

*** g93 10/8 10-13 Prevention in the Home ***

Prevention in the Home

Monique was nine years old when he started abusing her. He began by spying on her as she undressed; then he started visiting her room at night and touching her private parts. When she resisted him, he was furious. Once he even attacked her with a hammer and threw her down a flight of stairs. No one would believe me, Monique recalls not even her mother. The abuser was Monique's stepfather.

IT IS NOT the stranger in a trench coat, the loner lurking in the bushes, who poses the greatest threat to children. It is a member of the family. The vast majority of sexual abuse occurs in the home. So how can the home be made more resistant to abuse?

In his book *Slaughter of the Innocents*, historian Dr. Sander J. Breiner examines the evidence of child abuse in five ancient societies: Egypt, China, Greece, Rome, and Israel. He concludes that while abuse did exist in Israel, it was relatively rare compared to the other four civilizations. Why? Unlike their neighbors, the people in Israel were taught to have respect for women and children an enlightened view they owed to the Holy Scriptures. When the Israelites applied divine law to family life, they prevented child abuse. Today's families need these clean, practical standards more than ever.

Moral Laws

Does Bible law have an impact on your family? For instance, Leviticus 18:6 reads: You people must not come near, any man of you, to any close fleshly relative of his to lay bare nakedness. I am Jehovah. Similarly the Christian congregation today enforces strong laws against all forms of sexual abuse. Anyone who sexually abuses a child risks being disfellowshipped, put out of the congregation. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

All families should know and review such laws together. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 urges: And these words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up. Inculcating these laws means more than occasionally lecturing your children. It involves a regular give-and-take discussion. From time to time, both mother and father should reaffirm God's laws on incest and the loving reasons for these laws.

You might also use such stories as that of Tamar and Amnon, David's children, to show children that in sexual matters there are boundaries that no one's close relatives included should ever cross. Genesis 9:20-29; 2 Samuel 13:10-16.

Respect for these principles can be shown even in practical living arrangements. In one Oriental country, research has shown that much incest occurs in families where children sleep with parents even when there is no economic necessity for this. Similarly, it is generally unwise to have opposite-sex siblings share a bed or a room as they grow older, if this is at all avoidable. Even when cramped living conditions are a fact of life, parents should use good judgment in deciding on where each family member should sleep.

Bible law forbids drunkenness, suggesting that it can lead to perversion. (Proverbs 23:29-33) According to one study, some 60 to 70 percent of incest victims reported that their abusing parent had been drinking when the abuse started.

A Loving Family Head

Researchers find that abuse is more common among families with domineering husbands. The widely held view that women exist merely to fulfill male needs is Scripturally wrong. Some men use this unchristian opinion to justify turning to a daughter for anything they cannot get from a wife. This type of oppression can cause women in these circumstances to lose their emotional balance. Many lose even the natural urge to protect their own children. (Compare Ecclesiastes 7:7.) One study, on the other hand, found that when workaholic fathers were largely absent from the home setting, sometimes mother-son sexual abuse has festered.

What about your family? Do you as husband take the role of head seriously, or do you abdicate it to your wife? (1 Corinthians 11:3) Do you treat your wife with love, honor, and respect? (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7) Do her views count? (Genesis 21:12; Proverbs 31:26, 28) And what about your children? Do you see them as precious? (Psalm 127:3) Or do you view them as mere burdens, readily exploitable? (Compare 2 Corinthians 12:14.) Eliminate warped, unscriptural views of family roles in your household, and you will make it more resistant to abuse.

An Emotionally Safe Place

One young woman whom we call Sandi says: My whole family was set up for abuse. It was isolated, and each member was isolated from the other. Isolation, rigidity, and obsessive secrecy these unhealthy, unscriptural attitudes are trademarks of the abusive household. (Compare 2 Samuel 12:12; Proverbs 18:1; Philippians 4:5.) Create a home atmosphere that is emotionally safe for children. Home should be a place where they feel built up, where they feel free to open their hearts and speak freely.

