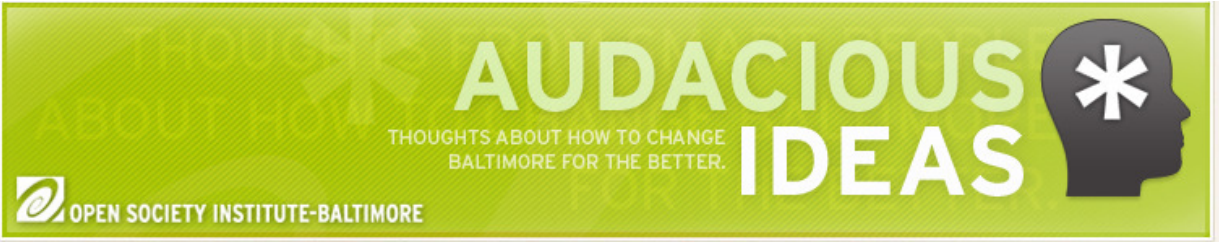


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## Let's Confront Child Sexual Abuse

Monday, September 29, 2008

Posted by [Adam Rosenberg](#), *Executive Director, Baltimore Child Abuse Center*, under [Uncategorized](#)

What if I told you that as a city we could reduce the incidents of sexual child abuse by 48%?

Consider the fact that last year, the Baltimore Child Abuse Center interviewed 793 children about allegations of sexual child abuse; now consider national estimates that only one in 10 children report the abuse.

Baltimore City statistics show that 82% of children who reported abuse knew their abuser. A significant proportion of abusers who these children know are young men who have grown up in a culture that tells them it's acceptable to have sex with a 12 year old – which is in fact rape, regardless of consent.

We need to start talking frankly and publically about child sexual abuse in Baltimore. Teaching our kids “good touch/bad touch” is insufficient. It inappropriately puts the burden on the child victim to stand up and say what happened – adults must take responsibility for the safety and healthy development of children. We must go from a fear based approach to one that confronts these issues head on in an open dialogue. We must also educate parents and teachers through outreach to schools, religious institutions and community groups. Adults need to know what to look out for as well as what to say and do to stop abuse. They also need to believe children who talk about alleged abuse rather than doubting their words simply because they are children.

It's essential we confront boys and young men ages 15 to 21. They are not necessarily *predatory* sex offenders but *opportunistic* sex offenders, whose behavior can be most easily and least expensively influenced. **Through candid discussions in classrooms, youth centers, and religious institutions with potential victims, potential perpetrators and even bystanders about the rules, ramifications and criminal penalties of their actions, we can begin to change the culture, prevent abuse and salvage many lives.** By helping all possibly affected impressionable youths identify the factors that put them at risk of being hurt themselves or hurting others and empowering them to develop their own protections, we can begin to dramatically reduce the incidents of future sexual abuse.

Nationally, child sexual abuse costs taxpayers an estimated \$24.4 billion a year for health care, social services, and law enforcement. Sexually abused/assaulted children are 74 percent more likely to commit a crime against another person and 24 times more likely to become abusers themselves.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention has declared child sexual maltreatment a preventable public health problem and recommended adoption of an ongoing and coordinated community prevention response. What are we waiting for?

It's been done. By confronting this issue, the State of Vermont – whose socio-economic and offender data is similar to Baltimore's – reduced its rate of reported child sexual abuse by 48 percent over 10 years. They implemented the above programs and curriculum in their schools and communities and committed to changing the dialogue about how they address sexual abuse. Educators, parents, and youth workers as well as teenage children have for years participated in comprehensive health education and violence prevention programs which resulted in promoting healthy relationships, safe lines of communication, and empowered adults to dramatically reduce sexual child abuse. It's time we take similar action in Baltimore and focus on aggressively fighting sexual child abuse in our city.