

Session Descriptions

When Faith Hurts: Understanding, Recognizing and Responding to the Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Impact of Child Maltreatment

Victor Vieth, JD, M.Th., Director of Education and Research, Zero Abuse Project

This opening session will provide an introduction to the issue of child abuse in faith-based communities. The speaker will highlight the prevalence of child abuse, how children disclose sexual abuse, the impact of sexual abuse on spirituality, behaviors indicative of sexual abuse, the interest sexual offenders have in faith based camps and schools and the methods often used in selecting children to be abused, effective policies for deterring sexual offenders, helpful rules and lessons from youth-serving organizations, physical abuse signs, types of emotional abuse, the role of background checks and worker interviews, how to respond when the church, synagogue, seminary or other faith institution is sued by a victim or group of victims, and suggestions for speaking with an adult survivor disclosing childhood maltreatment and an adult confessing child sexual abuse.

Theological Distortions - Commonly Misapplied Scripture in Counseling

Carrie Nettles, MDiv, Chaplain, JVC

Victims often hear scripture and theological concepts weaponized by their offender, and often unintentionally by their pastoral caregivers and fellow church members. Unwittingly, these messages discourage child abuse reports, keep victims from seeking medical and mental healthcare, and shames the victim for their own maltreatment. These injuries often leave a lasting impact. This module indexes theological themes and passages of scripture that have been used to harm victims and embolden offenders. Students will receive suggestions on a trauma-informed approach to scripture, theology, and pastoral care and an increased awareness of the impact on victims when their faith has been weaponized.

Like a Footprint in Wet Cement: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children through the Lens of ACES Research

Victor Vieth, JD, M.Th., Director of Education and Research, Zero Abuse Project

The ongoing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) studies out of Kaiser Permanente and the Center for Disease Control suggest that childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction are major risk factors for the leading causes of illness, death and poor psychological adjustment in the United States. Cumulative adverse childhood events have a role in poor physical health, problematic health risk behaviors, learning challenges, behavior problems and disease. The presentation will introduce faith leaders to this research and discuss the importance of faith, medical and mental health providers working to address to have a holistic approach to addressing a child's needs.

When Child Abuse Hits Home: Corporal Punishment, the Law & the Faith Community

Victor Vieth, JD, M.Th., Director of Education and Research, Zero Abuse Project

In this session, participants will receive an overview of research on the effectiveness and risk factors associated with corporal punishment as well as an overview of the contracting legal definition of reasonable force. Various theological approaches to corporal punishment are discussed. Finally, participants are presented with a case scenario and work through possible approaches to a case of physical discipline resulting in child injuries.

Mandated Reporting for Clergy

Shauna Galloway-Williams, M.Ed., LPC, Executive Director

One of the most important roles a clergy person plays in protecting children and responding to a disclosure of child abuse is that of a mandated reporter. This session will provide an overview of definitions, important laws, and procedures for fulfilling the role of the mandated reporter and will address the issue of clergy/penitent privilege.

Addressing Emotional and Spiritual Injuries from a Mental Health and Pastoral Counseling Perspective

Laura Thien, MSW, LISW-CP, Therapist, JVC & Rev. Dr. Jay Kieve, M.Div., Th.M., D.Min, CBFSC

This session focuses on a mental health and pastoral counseling approach to trauma-informed counseling of survivors of trauma. Participants will receive an overview of possible approaches for coordinating pastoral and mental health counseling for children and adults impacted by child abuse.

Challenging Dynamics in the Church: Case Examples for Addressing Sex Offenders in Places of Worship

Carrie Nettles, MDiv, Chaplain, JVC

Church leadership often faces challenges when making decisions about how to address sex offenders in the Christian environments, how to address issues arising from sex offenders and survivors in the same place of worship, and how to provide appropriate safety measures and pastoral care. This session will discuss these dynamics and provide practical case study examples for discussion and application.

It Takes a Team- A Multi-Disciplinary Approach at Child Advocacy Centers

MDT Team Members

This session gives an overview of the role child advocacy centers play in responding to child abuse in the community. Specifically, the material will highlight how multi-disciplinary teams provide a holistic approach to helping survivors and their families and the potential role faith-based community leadership could play. Representatives from the mental health community, law enforcement, and child protection agencies will answer questions—some pre-determined and some from participants.

When Children Offend

Kim Ponce, MS, NCC, LPCA, Children's Advocacy Center Director, JVC

We spend a lot of time talking about the characteristics of adult offenders and how to best protect children against these offenders. Did you know that 36% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated someone under the age of eighteen? Child on child sexual abuse can be just as traumatic as when abuse is inflicted by an adult. When abuse is inflicted by an older peer or sibling, families and even mandated reporters may be resistant to reporting and seeking interventions. This session will focus on the issue of children abusing other children. This includes: Risks of older children serving in supervisory roles of younger children in youth and faith settings, the importance of reporting incidents of child on child sexual abuse, Age appropriate sexual behaviors and concerning behaviors, Understanding the reoffending risks of child and adolescent offenders, and why reporting these incidents and treating young offenders is so important

Child Abuse Prevention in the Faith-Based Setting

Nina Mitchell, Human Resources Director, Brookwood Church

Participants will receive information about child abuse prevention and protection policies in the church setting, as well as information about how child safety education programs will benefit church leadership, children, and parents.

Moving Forward: Practical Application

Carrie Nettles, MDiv, Chaplain, JVC

Participants will be divided into groups and given a case study for discussion and application. The case study, as developed by Boz Tchividjian (professor of law at Liberty University and Director of G.R.A.C.E), will entail addressing the many challenging dynamics of responding to a disclosure of abuse in a church setting.