



# Where the Boys Are: Understanding and responding to trauma when the victim is a Male

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# Agenda

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- Case study
- Dynamics of male victimization
- Applying the research to case study
- The investigation
- Medical, mental health & spiritual care
- A trauma-informed courtroom

# Bobby's secret: A case study

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- After a personal safety lesson in school, Bobby tells Jemour, one of his first grade classmates, that “Mr. Joey does stuff like that.” When Jemour asks him to explain, Bobby discloses that “Mr. Joey touches my pee pee, and it sort of feels good.” Jemour tells Bobby that he should tell his parents, but Bobby says, “My Mom thinks boys getting touched by boys is a sin.” Jemour tells some other male classmates and a few start to tease Bobby, telling Bobby that he is gay.

## ...case study

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Eventually Jemour decides to tell their teacher, Molly Reynolds, about the disclosure. Ms. Reynolds makes a mandated report to child protective services and tells the intake screener that Bobby has an athletics instructor that everyone calls “Mr. Joey” and that the instructor’s full name is Joey McMaster. Mr. McMaster has been teaching gym classes for first through sixth grade boys for about 15 years. He is known as a very gregarious coach who goes out of his way to help children who are struggling. If a parent is unable to pick a child up after school, Mr. McMaster is always willing to help the parent with transportation or other needs.

## ...a case study

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Ms. Reynolds also tells the intake screener that Mr. McMaster is very religious. He goes to the same church as Bobby and volunteers for a camping ministry where he works with other boys. She knows that Bobby has camped with Mr. McMaster because Bobby brought pictures of the camping trip to school for show and tell. Ms. Reynolds says that Bobby's parents are divorced and that his mom is stressed out and working two jobs to make ends meet. She also shares that Bobby's dad is not very active in his son's life and that Bobby has no siblings.

# Dynamics of male victimization

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# Boys less likely to disclose than girls

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- A study of 487 adult male survivors of CSA found an average delay of 21.38 years before a partial disclosure
- Full disclosure delayed 28.23 years
  - Easton (2013)
- A delay of more than a year for boys increases mental health symptoms into adulthood.
  - O'Leary (2010)



# Dynamics that keep boys quiet

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Photo by Juan Mendez from Pexels



# Masculinity

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- “Given that the experience of [child sexual abuse] violates masculine norms such as self-protection, many [boys] felt weak, frightened, confused, or guilty around the time of the abuse.”
- As a result, boys choose not to discuss their abuse with others but employ strategies such as “toughing it out, being macho, remaining stoic, and handling it themselves.”
  - Easton (2013)

# Mistrust of others

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- Many boys do not disclose “because they [have] difficulty trusting others.”
- Of particular concern “to some survivors [is] the fear that disclosure [will] lead others to suspect them of becoming a future perpetrator or predator.”
- Not every boy assumes a negative reaction from others, but there is “a generalized concern over being unable to predict responses from others and the outcomes of disclosure” and this “fear of unknown consequences” keeps them from telling.
  - Easton (2013)

# Concerns about sexual orientation/identity

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- “Male survivors who self-identify as heterosexual are often fearful that others would use their abuse experiences as evidence of homosexuality.”
  - Easton (2013)
- Boys questioning their identify or are identifying as gay, bisexual or queer prior to abuse may encounter attitudes that discredit or minimize their sexual identity.
- A false assumption may be made that the abuse “caused” the child’s gay identity.
  - Russell (2022)

# The “God factor”

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- When abuser is a religious leader, significant risk a child will not disclose
- This is because “clergy members hold extraordinary power due to their social status...and the association between the abuser and the survivor’s faith in God.”
- As one survivor noted: “How can a man get raped, and by a priest, it’s the same as getting raped by God.”
  - Easton (2013)

# Spiritual impact of clergy abuse



Journal of Child Sexual Abuse

Routledge  
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ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wcsa20>

## An Exploratory Study on Mental Health, Social Problems and Spiritual Damage in Victims of Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy and Other Perpetrators

Noemí Pereda, Lorena Contreras Taibo, Anna Segura & Francisco Maffioletti Celedón

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To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2022.2080142>

- Victims of clergy CSA 4 times more likely to see their beliefs in God negatively impacted.
- This was a “significant predictor for experiencing most of the mental health and social problems analyzed.”
- These victims were more than twice as likely to have “suicidal phenomena”

# Safety & protection issues

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- Some males do not report out of fear that it “might jeopardize their own basic safety and security in terms of housing, employment, and physical well-being” or because they want to protect their family or others from “discomfort.”
- As one victim states, “I could not tell my parents because it would break their hearts. I’ll tell [others about the sexual abuse] when my parents are dead.”
  - Easton (2013)