Also, children have a great need for physical expressions of love hugging, caressing, handholding, romping. Do not overreact to the dangers of sexual abuse by withholding these demonstrations of love. Teach children through open, warm affection and praise that they are *valued*. Sandi remembers: My mom's view was that to give anyone any commendation for anything was wrong. It would give you a big head. Sandi suffered at least ten years of sexual abuse in silence. Children who are not secure in the knowledge that they are beloved, worthwhile individuals may be more susceptible to an abuser's praise, his affection, or his threats to withdraw it.

A pedophile who sexually abused hundreds of boys over a 40-year period admitted that the boys who had an *emotional need* for a friend like him made the best victims. Don't create such a need in your child.

Break the Cycle of Abuse

Under severe trial Job said: My soul certainly feels a loathing toward my life. I will give vent to my concern about myself. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul! (Job 10:1) Likewise, many parents have found that they can help their children by helping themselves. *The Harvard Mental Health Letter* noted recently: Strong social sanctions against the expression of pain by men apparently perpetuate the cycle of abuse. It seems that men who never get to express their pain about having been sexually abused are more likely

to become abusers themselves. *The Safe Child Book* reports that most child molesters were themselves sexually abused as children but never got help to recover. They express their pain and anger by abusing other children. See also Job 7:11; 32:20.

The risk to children may also be higher when mothers do not come to terms with past abuse. For example, researchers report that women who were sexually abused as girls often marry men who are child abusers. Furthermore, if a woman has not come to terms with past abuse, she may understandably find it difficult to discuss abuse with her children. If abuse occurs, she may be less able to discern it and take positive action. Then the children pay an awful price for the mother's inaction.

Thus, abuse may pass from one generation to the next. Of course, many individuals who choose not to discuss their painful past seem able to cope well enough in life, and that is commendable. But in many the pain is deeper, and they do need to make a concerted effort including, if necessary, seeking competent professional help to heal such severe childhood wounds. Their goal is not to wallow in self-pity. They want to break this sick, hurtful cycle of child abuse affecting their family. See *Awake!* of October 8, 1991, pages 3 to 11.

The End of Abuse

Properly applied, the foregoing information can do much to reduce the chances of child abuse in your home. Remember, though, that abusers work in secrecy, they take advantage of trust, and they use adult tactics on innocent children. Inevitably, then, some of them do seem to get away with their disgusting crimes.

However, rest assured that God sees what they do. (Job 34:22) Unless they repent and change, he will not forget their vile acts. He will bring them out into the open in his due time. (Compare Matthew 10:26.) And he will exact justice. Jehovah God promises a time when all such treacherous people will be torn away from the earth, and only the meek and gentle who love God and fellowman will be allowed to remain. (Proverbs 2:22; Psalm 37:10, 11, 29; 2 Peter 2:9-12) We have that marvelous hope of a new world thanks to the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 2:6) Then, and only then, will abuse end forever.

In the meantime we must do all we can to protect our children. They are so precious! Most parents will readily put their own safety at risk in order to protect their little children. (Compare John 15:13.) If we don't protect our children, the consequences can be horrible. If we do, we give them a wonderful gift—a childhood that feels innocent and free from calamity. They can feel just as the psalmist did, who wrote: I will say to Jehovah: You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I will trust. Psalm 91:2.

[Footnotes]

Sexual abuse of a child occurs when someone uses a child to gratify his or her own sexual desires. It often involves what the Bible calls fornication, or *pori'nei'a*, which could include fondling of genitalia, sexual intercourse, and oral or anal sex. Some abusive acts, such as the fondling of breasts, explicitly immoral proposals, showing pornography to a child, voyeurism, and indecent exposure, may amount to what the Bible condemns as loose conduct. Galatians 5:19-21; see *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1983, footnote on page 30.

While most child molesters were abused as children, this does not mean that abuse *makes* children become abusers. Less than a third of abused children become child molesters.

[Box on page 11]

One survivor of years of incest said: Abuse kills children, it kills their trust, their right to feel innocent. That's why children have to be protected. Because now I have to rebuild my whole life. Why make more children do that?

Why indeed?

[Box on page 11]

Listen to the Children!

