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## Letter to the Editor

A yearlong investigation by the Associated Press uncovered about 17,000 officially reported sex assaults of students by students, including heartbreaking stories of elementary age children violated by peers, as well as older children. This does not square with public perception of who commits child sexual abuse, which continues to be the scary looking older stranger lurking at the mall or park.

Nearly 90% of sexually abused children are molested by someone they know and trust. And about 40% of them are violated by children under age 18. As director of a program that focuses on adults taking responsibility to protect children, I am keenly aware that child-on-child sexual abuse is not simply an “out there” problem. It is here in Lancaster County, in our churches, schools and communities. Too often it is mischaracterized as “bullying.” Much of it is never reported for various reasons, ranging from lack of knowledge of PA reporting law for child-on-child sexual abuse to fear of stigmatizing a child with a label of “sexual offender.”

Last year, we began to work with nationally known expert in the field, Joan Tabachnick, to create a workshop to offer to parents, educators, church leaders and others on how to recognize warning signs that a child or teen has a sexual behavior problem and intervene. We want to help adults in our community understand that children who harm others are not “mini sexual offenders” and most respond very well to treatment by a trained professional. We also want to be clear that the trauma to the victim is not minimized simply because the offender was another child.

Our hope for the workshop is that adults are willing to sit with their discomfort about the issue of child-on-child sexual abuse in order to learn how to protect all children – potential victims as well as potential harm doers. We owe it to them.

For information on how to bring the workshop “Children & Teens with Sexual Behavior Problems: What we Need to Know” to your place of worship, school, organization or other setting, contact Samaritan SafeChurch/SafePlaces at 717.560.9991 or [Lcrockett@scclanc.org](mailto:Lcrockett@scclanc.org).

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