Greetings!

As media coverage and public outcry around the Jerry Sandusky case quiet down, an important lesson remains for all of us.

**Bystanders can prevent child abuse.**

**Each of us may someday be a bystander.**

There were many adult bystanders to Sandusky's abusive behavior during his years at Penn State. Some turned a blind eye. Some didn't think it was their responsibility. Perhaps some people spoke up, but were not heard. Many were scared of backlash, intimidated by power, or uncomfortable with what they saw or heard. Many didn't know what to do - or that they **could** do something.

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont (PCAV) believes every adult can be an effective bystander. In fact, we **all have a responsibility as bystanders.** Our children's safety depends on our engagement.

Read on to learn how you, as a bystander, can protect children. Together we can overcome the barriers to speaking up, intervene before a child is harmed, and create violence-free homes, schools and communities. Child abuse is preventable!

For Our Children,

Linda E. Johnson
Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

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**Recognize Suspicious or Uncomfortable Behavior**

As adults, we often witness behavior that makes us uneasy or uncomfortable. Paying attention to suspicious behavior is the first step to protecting children from harm.

Consider these scenarios:

- You walk into to the grocery store and see a young girl in the parking lot. She is talking to an older man who appears to be flirting with her. You have seen them around town before. Although she appears to only be about 12 years old, she is wearing a lot of makeup. While you don't know anything for sure,
you just have a feeling that something is not right.

- Your friend, also a parent, insists her son give your daughter a hug goodbye after each play-date. It’s obvious that your friend’s child does not want to give these hugs. Still, your friend insists. You feel uncomfortable and think the child’s boundaries are being crossed.

**Overcome the Barriers Facing Bystanders**

What might keep a bystander from taking action?

- "I don’t know what to do or say."
- "I don’t feel safe approaching the man."
- "I don’t want to embarrass anyone, or criticize another person’s parenting."
- "Maybe I’m overreacting."
- "It’s not my job... I just don’t want to get involved."
- "I’m not qualified to intervene."

"There is an acceptance of an unhealthy culture in which people believe 'that’s just the way things are' and we must get past that."

- Robin Castle, Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Manager, PCAV

**Take Action: Be an Engaged Bystander**

_You see the man outside the post office later that day. You decide to walk up and say something._

- Make sure it is safe to confront.
- Find an ally, and intervene together.
- In a calm voice, state the behavior that concerns you and how it makes you feel:

"I don’t think it is right that you spend so much time with the young girl I’ve seen you with, and I want you to know that I feel uneasy about it."

- Express concern for all involved, and encourage seeking help:

"I am concerned for everyone’s safety, and I will be contacting her parents. By law, this girl is far too young to be dating a man of your age."

Your friend continues to demand that her son give your daughter a hug goodbye. Sensing the boy’s discomfort, you decide to talk to your friend.
- Provide an alternative:
"It's okay if John doesn't want to hug Sarah. Let's wave, or give a high-five!"

- Create an inclusive environment:
"Let's all play Go Fish before we leave!"

- Follow up with your friend later:
"Saying 'No' to a hug, and choosing to wave, allows John to practice his autonomy - and that is an important learning experience. Sarah feels okay waving, too."

"A Bystander does not need to be a professional or hold a degree. You just have to say something."

- Rachel Gartner, SAFE-T Manager, PCAV

**Support a Parent: Be a Compassionate Bystander**

Every one of us has witnessed a mother or father trying to calm their crying baby or upset child in a public place. As many parents know, it is stressful - even embarrassing - if your baby cries loudly in a store or during a religious service. When you are a bystander to another mother or father and their upset child, you have the power to calm a stressful situation.

**Overcome the Barriers:**
- "I don't want to get involved."
- "The baby is disrupting my day."
- "What if the parent gets angry?"
- "The crying is annoying!"
- "I don't know them; I can't help."

**Take Action and Be a Compassionate Bystander:**
- Give the parent an understanding nod or smile
- Assure the parent:
"All babies cry."
"My son cried in the waiting room at the Doctor's office, too."

With small actions like these, you can help to lower parents' stress, allowing them to nurture and calm their baby safely.
Reach Out: Be a Bystander Who Joins and Connects

All too often, bystanders do not take action because they feel another person's parenting style is personal and private: "It's none of my business and I shouldn't judge another parent." But you can make a difference! If you sense anger, frustration, or stress between a parent and their child, anything you can do to help is a step towards preventing abuse.

"The notion that bringing up children is a totally private family matter must be challenged. Sometimes, events between a parent and their child happen in public. So, if you see an event that doesn't feel right, what can you do? Reach out."

- Steve Ness, Family Support Programs Manager, PCAV

Tips to Connect:
- Be friendly and helpful to parents.
- Are their hands full with grocery bags? Offer to carry something.
- Connect with parents.
- Make eye contact. "Parenting is hard, isn't it?"
- Be positive.
- It doesn't have to feel like a confrontation. "Kids are a handful, aren't they? But they bring us a lot of joy!"
- Be kind and friendly to children.
- Make a nice comment to an upset child.
- Be proactive.
- Talk to your friends and neighbors and make a commitment to looking out for each other's children.

"The bottom line is to take action to make things better!"

- Steve Ness, Family Support Programs Manager, PCAV

Start a Conversation: Be a Bystander Who Prevents

PCAV knows it takes courage to be an engaged bystander.

The Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)/Abusive Head Trauma prevention trainers at PCAV often hear from adults who are concerned but who feel uncomfortable discussing Shaken Baby Syndrome with new parents. It is a tough issue. But the conversation saves lives.

Discussion and education are essential to preventing abuse. SBS trainers encourage parents, school personnel, and caregivers to share experiences and skills, frustrations and challenges with each other.
“It all comes back to responsibility. We encourage health care providers to talk to all new parents about SBS/Abusive Head Trauma. It is becoming policy, a standard procedure, before parents leave the hospital with their new baby.”

- Kay Shangraw, Shaken Baby Syndrome Prevention Manager, PCAV