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, Canada, a recent study examined the careers of 30 child molesters. The results were chilling. The 30 individuals had, between them, abused 2,099 children. Fully half of them held positions of trust—teachers, ministers, administrators, and child-care workers. One molester, a 50-year-old dentist, had abused nearly 500 children over a 26-year period.

However, *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto notes: In 80 per cent of cases, one or more sectors of the community (including friends or colleagues of the offender, families of victims, other children, some victims) denied or minimized the abuse. Not surprisingly, the report suggests that denial and disbelief allow abuse to continue.

Some of the victims had told on the abusers. However, parents of young victims were unwilling to accept what their children were telling them. *The Globe and Mail* quotes the report as saying. Similarly, a government official in Germany recently cited a report that child victims of sexual abuse have to approach adults with their story as many as seven times before they are believed.

[Box on page 12]

Get Help Now

IF YOU are a man and you are sexually involved with children, you may be saying to yourself, She likes it or He asked for it or I'm teaching her about sex. You're lying to yourself. Real men are not involved sexually with children. If there's any part of you that really cares about that child, stop it. Get help now. A proposed public service announcement, quoted in the book *By Silence Betrayed*.

[Picture on page 13]

Children need plenty of warm, loving attention

***** g85 7/22 26-8 From Our Readers-Response on Child Molesting *****
From Our Readers' Response on Child Molesting

THE January 22, 1985, issue of *Awake!* carried a three-part series entitled *Child Molesting—You Can Protect Your Child*. In today's world, this unpleasant subject is one of which parents must become aware, and many of our readers wrote letters expressing gratitude for the information presented. We would like to share some of their expressions.

Your Suggestions Were Very Helpful

Here is part of a letter from the United States: Thank you so much for the information on child molesting. As children, both my sister and I were molested by a cousin. Now we both have families and want to do all we can to protect our children. We will surely be applying the sound advice found in this article.

From the United States: I really appreciated your article *Child Molesting—You Can Protect Your Child*. Your suggestions were very helpful and simple. I have a couple I would like to share with you: It can be dangerous for children to have their names on their shirts. They are more likely to go with a stranger who knows their name. Also, when children are naughty, parents often threaten them, saying: The police will get you! This makes children afraid and perhaps unwilling to approach the police if they ever need help.

From the United States: After having re-read the January 22 issue of *Awake!* on child molesting, I want you to know that it is one of the best I have read. Naturally I wish we had had this information several years ago, before my two beautiful granddaughters were so terribly and unmercifully abused. But if it prevents some other child from suffering as they have, I shall be glad.

I Was a Victim

Many letters confirmed the terrible damage done by child molestation. For example, here is a letter from England: Thank you for the recent articles on the subject of child molestation. I was a victim of child abuse and experienced feelings similar to those reported in your article. Even now, after so many years, I have to restrain myself because I get very emotional when I read or hear of these things happening to children.

Another letter from England says: I was a victim of incest over a period of years beginning when I was about five. The offender was my stepfather. What I experienced at his hands was so traumatic for my young mind that much of it was submerged in my subconsciousness until only a few months ago. The memories, once triggered, emerged like some sort of nightmare.

Some people may regard your article as an overreaction and may feel shocked about telling their little ones about what to do if someone—even a close relative—should touch their private body parts or ask them to look at or touch theirs. I have a message for those people: The advice in the article is excellent.

Who Would Believe You?

Some letters shed light on the tactics of molesters. A reader in England writes: As a young child, I was abused by an older man whom I had a lot of respect for. As your article brought out, the indecent fondling (which is what it was restricted to) was disguised as playing and tickling. It left me with tremendous feelings of guilt and shame.

A reader from the United States reminds us that it is not only adults who molest children. She writes: I warned my children about adults, never imagining that it would be a nine-and-a-half-year-old girl who would improperly fondle my four-year-old daughter.

Another reader from England tells us: My foster father was a judge; therefore, when he started to molest me, I didn't think there was anything wrong. When I got to the age of 12, I knew it was wrong but was unable to tell anyone, for he had drummed into me: Who would believe you? And don't be ungrateful. Look at all the things you've got! In my early teens my brothers and an uncle abused me. So by the age of 14, I was using drugs, thinking this was my only way to happiness. I grew up being very promiscuous, which was the only way I could afford the drugs. I'd like to thank you again for the article. I can now make sure my son will never have to go through the pain I had.

