



## The Awareness Center, Inc.

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### "How It's Been Done . . ."

## Emergency Wake Up Call to Our Community Leaders

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What do you do when after centuries of handling a problem a certain way, it becomes obvious that it doesn't work? This is the situation our rabbis and other community leaders are facing when it comes to child abuse.

The Awareness Center has no intention to cast stones at those who didn't know better and were not educated on what the long term ramifications of abuse are for victims/survivors. Rather, our intention is to help our communities make the needed changes, now that we all can and do know better. We need to change the way we handle child abuse. **THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. WE NEED TO DO IT TODAY.** Our children do not have the time for us to form committees to investigate the problem—we already know what the problem is. We already know what needs to be changed.

To date, when children bravely disclose abuse, they are NOT being protected. When it comes to OUR children's safety, our religious leaders are still failing, most for lack of information and understanding, but this can change. It will change if we all work together to put our children—our future—first.

It's sad that it took exposure through the news media to wake up our communities to this deep dark secret—childhood sexual abuse happens in Jewish communities around the world. Even sadder is the realization that the majority of our community leaders do NOT have the training or education on how to protect our children. All too often when children disclosed and there were cover-ups, the response from our leaders was: "This is how it's been done". Needless to say these words meant that more children kept getting hurt.

It is only recently that our rabbis are admitting that just because child abuse (emotional, physical and sexual abuse) has been handled a certain way in the past, doesn't make it the right or best way to handle the problem. Our rabbis and other community leaders need to be educated on the symptoms of a child who is being abused. They need to learn about the different types of profiles sex offenders can have. How just like an alcoholic can't hang out at a bar, a sex offender/pedophile cannot be allowed near children.

The response "This is how it's been done" for discussing child abuse, is one tradition we need to change. We need to break the cycle of violence so we can prevent the creation of another generation of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, even the creation of more offenders.

For all the misery it brought, there is one good thing that came out of the case of Rabbi Baruch Lanner ([www.theawarenesscenter.org/lanner\\_baruch.html](http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/lanner_baruch.html))--it

forced our community to wake up. Now that we are aware of the problem, we have to work to change things or we become accomplices in allowing more children to be told to keep silent when too many generations have already suffered needlessly.

Dealing with child abuse is never easy. What do you do when you hear that a

friend of yours has been named the alleged offender in a sexual abuse case? What do you do when you hear allegations that a colleague or family member is molesting a child? The natural reaction is to slip into denial. No one wants to believe that someone they know, and possibly trust, is a sex offender. But it is for exactly this reason that we have problems today—our rabbis all too often didn't want to believe that atrocities against children were being perpetrated by members of their minyan, of their community. They didn't want to know.

Our rabbis **MUST** now be open to learning about all forms of childhood abuse. They **MUST** start talking to their congregants about these issues, and develop a relationship with child protection workers in their communities. They are our leaders and example, our confidants, often the first to hear about or suspect abuse—they need to learn to make hotline reports so that investigations can be led by those who are highly trained in collecting evidence, conducting victim-sensitive interviews, and making referrals when needed. Our rabbis need to accept that they cannot be both judge and jury to people they know and care for.

Our rabbis, community centers, schools, and child care centers all need to be aware of the web page named "Clergy Abuse: Rabbis, Cantors and Other Trusted Officials" ([www.theawarenesscenter.org/clergyabuse.html](http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/clergyabuse.html)). To date, there are about fifty cases of rabbis, teachers, camp-counselors, scout leaders, etc. listed there, all who had articles written about them in the news media. All who have been accused and some who have been convicted of child molestation. Making their cases public is one way we can ascertain that a known or alleged sex offender doesn't have access to our children.

There has never been research done to show that sexual abuse happens more in one religion than another. But we do have resources that indicate that one out of every 3-5 women, and one out of every 5-7 men in the United States have been sexually abused by the time they reached their eighteenth birthday. Until proven differently, this means that a quarter of all Jewish women and about a fifth of all Jewish men have been molested in their childhood.

Keeping this in mind, we have a huge problem on our hands, one that is only now beginning to be addressed in religious

circles. We would most likely not be dealing with these issues today had it not been for the news media doing its job--they heard stories from victims, investigated, and found cover-ups. It is sad to admit that the only salvation our Jewish survivors had, was that their victimization was making headline news.

The Awareness Center is asking that every rabbi, religious teacher, child care worker, and community leader get familiar with the issues and long term ramifications of childhood sexual abuse. It's time we do things differently. Time we focus on our children's safety rather than on attempting to protect our communities "name" and ending up protecting adults who have sex addictions, adults who are pedophiles.

Too many of our large organizations are looking into spending millions on contracting with private risk management groups. This will NOT solve the problem. Risk management companies are great at protecting the assets of organizations and corporations. They help to prevent civil law suits. They continue the cycle of covering up and protecting offenders, rather than helping to heal our children and making our communities safer. Instead of spending money on risk management groups, how about funding organizations geared to raising awareness to and ways for dealing with child abuse? How about making it a priority to call attention to the safety of our children so that there are no more children hurt, rather than spending money on making allegations of abuse go away? The Awareness Center is putting together programming to help educate our communities and help you develop relationships with law enforcement and child protection services in your area. The Awareness Center's first priority is your communities--the safety of your children.

The role of clergy in the healing of their community is unique. By working as liaisons with child protection services (rather than against them, by not reporting when they suspect abuse in the community), our rabbis and clergy can become the missing link in meeting our goal to protecting our children. They can educate child protection workers on the customs and traditions specific to each community. Their support can help make this painful but necessary process least so.

Please, let us NOT BE AFRAID OF EACH OTHER. Child protection services aren't in place to break up families and/or demolish the spiritual bond individuals have with God--they are there to protect children and to offer services to families in need.

Monies spent on private risk management agencies in attempt to circumvent the involvement of child protection services (who are there to help free of charge and agenda, by the way) do not protect children. These monies do not provide the services needed to help heal the families in our various religious communities. These monies would be better spent on other venues for our people. We need not be wary of child protection services or law enforcement. The only ones we need to be wary of are those who continue to harm our children. We need to STOP protecting offenders--whether they are clergy or lay-people. We need to all be made responsible. These are our children who are being hurt.