abuse. Needless to say, the child soon associated religious symbols with sexual abuse.<sup>52</sup> Some child abuse victims have reported being gravely uncomfortable not only with religious symbols but religious language that in any way reminds them of their perpetrators.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Research uncommon religious practices*

If the report pertains to an uncommon religious practice, such as a ritual where a child may consume poison or be bitten by poisonous snakes,<sup>54</sup> the interviewer may want to conduct some preliminary research or otherwise find out as much as possible about this practice prior to the interview. In this way, the interviewer is less likely to act shocked at potential revelations during the interview or to otherwise signal his/her ignorance of a practice that, to the child, is likely quite normal.

### **During the interview**

#### *Be alert for signs of a spiritual block*

In some instances, the child may boldly say or do something in the forensic interview that reveals a potential spiritual block to disclosure. In one interview, for example, a young girl boldly asked the interviewer “Am I still a virgin in God’s eyes?”<sup>55</sup>

In other instances, the dynamics of the abuse itself may alert the interviewer to the potentiality of a spiritual block. Consider, for example, the plight of a young girl who was molested repeatedly after being required to recite her bedtime prayers. To such a girl, the feeling that God could not, or would not protect her from harm was particularly pronounced.<sup>56</sup> To this feeling was added shame when her father inquired “Why are you such a whore that you make me do this after we have prayed?”<sup>57</sup>

#### *Be liberal in offering reassurance*

One of the block removing techniques taught in the CornerHouse and ChildFirst forensic interviewing courses<sup>58</sup> is to offer a child “reassurance.” This can be as simple as reminding the child “You’re not in any trouble with me”, “this is a safe place”, or perhaps to go as far as saying “you know, I talk to lots of boys (or girls). No matter what happened, it’s not your fault.”

#### *Avoid minimizing the importance of spirituality*

Given the importance of spiritual healing to many child abuse victims,<sup>59</sup> it is imperative that the interviewer avoid minimizing the importance of the child’s spirituality. If an interviewer is uncomfortable with a child’s religious practices or expressions of faith and in some way communicates these feelings to the child, the child may shut down.

Though it is unlikely that interviewers would intentionally demean a child’s spirituality, this may be done unwittingly. In one case, for example, the interviewer was closing the interview by giving the child some personal safety messages. Specifically, the child was asked who she could tell if she were touched inappropriately. The child responded “I can tell Jesus.” The interviewer then asked “who can you tell on earth?” The child became frustrated and replied that Jesus is still on the earth. After all, the Bible specifically promises that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them.”<sup>60</sup> A better response would simply be to ask “who else can you tell?”

#### *Assure the child that someone will help him/her address spiritual questions*

If a child asks the forensic interviewer a religious question (i.e. “Am I still a virgin in God’s eyes?”), the interviewer must in some way acknowledge the question. Until the child’s question is acknowledged, if not fully addressed, it may be difficult to continue the interview.

At the same time, it is important not to delve too deeply when responding to a child’s spiritual question. Though well-meaning, an interviewer may not fully appreciate important nuances in a child’s question. A better approach is to ask the question back to the child (i.e. “what makes you wonder about being a virgin in God’s eyes?”) and thus obtain more information as to the source of this block. When asked the question back, the child may disclose that her father explained that her biological reaction during the abuse meant she “enjoyed” the encounter and thus would be condemned in the church for having lost her virginity. Perhaps the child is worried about a Sunday School lesson impressing upon her the command to remain a virgin until married. Obtaining details of the source of the block will assist the interviewer, and the team, in addressing the child’s concern.

If the child insists on an answer, the interviewer may want to inform the child that she has asked an important question and that he will make sure someone sits down with the child and fully answers the question. Again, an interviewer attempting to answer difficult spiritual questions may unwittingly offend the child by failing to understand nuances of her faith tradition. Moreover, many spiritual questions are also mental health issues that need to be explored in greater depth by a well-trained mental health professional. For example, a child inquiring whether God is mad at her may have a spiritual question, and may also have feelings of guilt that need to be addressed in therapy.