A reader in the United States writes: I just finished reading the article on *Child Molesting* in the January 22, 1985, issue of *Awake!* I could not hold back the tears from my eyes because I, too, was molested. It happened when I was five. The molester was a man that my mother was dating. While my mother was away and my brothers were out playing, this man would take sexual liberties with me. I have been trying to forget, trying to blot it out of my mind, trying to pretend that it was a bad dream, but it was not a dream. It actually did happen, and for all these years (I am now 27) I have never told anyone. Thank you for the article on child molesting. It gave me the courage to write this letter.

These are just a few of the many letters received that show the frightening scope of the problem. We are living in truly decadent times. (2 Timothy 3:1, 3) There have even been cases involving Christian families, which had to be handled by the congregation elders! Never forget that while child molesting is usually a sin committed by adults, it is children who carry the burden. It is tragic that so many children are being robbed of their childhood by adults who have no self-control. The emotional wounds inflicted on these young ones may last a whole lifetime!

[Box on page 27]

Alert Use of *Awake!* in Oregon

When the January 22, 1985, issue of *Awake!* arrived in Oregon, U.S.A., Joy, a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses, went with a friend to show the articles on child molesting to the local police sergeant in charge of crime prevention. He revealed that he was just on his way to the local community college to set up a seminar on child molesting, so he took a copy of the magazine along. That afternoon, he contacted Joy and said he would like to use the magazine in the seminar. Joy alertly told him about the April 22, 1984, issue of *Awake!*, which featured a series of articles about missing children. The police sergeant ordered 200 copies of each magazine in order to give one to each person in attendance at the seminar.

Later, the police sergeant increased his order to 250 copies of each issue so that there would be some available to use in the local police Helpline Support programs. He also recommended that Joy contact the local Children's Service Department. She followed his advice and

was able to give her presentation before a group of 20 counselors during an orientation seminar. The group took her remaining copies of both issues of the magazine.

*** g85 1/22 8 Child Molesting-You Can Protect Your Child ***

Be suspicious of any changes in the normal routine. In one case, a teacher asked that certain children come to school long before others. Watch for any telling signs in children such as declining grades or extreme anxiety around a specific adult. One woman who was victimized by her brother and her father as a girl said: "I came at the bottom of a class of 42, and nobody tried to find out why."

Pay attention to physical symptoms, such as headaches, vomiting or loss of appetite, and difficulty in sleeping. Genital complaints, such as soreness, are particularly important. Be aware of precocious sexuality in language, dress, or behavior. Be on the lookout for sudden changes in behavior that might indicate a problem. If a child becomes unusually withdrawn or shows an inclination to avoid one member of the family, a warning bell should sound. We also have to listen for the oblique messages that our children send us. The statement, "I don't like that math teacher any more" may be the child's way of trying to broach this difficult subject.

If parents see anything like this in their child, they should try to find out what is wrong. The child has a problem, and it may be a problem of molestation. If so, the child needs help. Unfortunately, many children do not get that help. Molested children have been accused of inventing the incident, although researchers assure us that children rarely, if ever, invent such things. Incest has been covered up so as not to break up the family.

However, if molestation and especially incest is discovered to have occurred, two things must be done immediately:

First, the child and other children too must be protected from any further abuse. This must be done, whatever the cost. In many cases the accused molester will have to be confronted. But whatever it takes, it is important that the child should feel confident that the molester will never be able to get at her (or him) again.

Second, the child must be given a lot of love and emotional support. Parents must make it very clear that the little victim is not to blame. The crime and anything that happens as a result of it even if a close relative goes to prison is not her (or his) fault. But that reassurance will have to be given many times, so that the victim comes to believe it and to believe that the parents believe it too!

*** g85 1/22 4-6 Child Molesting-'Who Would Do a Thing Like That?' ***

Child Molesting-'Who Would Do a Thing Like That?'

