

## Protecting God's Children for Adults



### Do Bad Things Happen to Children of Good Parents?

Americans have come to expect quick relief from the pain in our lives. We want the fastest acting pain reliever available. We look for the antiseptic spray that immediately stops the pain of scraped knees. We expect quick, easy answers to difficult problems. And, we want to assign blame when things go wrong—especially when what's wrong threatens *our* families and/or *our* emotional well-being.

In our zeal to find an easy answer to why such horrible things could happen, we sometimes point our finger at some of the very people who are suffering the most—the parents of the abused child. Compassion for the victim's family may shift to anger and blame aimed at the victim's parents. Parents who are dealing with the pain and agony of caring for their victimized child often become the victims of public opinion, public judgments, and public censure. But why do we, as a community, respond in this way?

We may think that if we can blame the victim's parents, we can relax and not worry about the risk to *our* child or our family members ... because, after all, *we* are good people (and, if we are parents, then *we* are good parents). *We* would never let our guard down. *We* would never let "someone like that" get close to our child or family member. "It *must* be the victim's parents' fault," we say to ourselves. "How else could something like that happen?"

We expect parents to automatically know what to do, to always take appropriate actions, to consistently respond in a helpful and effective manner to any situation, and to behave in such a way that they are wonderful role models for their children. We expect good parents to ALWAYS protect their child from harm—even when we know from experience that that is neither practical nor possible.

Now, let's consider another social factor. It is difficult for a faith community to believe that a beloved clergyman or other trusted member of the community could commit something as horrible as child sexual abuse. Often, it is easier for members of the community to blame the victim and the victim's parents than to believe that a beloved Church leader would commit such an act.

The fact is ... bad things sometimes happen to the children of good parents. That means that *all* children are at risk. As Bishop Raymond Boland says in the video, *A Plan To Protect God's Children*: "[Parents] must develop a very healthy suspicion about every program to which they entrust their children..." As adults in the faith community, it is our duty to share this responsibility with parents and to work together—as a *community*—to help protect all children.

It is important to remember that the perpetrators of abuse are usually master manipulators. They are particularly skilled at becoming heavily involved in the lives of children and families. Most often, child molesters are people parents have learned to trust—friends, neighbors, teachers, and family members. They are people who convince us that they are generous and kind and that they genuinely care about children. Parents, and others, are lulled into believing that the person can be trusted with those dearest to them—their children.

Assigning blame for child abuse at the feet of good parents will divert us from our primary purpose—protecting God's children. Each time we are distracted from our goal to create safe environments for children, child abusers recognize the opportunity to twist and confuse us with their manipulative mind games. As adult members of the faith community, we must educate ourselves about the warning signs of potential risks to children. It is our job to watch over *all* children, and to support others around us in creating safe environments for all the children in our communities, parishes, neighborhoods, and homes.

As individuals, we must avoid distractions and stay focused. And, as a community, we must support appropriate behavior and create environments where child abusers have no place to hide.