

CHILD ABUSE PROTECTION PROGRAM

Vaijayanti Mala Devi Dasi

Last year, the Board of Education sent all ISKCON-affiliated schools and temples a copy of its manual, Preventing Child Abuse in ISKCON. While the manual gives a good general outline, each school still has to translate the ideas into practical action. This article by Vaijayanti Mala d.d., of the Vrindavana, India, gurukula, show how the ideas were translated into a practical curriculum for that school. Perhaps it will serve as a starting point for others.

— Sri Rama Dasa

The following is a series of guidelines, to help teachers help children prevent child abuse. Where I have written "etc.", I am indicating that teachers are to think of further examples themselves. Some teachers find this difficult. In such cases they should consult with another teacher or a group of teachers in the form of a meeting, and together record effective teaching techniques and more examples. Without these examples, lessons on this subject lack direction, and the teacher may find continuing them a hard task. Therefore careful planning, incorporating appropriate examples, is necessary.

One of the first premises in teaching a program such as this is that there is no situation or culture where sexual abuse of children is unlikely to occur. We should appreciate this before we start. It is Kali Yuga, and anything is possible.

No teacher should be forced to teach this class. Some teachers cannot come to terms with teaching it. I personally worked with an abuse victim who could not teach this subject—understandably. This does not mean that the children missed out on the program, but another

teacher had to do it.

Basic Format: No, Go, Tell

No

In order for a child to say "No," he must be able to identify his feelings and discriminate between a safe and unsafe situation.

Feelings in their own right are discussed:

- ⇒ How do you feel when you get a *mangala-arati* sweet?
- ⇒ How do you feel when a big boy teases you?
- ⇒ How do you feel when your teacher is pleased with you?
- ⇒ How do you feel when you get a smack?

Touching is also discussed, in relation to feelings—a mother hugging her child—how does the child feel? Smacking, tickling, fighting, pinching, playful games, affection between friends, wrestling etc. are also discussed.

These discussions are extremely important. They open up a new channel of communication between the child and the teacher, as the child relaxes and feels he can express honestly whatever he is feeling or experiencing. They not only help the child discriminate, but lay the basic groundwork for a relationship based on trust that he may one day desperately need.

Touching of the private area of the body should be discussed also. Who is allowed to touch it? You—to clean it. Or a doctor or nurse if you're sick. Emphasize that no other person has any right to touch the private parts of the body on any occasion.

Non-devotee literature stresses fa-

miliarizing the children with the names of the private parts, because proper terminology helps them more easily discuss the situation. But as devotees, we use the term "genitals" which accomplishes this objective without getting unnecessarily absorbed.

Discuss the different sorts of "scary" situations that arise in a child's life. These can come from the teacher or from the children. List them as they are brought up. Then go through them and mark whether the children find them safe or unsafe situations. For example:

- ⇒ Walking to *mangala-arati* with the other boys during a blackout—and it's raining. (scary but safe)
- ⇒ Walking to the Yamuna in the afternoon. The other boys are way in front of you. A strange man comes over to you and tells you he will take you to the Yamuna; just follow him. (scary and unsafe) etc.

Discuss the danger of an older person—even an older child—using his authority to intimidate a child. For example, an abuser may say, "Get into this car quickly," or "Come here right now!"

Discuss the tricks some people have of making a child do something that they don't want to do. Warn the children that sometimes not nice people can appear to be very nice, like Putana.

- ⇒ I know your mother and she said.....
- ⇒ I just saw your *ashrama* teacher and he said.....
- ⇒ I have some position in the temple here and I think you should.....
- ⇒ I have something really wonderful

to show you but first you must come with me.....etc.

Sometimes adults think this is a very delicate situation, as they don't want to make the children unnecessarily suspicious of other devotees, but from my experience, the children are not affected badly and really appreciate being spoken to like this. That in itself helps form a trusting bond. They will know that they can turn to you because you are helping them verbalize their own feelings and fears, and you are discussing something of integral importance to them—their lives.

Discuss bodily reactions to a fearful situation. Often:

- ➔ palms become sweaty and clammy
- ➔ legs become weak
- ➔ head spins
- ➔ stomach feels sick
- ➔ heart beats faster etc., and you want to get out of the situation quickly.