### After the interview

Once the interview is complete, the forensic interviewer must bring to the attention of the multi-disciplinary team the spiritual questions, concerns or blocks raised during the interview. The team must develop a plan to address the child's spiritual injury just as the team would develop a plan to address the physical and emotional damage done to the child. When selecting a therapist, for example, seek a therapist with specific knowledge and experience in counseling child abuse victims and who shares the child's faith tradition or is otherwise familiar enough with the child's faith tradition to be sensitive in addressing the child's spiritual needs.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, respecting a child's religious beliefs and practices in placement, and otherwise selecting culturally appropriate treatment or services is required by law in most states.<sup>62</sup> It may also be helpful to have one or more members of the faith community on the multi-disciplinary team who can recommend spiritual resources that may assist the child.<sup>63</sup>

The team should also consider the value of spirituality in helping the child cope with the rigors of testifying or of separation from family. As mentioned earlier, many victims rebel against the authority of the church, but nonetheless pray regularly or report having spiritual experiences.<sup>64</sup> In one case, a prosecutor was accompanying a child abuse victim into the courtroom to testify against the man who molested her. The girl tugged on the prosecutor's skirt and whispered "can we pray before I go in?"<sup>65</sup> In such a scenario, a culturally sensitive response would be to tell the child yes but ask her to say the prayer. In this way, the

prosecutor can avoid saying anything that may be culturally offensive to the child. Moreover, in listening to the child's prayer, the prosecutor may learn exactly what is most frightening to the child at that moment and be able to address it. For example, if the child prays "please don't let the defense attorney yell at me", the prosecutor should be vigilant in objecting to the raising of voices in the courtroom.

If the child has a positive relationship with a pastor or some other member of a faith tradition, the team may want to consider utilizing this individual as a support person for the child at trial and to assist the child in praying or otherwise accessing God or some other source of spiritual comfort as part of her recovery. It is important, though, that the MDT make sure that the faith leader has some training on child abuse. Although most faith leaders would not intentionally hurt a child, many have unwittingly been insensitive to the needs of survivors.<sup>66</sup>

Given the large number of vulnerable children reporting the importance of spirituality in their lives,<sup>67</sup> the team should consider a culturally sensitive approach to nurturing this aspect – at least for those children expressing this desire. How this will be done may vary greatly depending on the child's definition of and expressed need for spiritual growth,<sup>68</sup> but the ability of the team to address this issue may have a profound impact on the child's life. In a literature review of 500 academic articles on "organic religion"<sup>69</sup>, one scholar concluded that various components of spirituality reduced the risks of depression, suicide, promiscuous sexual behaviors, alcohol and drug usage, and delinquency.<sup>70</sup> Equally important the reviewer noted research documenting "organic religion's association with a variety of prosocial factors, such as longevity, civic engagement, well-being, and educational attainment."<sup>71</sup>

There are a number of resources available to assist the team in addressing a child's long term needs for spiritual growth, in whatever manner the child may express this need.<sup>72</sup>

### Conclusion

Spirituality is deeply rooted in many, if not most aspects of our society.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that child abuse often causes lasting damage to a child's sense of spirituality. Unfortunately,

the child protection community has largely focused on addressing only the child's physical and emotional damage – leaving many victims to struggle alone with their desire for spiritual development or assistance in coping with their abuse.

For these children, and for our profession, we can do better.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>This article was originally published in two parts by the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse as part of their newsletter UPDATE (volume 20, issues 6 & 7). This article includes additional studies and cases that have been released since the original article appeared in 2007. NCPTC is grateful to the National District Attorney's Association for allowing us to publish this revised and expanded version of the original article.

<sup>2</sup>Director, NDAA's Child Abuse Programs (National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse and National Child Protection Training Center at Winona State University). The author thanks Kerri Trom, paralegal student from Winona State University, for her research assistance. The author also thanks Jackie Heard, Mike Johnson, Rachel Mitchell, Anne Lukas-Miller, Amy Russell, and Stephanie Smith for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>3</sup>DIANE LANGBERG, PH.D., ON THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE 131 (1999).

<sup>4</sup>See generally, ROBIN KARR-MORSE & MEREDITH S. WILEY, GHOSTS FROM THE NURSERY: TRACING THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE (1997).

<sup>5</sup>See generally, Victor I. Vieth, *In My Neighbor's House*, 22 HAMLIN LAW REVIEW 143 (1998).

<sup>6</sup>This may be changing. Since the original publication of this article in 2007, the National Children's Alliance, the National Children's Advocacy Center, and the National District Attorney's Association have invited me to speak at their national conferences on this subject. The National Child Protection Training Center has also included this topic at its national conferences and at a number of state child abuse conferences.