MOST parents would answer this question wrong. When we think of sexual molestation, most of us probably picture a weird stranger who exposes himself to children or lures them away into a car or to some wooded area. Publicity has also been given to groups that lure children away to exploit them for pornography or child prostitution. Such things *do* happen, but these people are far from the usual type of child molester. So who are the usual child molesters?

Sue was molested by a man who was running a church group. He ran a youth club, and everybody agreed that he was very pleasant. But he sexually abused Sue and other girls. Another young girl wrote to an advice column to tell that her favorite uncle had taken to pulling her onto his lap and fondling her improperly. One man remembers that as a boy he was habitually abused by the grown son of a close family friend. An 11-year-old boy was molested by the aunt that he lived with. A New York woman reports being molested by her grandfather when she was seven years old. A 15-year-old boy was molested by his doctor during a medical examination. For Pam, it was even worse. For many years, her own father molested her. And Mary was molested by two older brothers and an older first cousin.

In fact, probably less than a third of sexual assaults on children are committed by strangers. Usually the victim knows the assailant. Often the abuser is a relative. Thus, in most cases children are molested by people they know and trust, which makes the problem of protecting them more difficult.

The Molester at Work

Many parents have another misconception. They envision molestation as being violent, with the child fighting and screaming for mercy. This may not be the case at all, at least not in the beginning. At the outset, sexual abuse may be disguised as playful or affectionate contact, and go on from there. The abuser is likely to persuade and pressure the child, using all the built-in authority of an older person. Do you remember what it was like when you were a child and were trained to obey adults even when they told you to do things you did not like, such as go to bed early or eat all your vegetables? Molesters take advantage of this training. One convicted abuser said: "Show me an obedient child, and I'll show you an easy victim."

One child was receiving obscene phone calls. When asked why she had not put the phone down, she said she thought it was rude to do that when someone was still talking! A woman of 30 remembers having been approached at the age of 5 by her grandfather. He said to her: "Good girls do this for Grandpa and never tell their mothers." How many five-year-olds would be able to see through such a deception?

And do you remember how you loved presents and treats as a child? Abusers often use this childish trait to get an abusive relationship started. For example, what would your child do if the school janitor said: "Stay with me for a while in the office after school, and I will give you some money" or if the baby-sitter said: "I will let you sit up late and watch television, if you do something for me first"?

Sometimes molesters misuse a child's natural love of secrets. Wasn't it exciting, when you were young, to have a secret? One little girl had a secret that she kept from her parents. But one day her parents saw her acting in a precocious, sexual manner. When asked where she had learned such a thing, the little girl said: "It's a secret." Her father explained that sometimes we should not keep a secret, so the little girl revealed her secret. A 40-year-old man with a family of his own, who was a close family relative, had pushed her down and sexually assaulted her.

Finally, threats may be involved, subtle threats that strike at a child's sense of security. A grown woman tells of having been abused by her stepfather when she was a child. She says he abused her for four years, starting when she was six. Why did she not tell her mother?

He said that if I ever told anybody about it, the police would come get him and my mother would lose her job. The family would starve and it would all be my fault.

Author Gail Sheehy covers many of these points in the following observation: We forget how grownups seemed omnipotent to us when we ourselves were children. She adds: It is very easy for a parent or babysitter to initiate sexual activities under the guise of normal bathing and hygiene inspection. The child gets the message something is wrong only when secrecy is introduced: Don't tell your mommy that we did that and sufficient intimidation can be laid in with a single stroke or she won't love you anymore. Would your child be able to withstand that sort of psychological blackmail?

The Child's Best Defense

So you see, molesters can be the most unexpected of people and they can use sophisticated and cunning tactics. Child molestation is probably almost as old as history. But as this generation progresses, and more and more people are lovers of themselves, . . . having no natural affection, . . . without self-control, the threat is becoming greater. (2 Timothy 3:1-3) However, children do have one very strong defense. What is that? Their parents. These are the adults best able to protect them from other adults who may wish to molest them. Let us see how.

***** g82 10/8 28 From Our Readers *****

I feel you were unfair in accusing *Time* magazine of publishing pro-incest propaganda (June 22, 1982, pages 9, 10). The opinions of so-called sexologists and also those of child psychiatrists were presented. You failed to note that the *Time* reporter found these pro-incest views disturbing, irresponsible and falling just short of the child molester's lib.