All of these things indicate an unsafe situation and the child should trust in his own feelings enough to judge.

The children can practice saying "No," to people, trying to put them in an uncomfortable situation. They can do this with a partner, by looking them in the eye and saying in a very definite and loud voice, "No!" They can do this again and again and they really enjoy it. Drama is also an effective way of doing this, and they can applaud the attempts of the most convincing children.

The children can be asked, "What would you do if an older or bigger person tried to make you steal the teacher's pen? What would you do if an older or bigger person tried to make you steal a younger boy's gamsha? Think of more examples citing bullying only, without sexual abuse, where the child should say no. Later tie this in with sexual abuse. e.g. "What would you do if an older boy or bigger person tried to touch your genitals?"

It must be emphasized that the children have every right to say no. They should know this absolutely. No one has the right to make them do anything with the private parts of either bodies. (i.e., the perpetrator or the abused.)

That is why the first part of this pro-

gram is essential. It arms the child. Forearmed is forewarned. It does not disturb their minds or create mistrust in adults.

Go

How to get rid of the situation requires real clarity of thought and action. Most times the perpetrator will be bigger and stronger than the victim. There are different schools of thought, but all say that the child should run fast. Often a strong, loud "No", is enough to put off the abuser. Often they are wimps and their heaviness is simply a bluff.

At this point it should be noted that statistics prove that in many cases an abusee will often become an abuser. Abusers have been found to suffer from low self esteem, although superficially this is not easily judged. Low self esteem does not allow one to assert himself in life. The only way he feels superior or in a dominant position is to sexually abuse a weaker personality. (Thus there is also a high rate of abuse in handicapped and elderly people.) The reason for the cycle is because abuse reduces one's self esteem.

To get away quickly—some say screaming is good. It also puts off the attacker, and karate experts say that screaming is the most effective way of pumping adrenaline throughout the body, allowing the impossible to become possible.

The other day I was told that grabbing the attacker's fingers and bending them back is effective.

Ultimately, on the spur of the moment, it will be up to the child, his nature and how he deals with the problem. But if he is confident in saying no, and that he has every right to say it, a training program such as this will have helped him greatly.

Tell

Next thing, who does he go to? Sometimes the abuse is not just a sudden thing. It might have been going on for some time, but the child has not been able to get out of the situation.

Often in these cases the child has been threatened not to tell. e.g. "This is our secret and if you tell anybody, I will really hurt you."

Some more "if you tell" threats are as follows: 1 Your mother and father

won't want to keep you any more. 2. The police will take you and put you in jail. 3. Your mother will just beat you until you're black and blue. 4. You won't have any friends.

So the child has to feel confident that these are all just bluffs, and not to pay them any heed. And even if they are not bluffs, and a revenge is likely, the child has to know that he can take shelter of someone who will give him full protection.

The child is to think of four or five adults whom he trusts. For the smaller children, an adult you can trust has to be clearly defined—not a teenager, not just someone who smiles at you, but someone who cares for you and who has shown this at various times in the past. It is also someone you feel safe with and someone who has never made you feel unsafe. They may have chastised you or even smacked you, but never made you feel that they were going to really hurt you. Children of this age are very simple and equate a nice person with someone who smiles a lot and a bad person to someone who doesn't. They should be guided to think more carefully.

The older children can record on paper the names of these adults. This is referred to as network.

The network should consist of people in this school or temple—people who we will deal with in this situation. They can, if desired, make another list for their home situation.

The younger children often draw the faces of these people. Photostating some oval shapes for them to fill in allows them to do this effectively and quickly. The teacher then writes the name of the trusted adult next to the face.

Then the children are taught the system of effective telling. They are to make sure that the informed adult acts immediately. If they don't, they are to try the next person on their list, until something is done and the perpetrator is removed from their life. They have the right to feel safe and protected by the society in which they live.

Disclosures are never pleasant. If a child starts to disclose in front of a class group, tell him that you are very interested in what he is saying, and you

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Literature Guidelines (continued from page 15)

portrayed as drinkers?

Gambling

Is gambling presented as exciting, adventurous, or glamorous?

Illicit Sex

Is illicit sex portrayed as normal and exciting, without showing the physical, psychological, emotional, and social consequences?