<sup>7</sup>There is some improvement among members of the multi-disciplinary team. The medical community, for example, has long recognized the importance of spirituality and has made chapel and chaplains available for patients seeking this assistance. There is even a national healthcare chaplains association. See [www.hcmachaplains.org](http://www.hcmachaplains.org) (last visited January 9, 2011). In the field of psychology, most mental health professionals reject the view of Sigmund Freud that a spiritual worldview distorts "the picture of he real world in a delusional manner" and forcibly fixes people "in a state of psychical infantilism." DR. ARMAND M. NICHOLI, JR., THE QUESTION OF GOD: C.S. LEWIS AND SIGMUND FREUD DEBATE GOD, LOVE, SEX, AND THE MEANING OF LIFE 38 (2002).

<sup>8</sup>George Bernard Shaw criticized "polite conversation" for excluding the only two topics he considered worth discussing—politics and religion. DON W. KING (ED), OUT OF MY BONE: THE LETTERS OF JOY DAVIDMAN (2009).

<sup>9</sup>See notes 20-28 and accompanying text.

<sup>10</sup>See generally, PETER L. BENSON, EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, & KATHRYN L. HONG (EDS), NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (2008); KAREN MARIE YUST, AOSTRE N. JOHNSON, SANDY EISENBERG SASSO, & EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, NURTURING CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SPIRITUALITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (2006)

<sup>11</sup>THE OXFORD AMERICAN DICTIONARY P. 1664 (2001).

<sup>12</sup>Joanette Roberston, *Spirituality and Religion in Sexual Abuse Survivors* (May 10, 2006) (unpublished article on file with the National Child Protection Training Center).

<sup>13</sup>Id.

<sup>14</sup>Peter L. Benson & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Spiritual Development: A Missing Priority in Youth Development*, in PETER L. BENSON, EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, & KATHRYN L. HONG, NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 13 (2008).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 14 (citations omitted).  
<sup>16</sup> *Id.* (citations omitted).  
<sup>17</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 14-15.  
<sup>19</sup> PHILIP YANCEY, WHAT GOOD IS GOD? 73-74 (2010).  
<sup>20</sup> Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincelle, & Penk, *The Long Term Impact of Child Abuse on Religious Behavior and Spirituality in Men*, 22(5) CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 369, 376-377 (1998).  
<sup>21</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>22</sup> Adam Saradjian & Dany Nobus, *Cognitive Distortions of Religious Professionals Who Sexually Abuse Children*, 18 J. OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 905, 918 (2003).  
<sup>23</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>24</sup> Barbara R. McLaughlin, *Devastated Spirituality: The Impact of Clergy Sexual Abuse on the Survivor's Relationship with God*, 1(2) SEXUAL ADDICTION & COMPULSIVITY (1994).  
<sup>25</sup> GENE ABEL & NORA HARLOW, THE STOP CHILD MOLESTATION BOOK (2001).  
<sup>26</sup> Donna Eshuys & Stephen Smallbone, *Religious Affiliations Among Adult Sexual Offenders*, 18 SEX ABUSE 279 (2006); see also, Philip Firestone, et al, *Clerics Who Commit Sexual Offenses: Offense, Offense, and Victim Characteristics*, 18 JOURNAL OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE 442 (2009).  
<sup>27</sup> This was a case NCPTC consulted on. For a further exploration of the issue of physical abuse rooted in religious doctrine, see Christina M. Rodriguez & Ryan C. Henderson, *Who Spares the Rod? Religious Orientation, Social Conformity, and Child Abuse Potential*, 34 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 84 (2010).  
<sup>28</sup> Laurie Goodstein, *Vatican Declined to Defrock U.S. Priest Who Abused Boys*, NEW YORK TIMES, March 26, 2010.  
<sup>29</sup> Terry Lynn Gall, *Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 30 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 829 (2006).  
<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 838.  
<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 839.  
<sup>32</sup> Jesus told his followers: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:28 (NIV).  
<sup>33</sup> See generally, Anonymous, *The Road to Healing*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (April 2007) 56 (author is a married man who details his sexual attraction to men and the difficulties he has had in receiving counseling from conservative churches). There is research suggesting that, for male child sexual abuse survivors, "confusion about sexual orientation is a frequently reported and major negative consequence of their sexual history" and that "most men who have been sexually abused fear they are homosexual, and homosexual men wonder if the abuse made them gay." Maryam Kia-Keating, Frances K. Grossman, Lynn Sorsoli, *Containing and Resisting Masculinity: Narratives of Renegotiation Among Resilient Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 6(3) PSYCHOLOGY OF MEN & MASCULINITY 169, 179 (2005).  
<sup>34</sup> This is an account an adult survivor related to me.  
<sup>35</sup> This example is drawn from a case called into the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse.  
<sup>36</sup> This anecdote was shared with NCPTC by the survivor herself.  
<sup>37</sup> Jesus warned his followers "if you do not forgive men their sins your father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:15 (NIV).  
<sup>38</sup> In a survey of 2,864 church leaders, 79% said that convicted sex offenders should be allowed to attend church "subject to appropriate limitations." Marian V. Liautaud, *Integrating Sex Offenders at Church*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (posted online 12/5/10). However, 5% said that convicted sex offenders should be allowed to attend church with no limitations and under no supervision. As a reflection of how many sex offenders attend church, 20% of the church leaders said they knew of a convicted sex offender who was attending or was a

