

How long has it been since WT knew the proper way to handle child molestation? To date the thought brought forward was when research was done in 1992 about molestation the Governing Body was then informed and refused to make proper directives in the interest of protecting children. Well it appears that is no longer longer the case with the recent discovery of of a 1988 letter to all bodies of elders on Canada. The letter which was authorized by Watchtower Legal Department shows the home office knew exactly how to handle abuse properly in the congregation.

Read this letter and ask yourself, how many children were raped due to this policy not being enacted in the USA?

Was the Governing Body guilty of weakness or wickedness? ignorance or evil?

WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF CANADA

Box/C,P, 4100, Halton Hill: (Georgetown), Ontario, Canada L7G 04

Telephone: (418) 873-4100

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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN CANADA CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Brothers:

Awake! has drawn to our attention the problem of sexual molestation of children (see January 22, 1985, pp. 3-10). It was appropriately described as a "growing horror." This is further evidence of the depravity of many in the world around us.-Rom. 1:20.

These situations are rare, and we are glad that most of you will never encounter the problem. However, recognizing that such may come to your notice in your role as spiritual shepherds, we want to advise you of a legal responsibility that is now placed on ministers who learn of such abuse.

Provincial law in all provinces of Canada requires that child abuse be reported to child welfare officials so that immediate steps can be taken to protect the children. Jehovah's Witnesses certainly support the objective of protecting children.

The difficulty is to balance between your obligation to report such matters and your congregational duty to maintain confidentiality. We have asked our Legal Desk for some comment, and the following legal opinion is passed on to you:

When to report?

There is a duty to report when one has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that there is abuse or a substantial risk of abuse and parents have failed to protect the child. The report shall be made forthwith to the local child welfare authorities. Sexual offenders are notorious repeaters. Therefore, careful investigation should be undertaken to ensure that no other children are at risk from the same person.

Who must report?

Most provinces place the duty on "any person." There is no statutory provision for an ecclesiastical privilege. Generally, one cannot be sued if he reports

in good faith. A minister cannot ignore this obligation. He would be subject to prosecution, fines, and imprisonment if he did so.

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Does a minister have an alternative?

Yes. A minister could make definite arrangements for someone else to report.

For example, family members should be encouraged to discuss the abuse with a family physician. He can arrange for therapy from a suitable mental health professional. Then either the family or the physician could report the matter. The abuser himself could report it and is well advised to do so. This will usually result in assistance being provided, and officials are always more sympathetic to an abuser who seeks help.

Elders must be aware, however, that once they have knowledge, they have an obligation. They cannot just hope that someone else will report. They must follow through quickly and be sure that it is done. Once it is reported, either by them or by someone else, they have discharged the obligation.

Are there other considerations?

Yes. If the abuser lives in the same home as the children, it is best for the offender to voluntarily leave the home, even temporarily.

Otherwise, the child welfare authorities will likely remove the children from both parents. These authorities could conclude that the non-abusive parent has also failed to sufficiently protect the child. Such a decision, of course, rests with the family, but the advantages are obvious.

Is the law identical in every province?

No, there are variations. If you encounter difficulties in discharging your obligation, contact the branch office of the Society in Georgetown.

Should records be kept?

It is important that you document carefully everything that happened, including names, dates, and times; and keep it in the confidential records of the congregation in a sealed envelope.

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Checklist

The following checklist will give you a brief summary of the steps you should follow in handling this problem:

1. Read page I of this letter under subheading "When to Report," and determine if there has been sexual abuse that must be reported.
2. Advise parent to take immediate steps to protect the abused child, i.e., abuser not remain in the same home as victimized child and all access between abuser and children should be strictly supervised.
3. Recommend family take victim to family physician immediately. Recommend abuser or family seek physician's or psychologist's assistance. Doctor will have duty to report.
4. Promptly follow up with family and/or physician, psychologist, etc., to make certain abuse was reported.
5. Make written memorandum of steps taken to report abuse, and keep it in a confidential congregation file in a sealed envelop.

We appreciate very much your work in handling such problems. The brothers and sisters benefit by your service in both keeping congregation clean and providing help to erring ones. We pray that Jehovah may continue to support and bless your faithful ministry. Accept this expression of our Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

**Watch Tower B & T Society
Of CANADA**