L. C., Pennsylvania

Awake! should have stated that Time reported on pro-incest propaganda, not that it published such. We did include statements in Time's article showing the dangers of such propaganda. ED.

***** g81 2/8 16-19 Incest-The Hidden Crime *****

Incest-The Hidden Crime

IS THERE any help for a person like me? This sad question came from a woman with a difficult problem one shared by a surprising number of other women today. After many years, she was still suffering from a childhood experience. She had been a victim of incest. How can her question be answered?

Incest is not a pleasant word. Most would rather not discuss it, yet it is increasingly common. If estimates are correct, it is quite likely that some of your personal friends have been victims. It is certainly a problem of which parents should be aware.

Most of us know what incest means sexual activity between close relatives. It is suspected that a lot of such activity goes on between brothers and sisters, although this is not usually reported. Authorities are particularly concerned when children are abused by adult relatives. Of greatest concern, and probably accounting for most of the reported cases, are instances where children are molested by their fathers or stepfathers.

Is the Problem Really Widespread?

Despite the lack of complete statistics, the answer is clearly, Yes. Susan Brownmiller, in her book *Against Our Will*, says: The sexually abused child is statistically more prevalent than the physically abused, or battered child. Mrs. Lee Preney, a childcare worker, asserts that incest is more common than rape, and less frequently reported.

A report in the *Seattle Times* said: Look at any 15 girls in your daughter's classroom the next time you're there . . . the odds are good that at least one and possibly two or three has been a victim of incest.

Hank Giarretto, a psychologist who works in a sexual-abuse treatment program in prosperous Santa Clara County, California, thinks that incest is epidemic in America. In an area with a population of around one million, he saw incest cases rise from 30 in 1971 to more than 500 in 1977. In an interview with the magazine *People*, he said: I think we are just beginning to tap the actual prevalence.

Some estimate that 25 million women in America today suffered incestuous abuse as children! Reports indicate that many other countries are experiencing the same growing problem.

Should We Be Concerned About It?

Many experts have raised this question. For example, Wardell Pomeroy, coauthor of the original Kinsey reports, was quoted in *Time* magazine as saying: It is time to admit that incest need not be a perversion or a symptom of mental illness. Incest between children and adults . . . can sometimes be beneficial.

Are you a parent? How do you feel about that viewpoint? Would you allow your little boy or girl to have sex relations with an older relative?

If you are a Christian, you know you should be concerned about incest. God's opinion about it much more important than any man's was stated very clearly to the Israelites: You people must not come near, any man of you, to any close fleshly relative of his to lay bare nakedness. The forbidden relationships are specified, including: brother/sister, parent/child, as well as uncle-or-aunt/niece-or-nephew relations. Leviticus 18:6-18.

The experience of children who have been incestuously abused also shows that we should be concerned.

What Happens to the Child?

In correspondence with the *Australian Women's Weekly*, a woman described how childhood incest drove her to several suicide attempts, starting from the age of 10. Others could not have normal sex relationships when they grew up.

Another, one of three sisters molested by their father, wrote: "It has taken me 10 years and a lot of help from my husband to come to terms with it and discuss it freely. It affects everybody differently. My eldest sister thinks sex is the dirtiest thing in the world; my youngest just doesn't care. She was charged with prostitution at the age of 14 and had a child by the time she was 15 years old."

Prostitution, drug abuse, committing rape (in the case of boys), alcoholism, rebelliousness and emotional turmoil have all resulted from incest. One young girl could not think of God as her heavenly Father. An incestuous relationship with her natural father had soured her on the whole concept of fatherhood.

Why does incest seem to cause more emotional turmoil than, say, rape? Because the molester is imposing on a very close and important relationship. One girl complained that she felt more like a wife than a daughter and believed that she was there only for her father's sexual pleasure.

Consider the comment of another victim: "I was terrified to tell anyone what was happening to me. I was so scared to disobey him; after all he was my father, he wouldn't do anything he wasn't supposed to . . . As I grew into my teens, things got worse and worse. I understood things better. I felt like I was dirty, cheap and worthless. So many times I considered suicide. And how I hated men! . . . I knew I was only a little girl when it started, but I could not stop feeling that it was all my fault . . . almost worse than the actual molesting is the guilt."

