

Our Families

Jehovah's Witnesses and Child Protection

Also in Spanish

Child abuse is abhorrent to us. This is in harmony with the Bible principle recorded at Romans 12:9. Even one abused child is one too many. For decades *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* have featured articles to educate both Witnesses and the public regarding the importance and the need to protect children from child abuse. Among others, there were the articles “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked!” published in the January 1, 1997, issue of *The Watchtower*; “Help for the Victims of Incest,” in the October 1, 1983, *Watchtower*; “Your Child Is in Danger!” “How Can We Protect Our Children?” and “Prevention in the Home”, all in the October 8, 1993, *Awake!*, as well as “Child Molesting—Every Mother’s Nightmare,” in the January 22, 1985, *Awake!*

When any one of Jehovah’s Witnesses is accused of an act of child abuse, the local congregation elders are expected to investigate. Two elders meet separately with the accused and the accuser to see what each says on the matter. If the accused denies the charge, the two elders may arrange for him and the victim to restate their position in each other’s presence, with elders also there. If during that meeting the accused still denies the charges and there are no others who can substantiate them, the elders cannot take action within the congregation at that time. Why not? As a Bible-based organization, we must adhere to what the Scriptures say, namely, “No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin . . . At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good.” (Deuteronomy 19:15) Jesus reaffirmed this principle as recorded at Matthew 18:15-17. However, if two persons are witnesses to separate incidents of the same kind of wrongdoing, their testimony may be deemed sufficient to take action.

However, even if the elders cannot take congregational action, they are expected to report the allegation to the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses in their country, if local privacy laws permit. In addition to making a report to the branch office, the elders may be required by law to report even uncorroborated or unsubstantiated allegations to the authorities. If so, the elders receive proper legal direction to ensure that they comply with the law. Additionally, the victim or anyone else who has knowledge of the allegation may wish to report the matter to the authorities, and it is his or her absolute right to do so.

If, when confronted, the accused confesses that he is guilty of child abuse, the elders take appropriate congregational action. If he is not repentant, he will not be permitted to remain a member of the congregation. Even if he is repentant—is cut to the heart and is thus resolutely determined to avoid such conduct in the future—what was stated in the January 1, 1997, issue of *The Watchtower* applies. The article said: “For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation. Moreover, he cannot be a pioneer [full-time missionary of Jehovah’s Witnesses] or serve in any other special, full-time service.” He would not qualify Scripturally. (1 Timothy 3:2, 7-10) We take such action because we are concerned with maintaining Bible standards and protecting our children. Everyone in our organization is expected to meet the same requirements, namely, to be clean physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.—2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

In a few instances, individuals guilty of an act of child abuse have been appointed to positions within the congregation if their conduct has been otherwise exemplary for decades. All the factors are considered carefully. Suppose, for example, that a long time ago an 18-year-old male had

sexual relations with a 15-year-old girl who was a willing participant. Depending upon the U.S. jurisdiction where he lived when this happened, elders may have been required to report this as an incident of child abuse. Let us say that 20 years have passed. He has been living an exemplary life and he is respected. In such a case, the man could possibly be appointed to a responsible position within the congregation.

Our procedures have been refined over time. Over the years, as we have noted areas where our policies could be strengthened, we have followed through. We are continuing to refine them. We do not believe that our system is perfect. No human organization is perfect. But we do believe that we have a strong, Bible-based policy on child abuse. Anyone in a responsible position who is guilty of child abuse would be removed from his responsibilities without hesitation. We certainly would not knowingly allow him to serve elsewhere, either because he moved or through a transfer. Further, we regularly review our procedures to ensure that they are in compliance with the law. —Romans 13:1.

The Bible teaches that individuals can repent of their sins and “turn to God by doing works that befit repentance,” and we accept what the Bible says. (Acts 26:20) Still, the safety of our children is of the utmost importance. We take it very seriously.

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