



Lessons from Penn State Part 2, February 2012

As service providers and community members, we know that there are many lessons to be learned from the tragedy at Penn State. By providing an update on the Sandusky case, WCSAP hopes to promote ongoing conversations and learning that will help us to build upon our child sexual abuse prevention and intervention efforts.

The intense coverage of this case over the last several months has highlighted the powerful role that media can play in shaping society's understanding of and response to sexual assault. We want to harness this power for good by finding effective and intentional ways to engage the media in our work to end sexual violence. Toward this end, we have drawn upon media advocacy resources and studies on the media's coverage of child sexual abuse to provide practical considerations and tips for your media advocacy efforts at the local level.

On [December 13, 2011](#), Jerry Sandusky waived his right to a preliminary hearing. As a result, the case against him will go directly to trial. As Sandusky's lawyer stated, this also "eliminated the rehashing of the allegations in the presentment without the opportunity to attack the credibility of the witnesses." More recently, on [February 13, 2012](#), a Pennsylvania judge ruled that Sandusky can have supervised visits with his grandchildren. The judge also rejected prosecutors' requests that Sandusky remain indoors while on home confinement and that jurors be brought in from outside the area to hear the case. However, Sandusky was not granted a request that would have forced prosecutors to disclose the names, addresses, and birth dates of witnesses. Currently, the trial is scheduled to begin in mid-May.

Meanwhile, a preliminary hearing was held on [December 16, 2011](#) in the case against suspended Penn State athletic director, Jim Curley, and retired university vice president Gary Schultz. A judge determined that there is probable cause to try the two men on charges of lying to a grand jury. Following Joe Paterno's death on January 22, Curley filed a motion asking that the perjury charges against him be dismissed because the State no longer has the required second witness to support the charge.



And what about the survivors who have come forward in these cases? They have endured national debates that question their motives and credibility; some have left school due to bullying by peers and administrators who blame them for the downfall of Sandusky and Penn State; and they have stood strong in the face of Sandusky's repeated public denial of the abuses that have shaped their lives. They also have been validated by supporters who have praised their bravery and believed them without question; they have helped others to break their silence by coming forward; they have forced the powerful to be accountable; and they have found solace in knowing that they are not alone

Despite the current lull in legal proceedings, we must stay present with the realities of this case and keep its implications at the forefront of our work. Many in the field have continued the conversations that started in November 2011. The national discourse has addressed mandated reporting laws, child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention, media coverage, bystander intervention, and institutional policy reform. So how do we translate this to our communities and bring forth action?

Stories of this magnitude often leave people asking, "Why did this happen and how can I prevent other children from being victimized?" As the local expert on child sexual assault advocacy and prevention, you are in a position to respond proactively to these collective questions in your community. The media provides an outlet for you to do so and allows for your message to reach a broad audience.

Creating opportunities to increase media coverage about sexual assault aligns with prevention efforts because it begins to change the social norms that allow for abuse to happen. Media coverage sends the message that sexual assault will not go unnoticed in your community and promotes an expectation that people will take ownership of the problem and hold offenders accountable. Your agency's presence in the media also serves to chip away at the silence surrounding child sexual abuse and raises awareness of your mission and services.



Several resources have been created that can help with your media advocacy efforts. Here are a few of the central considerations with suggestions for how to apply them at your agency:

- 1) Build relationships with your local media *before* a news story breaks. If you have already developed a positive rapport, they will be more likely to come to you for contributions when they are covering a story on sexual assault. A study by the Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) on [early media coverage of Penn State](#) found that “Across all news coverage, child sexual abuse prevention advocates (4%) were quoted about as often as sports fans (5%)” (p. 4). Our collective voice needs to be louder. Ultimately, if your agency isn’t the voice in your community, someone else’s will be and they may not be sending on point and constructive messages.
- 2) Draft some general media pieces on CSA so you are prepared when you do get that call from the local newspaper. This could include some statistics on CSA, tips for parents and adults on talking with kids and keeping them safe, social norms that contribute to sexual abuse, and a summary of your services for children and families. Reporters are often working under short deadlines, so if they know they can count on you to respond quickly you will be an obvious contact next time.
- 3) Talk about solutions. We want our communities to be educated about the impacts of sexual abuse but this should not overshadow information about how to prevent it from happening. A second report by the BMSG on [news coverage of child sexual abuse](#) asserts that “Advocates should articulate the policy and environmental changes that can prevent child sexual abuse, succinctly present those solutions in simple terms, and be prepared to talk with reporters about who can implement them” (p.16). How about a piece that discusses mandated reporting and the principles of the bystander approach?
- 4) Don’t wait for news, create it. The BMSG also found that most news stories about child sexual abuse focused on a proceeding or outcome in the criminal justice system. We know that this is just one piece of prevention and intervention, so we have to paint a bigger picture for our communities



by creating different types of stories. Are you working with a community partner on a new project? Are you hosting events for Sexual Assault Awareness Month? Does a local youth-serving organization have great policies on preventing CSA? Are you working with a survivor who wants to speak out? Make it news! They also suggest utilizing letters to the editor or the opinion section to weigh in on current events related to sexual assault.