member of their church. Marian V. Liautaud, *Sex Offenders: Coming to a Church Near You*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (posted online 10/25/10).  
<sup>39</sup> Victor Vieth, *Keeping the Faith: A Call for Collaboration Between the Faith and Child Protection Communities*, 947, 949 in COOPER, ESTES, GIARDINO, KELLOGG, & VIETH, MEDICAL, LEGAL, & SOCIAL SCIENCE ASPECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (2005).  
<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 949-950.  
<sup>41</sup> ANNA C. SALTER, PH.D. PREDATORS 29 (2005).  
<sup>42</sup> The support of a faith institution for a perpetrator may also prevent parents from reporting to the authorities once a child has disclosed to them. These contradictory messages may further confuse a child.  
<sup>43</sup> This was a case I handled as a prosecutor.  
<sup>44</sup> See notes 20-28 and accompanying text.  
<sup>45</sup> This is another anecdote shared with NCPTC by a survivor. For an analysis of sexual offenders within the Catholic church, see Kathryn A. Dale & Judith L. Alpert, *Hiding Behind the Cloth: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, 16 JOURNAL OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE 59 (2007).  
<sup>46</sup> Mark 16:17-18 (NIV): "In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up snakes with their hands, and when they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them at all..."  
<sup>47</sup> This was a conversation NCPTC had with an officer trained in one of our classes.  
<sup>48</sup> For an overview of conducting an MDT investigation in small communities, see Victor I. Vieth, *In My Neighbor's House*, 22 HAMLIN LAW REVIEW 143 (1998).  
<sup>49</sup> This was a case NCPTC consulted on.  
<sup>50</sup> For an excellent overview of the history of Children's Advocacy Centers and the strong research supporting this model, see Nancy Chandler, *Children's Advocacy Centers: Making a Difference One Child at a Time*, 28 HAMLIN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC LAW & POLICY 315 (2006).  
<sup>51</sup> DIANE MANDT LANGBERG, PH.D., ON THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE 131 (1999).  
<sup>52</sup> This is an anecdote shared with NCPTC.  
<sup>53</sup> See generally, CHRISTA BROWN, THIS LITTLE LIGHT (2009).  
<sup>54</sup> Some years ago, the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse provided technical assistance to a child protection team responding to a report that an 11 year old boy was scheduled to participate in a "snake handling" religious service in which the child would drink strychnine poison and be bitten by water moccasins.  
<sup>55</sup> This is a case that was called into the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse.  
<sup>56</sup> Diane Langberg, *The Spiritual Impact of Abuse*, available in the "articles" section of the following web site: <http://www.netgrace.org>  
<sup>57</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>58</sup> For an overview of the CornerHouse and *Finding Words* interviewing programs, see Victor I. Vieth, *Unto the Third Generation: A Call to End Child Abuse in the United States Within 120 Years (Revised and Expanded)*, 28 HAMLIN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC LAW & POLICY 1, 21-29 (2006); Jennifer Anderson, et al, *The CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol RATAAC*, 12 THE THOMAS M. COOLEY JOURNAL OF PRACTICAL AND CLINICAL LAW 193 (2010).  
<sup>59</sup> See generally, LANGBERG, note 2, and DIANE MANDT LANGBERG, PH.D., COUNSELING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE (2005).  
<sup>60</sup> Matthew 18:20 (NIV).  
<sup>61</sup> For suggestions on selecting a counselor that may assist in addressing the child's spiritual injury, see DIANE MANDT LANGBERG, PH.D., ON THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE 191-196 (1999).  
<sup>62</sup> See e.g. FLA. STAT. § 409.175 (requirement to safeguard the "cultural, religious, and ethnic values of a child"); MICH. COMP. LAWS § 722.23 (citing as one factor in determining custody the ability of the parties continue the "raising of the child in