Romance and Marriage

This is a difficult area. Improper dealings between men and women taint many otherwise innocuous books. Even in books where love affairs are not essential to the plot or theme, authors include them to meet the demands of the reading public.

Is "love" made out to be the all-important factor in choosing a marriage partner? Do boys and girls meet under improper circumstances? Is the Vedic concept of arranged marriages denigrated? Is mundane love glorified as being spiritual? Are intimate dealings graphically portrayed? Is romance a main theme or predominant part of the plot?

Other Problems

Is the work full of unwholesome language? Overdone patriotism? Glorified frivolous activities? Is there ridicule and abuse of sacred things?

Does the author embrace evolution as an unquestionable truth?

Devotional Service

The most important question about a book is how it leaves one feeling about his own devotional service. Some works make one want to get serious about one's spiritual practices—either because of the good example shown by a character, or because the book graphically and forcefully illuminates the problems of material life.

Other books leave one feeling drained, uninspired, doubtful about the purpose of life, enthusiastic for material activities, or feeling that one's spiritual practices are unimportant, foolish or irrelevant.

Even worse, an improperly chosen book can leave a child with doubts about the reality of God and the spiritual realm.

Proud to be Devotee?

After reading the book, does one still feel glad to be a devotee of Krishna? Or does the reader feel foolish and out of touch with society, wishing he could be more involved with "normal" material activities?

Major Flaws

What are the major philosophical

flaws of the book to point out to readers? Can students study the work and enjoy the positive points without becoming influenced by the negative?

Possible Value?

What benefit might Krishna conscious readers get out of this book? What would justify a student's reading it? Spiritual value? Moral guidance? Value as good literature? Important and relevant information? Reinforcement of Krishna conscious principles or viewpoint? Educational or reference value?

Conclusion

It's unlikely you'll find any modern literature not suffering from some, many, or most of the flaws mentioned above. That is one good reason for emphasizing Srila Prabhupada's books.

Hopefully, these guidelines will help parents and teachers become aware of the complex issues involved and the possible dangers.

If your children are exposed to mundane literature and similar influences, please use this information to teach them how to think about what they hear, read and see. ♪

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will get him to tell you later. The other children should be spared the sordid details. If you don't want to defer the discussion until a later date, take the child outside, where you can talk to him confidentially.

Note carefully children's reactions to discussions. I knew of one girl who didn't say a word the entire class. Rather she sat very quietly and solemnly. When the class was over, she ap-

proached a teacher and talked readily about a threatening situation she was in. Her reserved involvement continued throughout the entire term's classes however. She could not participate in group discussions on the matter.

Examples of potential abuse situations are sometimes given to the children who discuss what they think might happen and how to deal with it. For example, "What would you do if you

were in the bathroom and an older person came to shower without wearing a gamsha?"; "What would you do if you noticed someone repeatedly staring in your ashrama window?" etc.

It is important that the community has the knowledge of the child abuse team and their resolutions. If a child discloses to a member of the staff of the community here, the adult should know what course of action to take to

protect the child. He or she should also know the procedure to effectively deal with the society. More than likely the child will not know anyone outside the *urukula*, but we can't assume this, as a trusted adult in the community may be an old family friend, or someone from their home town. I know of an instance, where a child who had been approached by some bigger boys did not tell anyone. But when the wife of his old ashrama teacher visited the temple he was now in, he told her readily, as he had developed a trusting relationship with her and knew that she cared about him.

May I also suggest that because we have to do our own counselling, a book be purchased on this subject for reference if necessary. If we really acknowledge the premise that was mentioned at the beginning of this overview, we should have such a book in our possession now.

This is a very basic curriculum overview. But if we want to start work immediately, we can use this outline to create our own lesson plans and arrange them into 10 to 15 week, half hourly segments, or half an hour daily for two weeks, every six months. The children

love these discussions as you are talking about them. There is no other point to the lesson than finding out about them and giving them some helpful advice.

We will continue working on attaining more information on how to most effectively teach this subject. We also like to present, for the information of the teachers and staff, a list of the myths surrounding child abuse that are

accepted by many people who have not been educated in this matter.

Footnote: You might want to rearrange the order I have listed here. e.g. You might think it wise to give the children the NO GO TELL format at the start of the unit, then return to the beginning to discuss feelings etc. It's up to you and the children you are teaching, but all points should be covered at some point. 