You have the ability to transform media coverage in a meaningful way for survivors.

Resources for Media Advocacy

[Berkeley Media Studies Group. Case by Case: News Coverage of Child Sexual Abuse.](#)

[Berkeley Media Studies Group. Breaking News on Child Sexual Abuse: Early Coverage of Penn State.](#)

[California Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Media Advocacy Guide.](#)

[Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. Media Relations Made Easy.](#)

[Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Media Advocacy Resources.](#)

Additional Resources

[Jackson Katz. Penn State and the Bystander Approach: Laying Bare the Dynamics in Male Peer Culture.](#)

[Jackson Katz. Moving Beyond Penn State: Bystander Training as Leadership Training.](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures.](#)

[National Child Protection Training Center. Lessons from Penn State: A Call to Implement a New Pattern of Training for Mandated Reporters and Child Protection Professionals.](#)

[VAWnet. What Can Rape Crisis Centers Take Away From the Penn State Case?](#)

[NSVRC. Answers to Questions about Recent Child Sexual Abuse Cases.](#)



Lessons from Penn State Part 1, November 2011

The filing of sexual assault charges against former Penn State University football coach Jerry Sandusky has led to a barrage of media coverage. What has been deemed by many outlets as a “sex scandal” is actually the ongoing molestation and rape of numerous children, whom Mr. Sandusky found through his charity for troubled young boys. What makes the situation “scandalous” is the fact that it involves a coach and a university with a football legacy, defying societal myths about who perpetrates and disregards child sexual abuse.

It is regrettable that it takes a high-profile case such as this to induce media coverage and community conversations about child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, we know all too well that the tactics used by Mr. Sandusky to gain access to children and to groom the community are the same as those used by other offenders who continue to abuse undetected and never face the criminal justice system or the public court of opinion.

What makes this case unique, however, is the attention focused on the inaction of many individuals and university officials who could have intervened more than a decade ago to prevent further abuse and address the needs of those who had already been victimized. Indeed, their silence served as a message condoning the abuse to the perpetrator, the victims, and the community.

Child sexual abuse is preventable. We need to shift responsibility from children to adults and counter the denial, silence, and misconceptions that allow the sexual abuse of children to continue. This recent tragedy illustrates these norms and the ways in which they directly contributed to inaction by those who were in a position to practice prevention. The following testimony is taken from the findings of the Investigating Grand Jury:

- The assistant principal at a local high school testified that several students were left alone with Sandusky, who was “clingy” and “needy” when a young man broke off a relationship with him.
We must educate adults about red flags and grooming tactics and give them the tools and confidence to question inappropriate behavior, criminal or not.
- Testifying about the report of rape made to them by a witness, Athletic Director Timothy Curley and Senior Vice President for Finance and Business



Gary Schultz characterized the assault as “horsing around” and “inappropriate sexual conduct.”

We must address attitudes that minimize the occurrence and severity of child sexual abuse.

- A janitor who witnessed Sandusky orally raping a child told his co-workers what he saw. When discussing what they should do, the employees voiced concerns that they might lose their jobs for reporting. The janitor did tell his supervisor, who gave him the choice to report or not. No report was made by the janitor or his supervisor.

We must actively address real and perceived barriers to disclosure and reporting. Our institutions and organizations must make it clear that protecting children and doing what is right is more important than reputation and politics.

- Though Pennsylvania’s Attorney General has said that it appears Joe Paterno met his obligations under state law by reporting to his boss, he did not report the suspected abuse to police. None of the university officials made an attempt to identify the victim and protect him from further abuse. Paterno has now said that “With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more.”

We must instill in our communities that everyone has a role in preventing child sexual abuse and supporting survivors.

It is estimated that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18.

It is everyone’s responsibility to take action to end sexual violence.

To learn more about sexual violence towards children and to find resources on prevention and response, visit WCSAP’s webpage on [Child Sexual Abuse](#). Also see our *Start the Conversation* booklets in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

[Stop It Now!](#) has a broad range of resources to help parents and community members take action.

There is help for children who have been sexually abused and their families. Many community sexual assault programs in Washington State offer individual counseling and educational support groups in addition to providing information and referral and and medical and legal advocacy. [Find help in your community.](#)



To learn more about the Sandusky case:

[Investigative Grand Jury Report](#) (Please take care in reading this, as it includes some graphic details that may be triggering.)

CNN Justice--[Trustees: Penn State president removed, Paterno out immediately](#)

CBS News--[The Penn State Scandal](#)

The Washington Post--[Penn State Abuse Scandal and What Parents Can Do](#)

[Talking Points](#) from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR)

[PCAR offers support to Penn State Board of Trustees](#)