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## **ABUSE CONTINUES WHEN NOT REPORTED**

### **In Wake of Penn State Sexual Abuse Scandal, the National Child Protection Training Center Renews its Call for Mandated Reporter Education**

Although Americans are justifiably outraged that officials at Penn State University failed to report to the authorities an eyewitness account of child sexual abuse, Americans should be equally outraged that this is not an isolated instance. Indeed, a number of studies, extending more than 20 years, have found that most mandated reporters, including teachers, social workers, physicians, and physician assistants fail to report the majority of child abuse cases.

#### **Studies indicate that most mandated reporters won't report cases of child abuse**

A 1990 study found that only 40% of maltreatment cases and 35% of the most serious cases known to professionals mandated to report were in fact reported or otherwise getting into the child protection system (CPS). More recent studies confirm that when faced with a situation of child maltreatment, less than 50% mandated to report actually do so. "The disheartening fact is that victimization of children will continue to happen unless people speak up," said Victor Vieth, executive director of the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC).

Even more unsettling is the reality that, when a person who suspects abuse knows the alleged perpetrator, he is even less likely to call the authorities. There are several reasons why mandated reporters do not report. Insufficient evidence, lack of certainty that abuse has occurred, the belief a report will cause additional harm, and the need to maintain a good relationship with the alleged abuser are some of the reasons cited by reporters who fail to comply with the law. Ambiguity in some mandated reporting statutes and lack of training on how and to whom to report also contributes to underreporting. However,

lack of legal obligation to report shouldn't keep people from contacting authorities with their suspicions.

“The fact is, most victims of abuse will not come forward on their own out of fear of the alleged perpetrator, shame or embarrassment about their victimization or concern about community response,” says Vieth. “Community members have an ethical obligation to protect children as well.”

**The need for reform**

NCPTC is working with dozens of universities throughout the United States to implement undergraduate and graduate courses that will prepare child abuse professional to recognize and report a reasonable suspicion of abuse. Universities and colleges should make these or similar courses required of all students who have declared a major where they will likely be a mandated reporter. Federal and state governments should provide funding to universities, colleges, medical schools and other institutions of higher education seeking to implement this reform. NCPTC also encourages state governments to mandate and fund high quality, ongoing training of mandated reporters in the field. Unless and until these or other common sense measures are taken, the tragic events at Penn State University will not be an isolated instance—they will continue to be the norm.

NCPTC, located on the campuses of Winona State University and Northwest Arkansas Community College, assists colleges, universities, medical schools, law schools and seminaries in improving the undergraduate and graduate training of future mandated reporters and child protection professionals. The Center also provides training, technical assistance and publications to child protection professionals in the field—training as many as 15,000 professionals each year.

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