

Child Injury Laws *Blog*

Despite The Recent Publicity, Children Continue To Remain Susceptible To Abuse From Clergy

Posted by [Jonathan Rosenfeld](#) on November 15, 2010

Child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is a devastating event and can be difficult to discuss. This is especially true for clergy abuse because it involves the church and trusted priests. However, clergy abuse is a topic that needs to be discussed.

The more light shed on the topic, the better people can understand the problem, take preventative measures, provide therapy to victims, and attempt to right wrongs.

The [Catholic Church](#) is at the center of the scandal, with numerous stories of abuse and expensive lawsuits. The Church has dealt with these cases for more than two decades, costing almost [\\$2 billion](#) in settlements. Many victims of clergy abuse want more than just [money](#), they want [validation](#) that the abuse occurred, that it was wrong, and that it wasn't their fault.

Some accusers and victims want nothing more than the opportunity to speak to the parish where their abuse occurred, fighting against the veil of secrecy and silence that covered the misdeeds in the first place. Oftentimes, victims want to regain control and power over their own treatment. Clergy abuse usually occurs because of the [abuse of power](#), where a priest uses his position and the parish's trust to coerce children into accepting abuse.

One of the first cases of clergy abuse in the U.S. is from 1985, where [Rev. Gilbert Gauthé](#), a Louisiana Reverend, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for molesting at least 35 kids. Since then, many more victims of clergy abuse have come forward.

However, the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) did not release policy recommendations for how to deal with cases of clergy abuse. The policy recommended that accused priests be removed from represents Top of Form

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service, sent into treatment, and provided with counseling and pastoral care. The church settled these cases quietly, reassigning priests to new areas, and maintaining a veil of secrecy.

Most notable are cases of clergy abuse in Boston in 2002, Ireland in 2009, and Germany in 2010. Priests in Boston with backgrounds of sexual abuse were reassigned numerous times, resulting in hundreds of children being sexually abused. [Father John J. Geoghan](#) was accused of abusing over 130 young boys over 30 years.

Shockingly, priests who had a history of sexual abuse were allowed to continue ministering, with no warnings given to their new parishioners. The secrecy that cloaked these terrible incidents only added to the horror. In [Chicago](#), over half of the Roman Catholic parishes have housed a priest accused of sexual abuse at some point.

The [Church](#) has not always reacted well to the charges of clergy abuse. Some church officials claimed that the sensationalism of the abuse was an effort to malign the church and hurt its cause. The well-loved former Pope John Paul II did not do much to address the charges of abuse, while the current Pope Benedict XVI has done more to address clergy abuse.

The [Vatican](#) revised its own laws to make it easier to discipline priests accused of sexual abuse with faster juridical procedures. However, the Vatican also stated that pedophile and ordaining women as priests were comparable crimes, both being described as “grave crimes.” Needless to say, these conflicting sentiments from the Church did not do much to minimize the public’s [outrage](#) with the Church’s handling of clergy abuse.

Illinois amended its [statute of limitations](#) for cases of sexual abuse in 2003. The law allows accusers of sexual abuse 5 years after they realized they were abused, instead of the previous statute of limitation of 2 years, to file civil suits. It also gave accusers 10 years after turning 18 to file civil suits. This amendment applies to situations .

Sexual abuse can cause long-lasting effects, causing emotional and behavioral problems later in life. (See “[Sexual Abuse of Children By Caregivers: A Varied and Widely Unknown Impact](#)”) The impact of sexual abuse among children varies greatly, depending on individual factors such as: the child's personality, their age and their living situation.

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Similarly, victims of childhood sexual abuse manifest the effects of their abuse at different times of their lives. In some cases, the sexual abuse victims may not even become aware of the full effects of their abuse until later in life-- when they begin to experience difficulties with relationships and intimacy.

Common manifestations of sexual abuse in children include:

- Sudden behavior changes
- Difficulty sleeping
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Toileting accidents
- Behavioral problems
- Inappropriate sexual behavior
- Aggressiveness

Despite the obvious level of discomfort that accompanies sexual abuse topics, experts agree that some of the most productive part of sexual abuse treatment involves an open discussion of the incident itself and acknowledgment of related feelings.

Treatment for victims of sexual abuse usually incorporates various aspects of individual and group therapy. Because family members may experience feelings of guilt and embarrassment, it is also important that counselors work with the family unit as well as the child.

The best way to prevent sexual abuse, whether it involves the clergy or not, is through open discussion, education, and regulations and oversight in place to recognize and correct any inappropriate behavior or abuse. "Silence protects predators."

As a parent, it is important to have open discussions with your children about inappropriate touching and cultivate a close relationship where they feel comfortable confiding in you. Also, it is important for your children to have a network of trusted adults (teachers, therapists, doctors, etc) who can also represents Top of Form

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provide safe lines of communication. It is important to remember that the safe haven of a Church can have hidden dangers, and you should remain aware and vigilant in order to protect your children.

Especially in light of the fact that church insiders have had knowledge of the abusive propensities of some clergy member--- yet failed to take any remedial action or protect its membership from harm-- claims for damages may be may maintained against the church directly. In some cases, claims for past sexual abuse can be resolved prior to litigation with special attention paid to the protection of the victim. Speak to an attorney today for a confidential consultation about your legal options. (888) 424-5757

Special thanks to Heather Keil, J.D. for her assistance with the [Child Injury Laws](#) entry.

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