What About the Perpetrator?

Not only the victim, but the molester, too, can suffer because of incest. Often he feels shame and self-hatred, while all the time becoming more and more involved. A therapist told the *Seattle Times*: "The problem is that we're dealing with compulsive behavior. These men have conditioned themselves through repeated sexual daydreaming . . . to respond to young girls."

One molester said: "I tried stopping it several times, and I told my stepdaughter that I had to stop because of what I was doing to the family. But he did not stop. Another said his incestuous relationship left him with permanent emotional scars."

Besides this, remember that in most lands incest is against the law, punishable by a possible prison sentence. Surely, if all these facts were kept in mind, fewer parents would allow themselves to fall into incestuous relationships.

Then Why Do They Do It?

Some adults who turn to incest are psychotic. Most are not, however. They may be apparently good family men, business or community leaders, even good churchgoers.

Why do such ordinary people commit incest? Loss of control due to alcohol has been involved. Sometimes, a man marries a woman who already has children. As his stepchildren get older, he may be tempted sexually.

Family problems can contribute. Hank Giarretto says: "Usually it's a man losing his job or going through a low-ebb period in his life. He and his wife become alienated. The father reaches out to his daughter, looking for closeness. She is open to him, loves him, thinks he's great. The first overtures are not sexual."

There may be additional causes. One incest victim told how pornographic literature was always present in the house. Giarretto adds: "It's the sexual climate of our society which helps create the problem. We teach our girls to be Lollitas and sexual provocateurs from the time they're 2."

An adult committing incest with a child betrays selfishness. He shows no concern at all for the welfare of the child. Yet, in a world that encourages us to do our own thing and promotes such perversions as child pornography, is it surprising that cases of incest are on the increase?

Can It Be Prevented?

It surely can, but it means that individuals must make a determined mental stand against the worsening moral climate of this world. For this, we can get no better advice than that found in the Bible. The apostle Paul tells us: "Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over" (Rom. 12:2) To do this, we must avoid unclean books and entertainment and block from our minds the unclean influences to which we are constantly exposed. Thus, we avoid conditioning ourselves to wrong behavior.

One incest victim recommended teaching children at an early age that certain parts of their bodies are not for others to play with. This can be done in a loving way, perhaps using the story of Dinah, in the publication *My Book of Bible Stories*. Then, if anything resembling molestation should occur, the child can immediately tell mother or father. Remember, sexual molestation does not have to be intercourse. Fondling, touching, unwarranted intimacy or any sexual playing can cause great damage in later life.

Deep parental love is a true safeguard. Paul said: "Love . . . does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests" (1 Cor. 13:4, 5) This unselfish love will surely prevent parents from allowing fleshly weaknesses to nudge them to do wrong acts toward their offspring. It will also help to prevent another problem. Sometimes, as children start to become young men or women, their parents, afraid of falling into incestuous relationships, become cold and distant. Of course, this, too, is harmful to the growing child.

Handling the Problem

Handling incest has not proved easy. It is a secret crime. Families often try to keep it hidden. Mothers who know that something is going on may turn a blind eye, afraid of disrupting the family. Children who report their parents may come under strong pressure to withdraw the complaint. Yet, in the experience of many specialists, children rarely lie about incest.

Some feel that prison is not always the answer for the molester. Hence, counseling centers have been set up where these families can be treated as a whole. Explaining what he thinks is very important in such treatment, Hank Giarretto says: "[The father] must face the

daughter and accept full responsibility for whatever happened. This may be difficult for the father to do; but it is a way he can try to undo some of the harm that has been done to the child.

Outsiders can help too. Many victims have testified how, through patient, considerate and selfless care, they were assisted to overcome the emotional confusion and start planning for the future. The scars may never completely disappear; but with persistence, they will at least recede into the background.

Another Source of Help

What, then, about the incest victim whose question appears at the beginning of this article? She was molested by her grandfather from the age of six until nine. She tried immorality, drugs and psychiatrists, but found in these no relief from her unhappiness.