# Past negative responses from others

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- If a boy attempts to disclose but has a negative response, they are more likely to remain silent.
- One survivor shared the he “tried to tell [his] father once, but he hit me.”
  - Easton (2013)



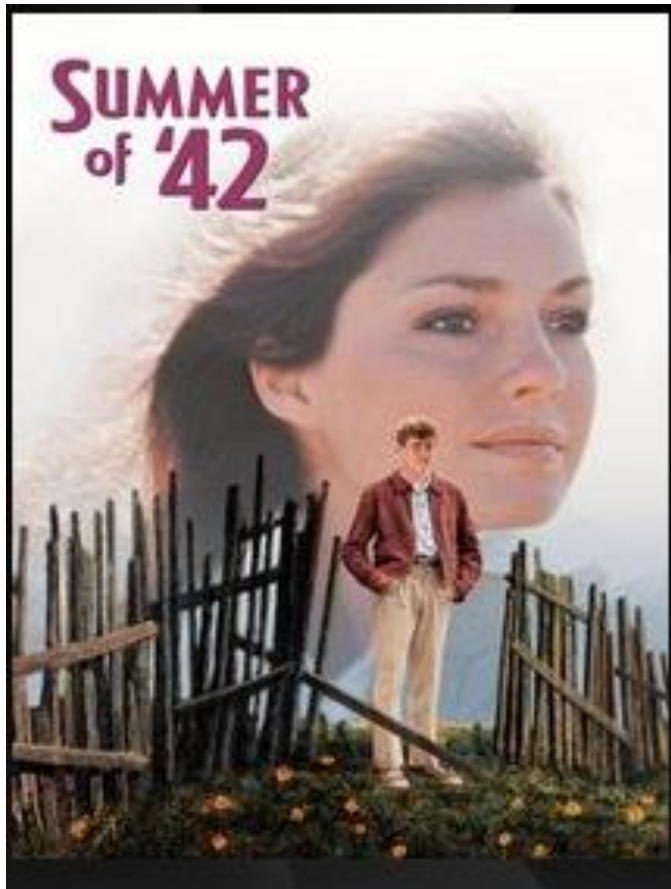
# Inability to name sexual abuse as “abuse”

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- Some boys are unable to “recognize childhood events as abusive.”
- One survivor referred to CSA as “just part of growing up.”
- Another survivor said “I wasn’t sure if it was actually abuse or not.”
  - Easton (2013)

# Another reason boys don't disclose

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# We make light of the sexual abuse of boys

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“Where were these teachers when I was in school?”

– Jay Leno

# Facilitators to a boy's disclosure

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- Parental or other support
- Public education (e.g. personal safety course)
- Adequate services for boys
  - Sivagurunathern (2019)

# The Forensic Interview of Bobby

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# Forensic Interview- male victims

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- Dynamics to consider
- Mistrust of adults (position of authority)
- Response from others (negative, shame)
- Pleasure/enjoyment of maltreatment
- How victimization may be perceived by others
- Affects on child's life
- Myth (gay)
- Weakness
- Spiritual impact of abuse

# The investigation of “Mr. Joey”

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Credit: Markus Winkler, Pexels



# Other victims

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- If Mr. Joey is a preferential sex offender attracted to pre-pubescent boys, there is potential to accumulate a large amount of victims.
  - Cross, et al (2022)
- Offenders operating in a religious community often accumulate large numbers of victims
  - Eshuys & Smallbone (2006)
- Work with Ms. Reynolds to find out who else the suspect has given rides to or spent inordinate amounts of time with
- Ask local CAC to do a prevention program for parents on speaking with their children about abuse

# Work with non-offending parent(s)

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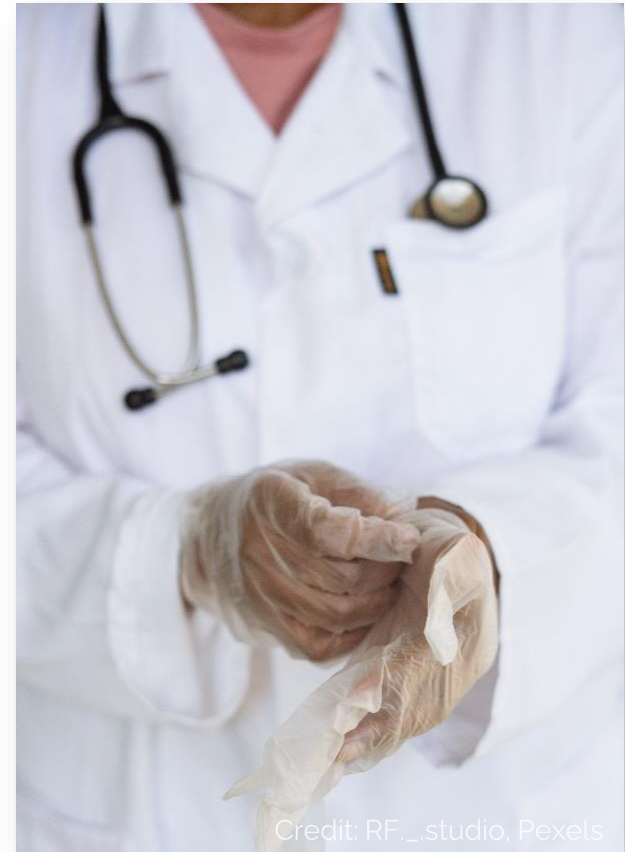


