

Proclamation Regarding Child Safety in the Orthodox Jewish Community

In light of tragic suicides committed as a direct result of child sexual abuse, as well as other physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual consequences suffered by innocents in our Jewish Orthodox communities and beyond; and,

In fulfillment of the Torah's precept, לא תעמוד על דם רעך ("Do not stand by while your fellow's blood is spilled"); and,

As religious leaders responsible for our communities' institutions and their policies, as well as for the physical and spiritual welfare of the members of our communities

We proclaim the following:

- We acknowledge that sexual abuse of children - committed by family members, acquaintances, rabbis, teachers, counselors, youth leaders, and other professionals - exists in our communities. This abuse has caused and continues to cause immeasurable harm to the victims, their families, and our entire community; it can destroy lives.
- We recognize in light of past experiences that our community could have responded in more responsible and sensitive ways to help victims and to hold perpetrators accountable.
- We condemn attempts to ignore allegations of child sexual abuse. These efforts are harmful, contrary to Jewish law, and immoral. The reporting of reasonable suspicions of all forms of child abuse and neglect directly and promptly to the civil authorities is a requirement of Jewish law. There is no need for people acting responsibly to seek rabbinic approval prior to reporting.
- We decry the use of Jewish law or the invocation of communal interests as a tool to silence victims or witnesses from reporting abuse. Regardless of the standing of the abuser, accusers and their family members must be treated in an accepting, nonjudgmental manner so that they feel safe and can therefore speak frankly and fully. This is necessary for them to receive suitable therapeutic support, and in order to facilitate proper investigation and pursuit of justice. Shunning or encouraging social ostracism of victims, their families, or reporters is forbidden.
- We call upon all synagogues and schools to adopt policies geared towards preventing sexual abuse, including:
 - Setting up a committee within each institution to oversee policy development and implementation. Members should include school or synagogue professionals, lay leaders, and experts in dealing with abuse.
 - Maximizing visibility and physical access to every space in the building in order to prevent any one adult from being secluded with one or more children without the reasonable and immediate possibility of being seen.
 - Developing a hiring policy which uses a variety of currently available tools to carefully screen each potential employee including, but not limited to, diverse background checks and mandatory fingerprinting.

- Having a secure policy for dropping off and picking up children at the school or synagogue.
- Establishing rules defining acceptable and unacceptable touching of children by teachers, youth leaders, and counselors.
- Educating current and incoming staff about how to identify, respond to, and report child sexual abuse. Similar sessions should be held for the community at large. Retraining should be conducted periodically.
- Raising awareness in the community of the existence, significance, and preventative policies regarding child sexual abuse.
- Members of the community must be made aware when a sex offender moves in to a community. Community members and leaders should monitor the person's compliance with specially instituted safeguards that may be imposed.
- Remaining alert regarding adults who seem overly interested in interacting with children.
- Teaching children in age-appropriate ways about sexual development and sexual safety, about what constitutes improper adult behavior, about being assertive in the face of such behavior, and about the need to tell a trusted adult if another adult tells them to keep a secret. In this way, children can become aware of, and alert to, dangers they may encounter even though no child is responsible for preventing sexual abuse; that is a responsibility of every adult and the entire community.

Ultimately, it is the halachic and moral obligation of the entire Jewish community, individually and collectively, to do all in our power to safeguard our children by preventing abuse and responding appropriately once instances of abuse have occurred.

Proclamation Signees

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