
 PUZZLING QUESTIONS ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

The current crisis of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church presents troubling and confusing questions to many parishioners. The answers are not always simple or the same from one person to another. Below are frequently asked questions and some of the most common explanations.

WHY DIDN'T VICTIMS SAY SOMETHING BEFORE? WHY WAIT YEARS TO SPEAK UP?

- Years ago, most kids felt no one would ever believe them if they said that a teacher, priest or doctor had touched them in an inappropriate way.
- Many kids were afraid they would be punished if they spoke up and sometimes abusers threatened to punish them if they talked.
- Many people who are abused feel a deep sense of shame and embarrassment, even years later, over having been victimized and fear others will blame the victim
- In many cases, children did speak up, but the adults did not understand or listen and so they gave up trying.
- Very often, people who are victimized in their youth need to achieve a sense of competence as adults before they can talk about traumatic things in their childhood

SO WHY DO VICTIMS SPEAK UP NOW YEARS LATER?

- Now that there have been publicly confirmed cases of abuse, they feel there is a better chance they will be taken seriously rather than disbelieved and met with compassion and help rather than blame.
- To unburden themselves from the pain of continuing to carry a shameful secret and all the problems that go with it.
- To get the help they need to recover from the effects of abuse
- So that others who were abused will be able to talk about what happened without shame
- So that others who need counseling and understanding will be able to receive it
- To prevent this kind of abuse from happening to other children

WHY WOULD ABUSE FROM 30 YEARS AGO STILL AFFECT A PERSON? HOW DOES IT AFFECT THEM?

- Because traumatic events that are not dealt with leave open emotional wounds which may be covered over but do not heal.
- Because experiences as children are formative: betrayal or exploitation by a trusted authority figure in childhood may create lasting problems with trust and self-esteem.
- Chronic feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy, as well as sexual difficulties and anxieties are common, long-term effects.
- Traumatic events that remain a secret can also cause depression, anxiety, problems on the job and difficulties in relationships.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE WHO DID A LOT OF GOOD ABUSE KIDS?

- Because of immaturity, bad judgment, use of alcohol or drugs, and/or a mental illness called pedophilia.
- Because they mistakenly thought of what they were doing as benign, affectionate, or even loving and were blinded to seeing it for what it was: exploitative, abusive, and harmful.
- Because they didn't (couldn't or wouldn't) exercise control over urges and desires they had that were wrong.
- Because they thought they were "above the rules".
- Because they failed to understand the damage they were doing.