



Sandusky Case Illuminates Prevalence of Child Sexual Violence and a Culture of Silence

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 performing oral sex on 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 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](#)