his or her religion or creed"); MONT. CODE ANN. § 41-3-101 (stating it is the policy of Montana to "ensure that whenever removal of a child from the home is necessary, the child is entitled to maintain ethnic, cultural, and religious heritage wherever possible").  
<sup>63</sup> See generally, GERARD J. MCGLONE, ET AL., CREATING SAFE AND SACRED PLACES: IDENTIFYING, PREVENTING, AND HEALING SEXUAL ABUSE (2003).  
<sup>64</sup> See Terry Lynn Gall, *Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 30 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 829 (2006). See also, Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincelle, & Penk, *The Long Term Impact of Child Abuse on Religious Behavior and Spirituality in Men*, 22(5) CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 369, 376-377 (1998).  
<sup>65</sup> This is a case a prosecutor in California shared with me.  
<sup>66</sup> For example, a girl disclosed sexual abuse to her Rabbi but was told he didn't believe her and failed to connect her eating disorder with a possible history of sexual abuse. The child abandoned her faith in God but now, as an adult, is attempting to re-connect with her "spiritual identity." Vicki Polin, *Throw Away Children of God?*, [www.examiner.com](http://www.examiner.com) (December 29, 2010) (last visited December 30, 2010). As another example, a prosecutor told NCPTC of a case in which a pastor argued for a lenient sentence because the defendant had now been "saved." These comments were deeply hurtful to the victim.  
<sup>67</sup> Benson, note 12, at 13.  
<sup>68</sup> See generally, KAREN MARIE YUST, AOSTRE N. JOHNSON, SANDY EISENBERG SASSO, & EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, NURTURING CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SPIRITUALITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (2006).  
<sup>69</sup> The researchers define organic religion as "practiced over time, such as with children who were raised and nurtured in religious homes." Peter L. Benson & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Spiritual Development: A Missing Priority in Youth Development*, in PETER L. BENSON, EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, & KATHRYN L. HONG, NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 13 (2008) citing B.R. Johnson, *A Tale of Two Religious Effects: Evidence for the Protective and Prosocial Impact of Organic Religion*, in KLINE (ED), AUTHORITY COMMUNITIES: THE SCIENTIFIC CASE FOR NURTURING THE WHOLE CHILD 187-226 (2008).  
<sup>70</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>71</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>72</sup> See e.g., PETER L. BENSON, EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, & KATHRYN L. HONG (EDS), NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (2008); KAREN MARIE YUST, AOSTRE N. JOHNSON, SANDY EISENBERG SASSO, & EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, NURTURING CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SPIRITUALITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (2006); DR. JAIME J. ROMO, HEALING THE SEXUALLY ABUSED HEART: A WORKBOOK FOR SURVIVORS, THRIVERS AND SUPPORTERS (2008); EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, BUILDING ASSETS IN CONGREGATIONS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR HELPING YOUTH GROW UP HEALTHY (1998); STEPHEN R. TRACY, MENDING THE SOUL: UNDERSTANDING AND HEALING ABUSE (2005); DIANE MANDT LANGBERG, PH.D., COUNSELING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE (2005); GERARD J. MCGLONE, ET AL., CREATING SAFE AND SACRED PLACES: IDENTIFYING, PREVENTING, AND HEALING SEXUAL ABUSE (2003).  
<sup>73</sup> See generally, JON MEACHAM, AMERICAN GOSPEL: GOD, THE FOUNDING FATHERS, AND THE MAKING OF A NATION (2006); Peter L. Benson & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Spiritual Development: A Missing Priority in Youth Development*, in PETER L. BENSON, EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN, & KATHRYN L. HONG, NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT 13-27 (2008).

## For More Information

The National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) at Winona State University provides training, technical assistance and publications to child protection professionals throughout the United States. In addition, NCPTC assists undergraduate and graduate programs seeking to improve the education provided to future child protection professionals. In partnership with CornerHouse, NCPTC also assists in the development and maintenance of forensic interview training programs utilizing the RATAAC® forensic interviewing protocol. For further information, contact NCPTC at 507-457-2890 or 651-714-4673. Please visit our website at [www.ncptc.org](http://www.ncptc.org).