- Reaction of parents may range from anger to complete denial
  - Vaughan-Eden (2022)
- Suspect may also have groomed Bobby's mother (father is absent)
- Mother's opposition to same-sex behavior may create hardships

# Medical care for Bobby

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- Males may be particularly wary of medical exams
- Sensitivity at the outset is critical
- Prepare victim for position, “sound out” patient during exam
- Give victim as much power as possible (e.g. who will be present for exam).
  - Ayson (2022); Gallo-Silver (2014)



Credit: RF...studio, Pexels

# Mental health care for Bobby

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# Mental health care

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- Long delays in therapy may impact child negatively
- Therapist needs to be aware of dynamics unique to boys (e.g. concerns about weakness)
- Boys may be reluctant to label themselves as victims
- Trauma of victim but also family dynamics
- Potential value of addressing spiritual impact of trauma



# Spiritual care for Bobby

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# Spirituality and ACEs



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## **The Role of Religious Involvement in the Relationship Between Early Trauma and Health Outcomes Among Adult Survivors**

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# Spirituality & resilience



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Psychology of Violence

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## Divine Spiritual Struggles and Psychological Adjustment Among Adolescents Who Have Been Sexually Abused

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# Gower (2020)

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## Caregiver and divine support: Associations with resilience among adolescents following disclosure of sexual abuse

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**  
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Resilience  
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Caregiver support

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Social support is believed to be important for fostering adolescent resilience following sexual abuse. Caregiver support is often examined as a source of support for adolescents, but divine support (support from God or a higher power) has received scant research attention.

**Objective:** This study examines relations of caregiver support and divine support with resilience following adolescent sexual abuse.

**Participants and Setting:** Participants were 548 adolescents aged 11–17 ( $M_{age} = 13.78$ ; 91% female) and their non-offending caregivers ( $M_{age} = 39.68$ ; 79% mothers). Families were recruited from a children's advocacy center located in the southern United States following a disclosure of sexual abuse.

**Methods:** Adolescents completed measures of caregiver and divine support and their social and academic functioning; caregivers and adolescents reported on adolescent psychological func-