Happily, there is help for such a person. However confused and down we may be, there is One who is raising up the lowly one from the very dust, and we can get to know him by means of the Bible. (Ps. 113:7) He can help even in the deepest depression, for he is the Father of tender mercies and the God of all comfort. (2 Cor. 1:3) It takes much prayer, study and discussion with mature people to replace the depressing, guilt-ridden thoughts in the mind with upbuilding ones. But it can be done. The following experience may help to demonstrate this.

A woman said that she was abused by her natural father from a very early age, and then by her stepfather. She sank into immorality, drug abuse and finally had an illegitimate child. But she says: There is a way out of incest, child-abuse, statutory rape, drugs and homosexuality. You may feel as though you can't live through these things with a completely sane mind, but you can if you have hope of something better to live for. I have that hope . . . I never fought back as a child. I only wish I had, but I was afraid, afraid no one would take care of me or want me. I was wrong, very wrong! Jehovah cares . . . and the elders at the local Kingdom Hall [of Jehovah's Witnesses] care too.

Whatever our past history, any of us can be washed clean, and sanctified from the standpoint of God. (1 Cor. 6:11) The Bible explains how. By the power of his Word and spirit, God can also remove our guilt feelings and provide escape even from emotional confusion. He can help us to live a satisfying life now, and give us confidence that, one day soon, we will live in a world where such things as incest will never happen again.

[Footnotes]

***** g93 10/8 9 If Your Child Is Abused *** If Your Child Is Abused**

TO STOP abuse, you must know it when you see it. In the numerous books on the subject, experts have listed dozens of telltale signs of abuse that parents can watch for. These include: complaints of pain while urinating or defecating, genital infections, abrasions or lesions in the genital area, the sudden onset of bed-wetting, appetite loss or other eating problems, precocious sexual behavior, a sudden fear of such places as school or parts of the house, periods of panic, an extreme fear of undressing, a fear of being alone with a familiar person, and self-mutilation.

However, be careful about jumping to conclusions. Most of these symptoms do not by themselves necessarily mean that a child has actually been sexually abused. Each could indicate some other problem. But if you see disturbing symptoms, gently broach the subject, perhaps with such a statement as: If anyone ever touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, I want you to know that you can always tell me, and I'll do all I can to protect you. Has anything like that ever happened to you? Proverbs 20:5.

If your child discloses sexual abuse, you will no doubt feel shattered. But remember: Your reaction will play a major role in the child's recovery. Your child has been carrying an unbearable burden and needs you, with all your adult strength, to lift it from her or his shoulders. Praise the child for being so brave as to tell you what happened. Repeatedly reassure the child that you will do your best to provide protection; that the abuse was the abuser's fault, not the child's; that the child is not bad; that you love the child.

Some legal experts advise reporting the abuse to the authorities as soon as possible. In some lands the legal system may require this. But in other places the legal system may offer little hope of successful prosecution.

What, though, when the abuser is one's own beloved mate? Sad to say, many women fail to take decisive action. To be sure, it is never easy to face the ugly reality of a mate who is a child abuser. Emotional ties, and even financial dependency, can be overwhelmingly strong. The wronged wife may also realize that taking action could cost her husband his family, his job, his reputation. The hard truth is, though, that he may just be reaping what he has sown. (Galatians 6:7) Innocent children, on the other hand, stand to lose much more if they are not believed and protected. Their whole future is at stake. They do not have the resources that adults have. Trauma can scar and shape them adversely for life. They are the ones who need and deserve tender treatment. Compare Genesis 33:13, 14.

Parents must therefore make every reasonable effort to protect their children! Many responsible parents choose to seek out professional help for an abused child. Just as you would with a medical doctor, make sure that any such professional will respect your religious views. Help your child rebuild his or her shattered self-esteem through a steady outpouring of parental love.

[Footnotes]

In reality, the molester is already in trouble and badly needs help. Even if the perpetrator claims to be sorry, the wronged mate may consider: Why didn't he confess before being exposed by his victim?

For instance, when Jehovah's Witnesses are confronted with issues involving blood transfusion, they make sure that the doctor respects their religious beliefs.