

Allegations of child sexual abuse by a former assistant football coach at Penn State University have dominated the news this week. On Wednesday legendary football coach Joe Paterno released a statement in which he said, "With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more." How lame is that, coach?

Would you have accepted that excuse from one of your players? "With the benefit of hindsight, coach, I wish I had run the route we rehearsed a thousand times in practice." See how stupid that sounds? It doesn't take "hindsight" to know that when some monster is raping children in your locker room, you call the police.

Coach, you knew back in 2002 that Jerry Sandusky had anally raped a ten-year-old boy in the Lasch Football Building. You handled the matter quietly with your athletic director, Tim Curley. You took away the rapist's keys and barred him from the facility—but you didn't call the police. You didn't lift a finger to help the victim. No hindsight needed, coach. You screwed up.

Yes, we all know about your 61-year career at Penn State. But when you allow children to be victimized right under your nose, you wipe out 61 years of achievement. The Jerry Sandusky scandal is your legacy now.

This scandal has also indelibly stained the reputation of The Second Mile, the charity Jerry Sandusky founded in 1977 as a foster-care program for at-risk kids. Turns out the kids were most at-risk from Sandusky himself.

The Second Mile was one of George Bush Sr.'s Thousand Points of Light and probably did some good work. But the grand jury says Sandusky met his victims through The Second Mile. So even if the program survives this scandal, it will always be remembered as Jerry Sandusky's private sandbox for recruiting rape victims.

As for the alleged child-rapist himself, you have to stand amazed at his gall. He actually had the brass to title his autobiography "Touched: The Jerry Sandusky Story." What is that, the punch line of a sick joke?

I don't want to hear any more "benefit of hindsight" excuses. So let's be clear about what you should do if you learn that a child is being sexually abused. Print this out, post it on your bulletin board, and make sure everyone in your family, company, or organization knows how to respond to child sexual abuse.

1. If you see an act of child abuse in progress, step in and STOP IT. I have to wonder why the grad assistant who witnessed the rape felt he only had to report it to someone. Why didn't he jump in, knock Sandusky on his butt, and protect the child? If you see a child being raped by an adult, please have the guts and good sense to intervene.
2. If a child tells you he or she is being abused, don't panic, don't act shocked. Make sure the child feels supported and protected. Say, "You did the right thing in telling me."
3. Believe the child. Even if the offender is "good old Uncle Charlie," tell the child, "I believe you." It takes a courage for kids to speak up because they fear they won't be believed. Kids need to know you're on their side, and they almost never imagine sex acts unless they've experienced them.
4. Tell the child that he or she is not bad. Say, "He knew better; you didn't know. We'll make sure he can't touch you again."
5. Focus on the child's needs. Don't think about the reputation of any individual or organization. The moment you shift your focus off of what's best for the child, you're on the wrong side of the issue.
6. Don't confront the offender in front of the child. Keep adult discussions away from the child. Kids need to feel protected. They don't need to be upset, disturbed, and frightened.
7. Report the crime to the police. Law enforcement agencies in your area have trained investigators who will talk with you and the child, and who know exactly how best to handle the situation.

And don't you dare tell me that you don't have the heart to have "good old Uncle Charlie" arrested. If Uncle Charlie is molesting a child, protect that child!

I've heard too many horror stories of people who protected "good old Uncle Charlie" or "good old Coach Sandusky" instead of protecting children. You must have absolute moral clarity: Child molesters belong in jail where they can't hurt children. If you don't call the police, then you are an accomplice and no better than a molester yourself.

8. If the molester is a member of the clergy, DO NOT report the abuse to church officials. If the molester is a coach or teacher, DO NOT report the abuse to the school authorities. Some churches and organizations worry more about lawsuits and bad publicity than about kids. Just call the police.
9. Don't call Child Protective Services—investigating crimes is not the function of CPS. If the police determine that CPS should be involved, they will make that decision.

Don't let the predator talk you out calling the police. Most predators are amazingly persuasive—that's how they entice their victims, and that's how they get people to cover for them instead of reporting them. Don't be taken in by a charming predator.

10. After you call the police, call the ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4ACHILD (1-800-422-4453). The ChildHelp counselor will listen to your concerns, answer your questions, and direct you to local support services for the child.

Finally, don't you ever use the "benefit of hindsight" excuse! I've armed you with the foresight to do the right thing to protect a child—and that child is counting on you.

The reason I tell you all this? Because, I was once that boy.

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