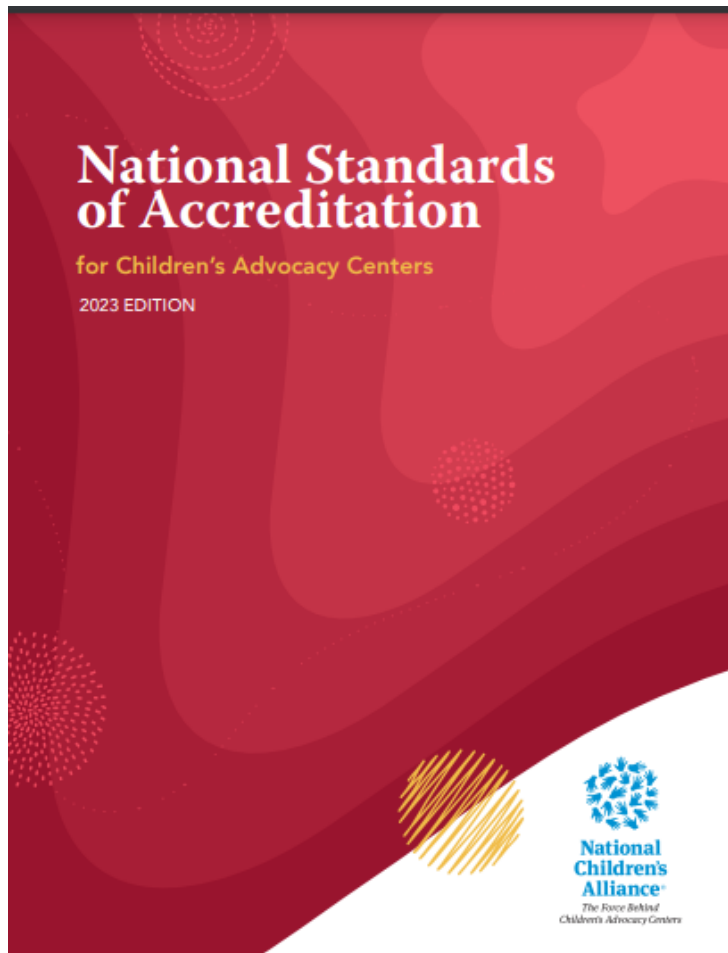
# If available, use CAC chaplain

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# NCA Standards of Accreditation

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“To effectively meet clients’ needs, the CAC and MDT must be willing and able to understand the clients’ worldviews, adapt practices as needed, and offer assistance in a manner in which it can be utilized. Striving toward culturally responsive services is an important and ongoing endeavor and an integral part of a CAC’s operations and service delivery.”

# A trauma-informed courtroom

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Source: Wikimedia Commons



# Pre-trial motions



## A Trauma-Informed Courtroom

Seven Pre-Trial Motions Child Abuse Prosecutors Should Routinely File<sup>1</sup>

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

### Introduction

Testifying in court is often stressful for children. Numerous studies document that children have very little, if any, understanding of legal processes.<sup>3</sup> The confusing, often intimidating environment of a courtroom is exacerbated when judges and attorneys ask questions the child cannot understand. Even worse, some attorneys purposely ask questions that will confuse the child. In one study, for example, two-thirds of the public defenders and one-third of the prosecutors admitted questioning children in a manner designed to confuse the child.<sup>4</sup>

To protect children from confusing, even abusive practices while testifying, and to facilitate testimony that is fair and accurate, there are seven pre-trial motions prosecutors should file in most, if not every, case of child maltreatment. Some of these "children's courtroom rights" have been codified into law in one or more states, but no state has codified all seven of these rights.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revision of an earlier article from the author entitled *A Courtroom Bill of Rights: Seven Pre-Trial Motions Prosecutors Should Routinely File in Cases of Child Maltreatment*, 102 *CENTERPIECE* (2008). The current article provides additional case law and statutory support and discusses the emerging trend of using a chaplain as a support person or as someone who can address the spiritual needs of maltreated children. The author is grateful to Zero Abuse Project legal externs Caralea Grant and Lauren Munday for their research assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Chief Program Officer for Education & Research, Zero Abuse Project

<sup>3</sup> Karen Saywitz, *Children's Conception of the Legal System: Court is a Place to Play Basketball*, *PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S TESTIMONY* 131-157 (Ceci, Ross, & Toglia eds., 1989); Karen Saywitz et al., *Children's Knowledge of Legal Terminology*, 14 *L. & HUM. BEHAV.* 523 (1990); Rebecca Nathanson & Karen J. Saywitz, *The Effects of Courtroom Context on Children's Memory and Anxiety*, 31 *J. PSYCHIATRY & THE LAW* 67 (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Leippe et al., *The Opinions and Practices of Criminal Attorneys Regarding Child Eyewitnesses: A Survey*, *PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S TESTIMONY* 110, 118 (Ceci, Ross, & Toglia eds., 1989). Recent research from New Zealand also found that "many defence solicitors use aggressive, misleading cross-examination and play on myths about child abuse to get their clients off". Emily Watt, *Courts fail child sex-abuse victims*, *THE DOMINION POST*, March 31, 2008, available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/dominionpost/44575298479.html](http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominionpost/44575298479.html) (last viewed April 20, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *People v. Totom*, 100 A.D.2d 253, 265-266 (2003) ("the clear mandate of [New York] Executive Law § 642-a is to render the judicial process less threatening to child victims who necessarily become engaged in that process. Hence, the statute sets out specific ways to accomplish its intended purpose, to wit, allowing children to testify via live, two-way closed-circuit television; permitting a person supportive of the 'child witness' to accompany the child witness, and allowing the child witness to use anatomically correct dolls and drawings during his [or her] testimony.") (internal citations omitted); *State v. Mills*, 391 P.3d 1225, 1234 (2017) ("Although § 13-4442 was not in effect at the time of Mills's trial, it shows the policy of the State of Arizona to accommodate crime victims' use of a dog").

- Developmentally appropriate oath
- Requiring questions child can understand
- Comfort item
- Modifying courtroom
- Day and time certain for testimony
- Explaining dynamics of male abuse to jurors

# “Till the night be passed”

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“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to act is to act.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer