

Hope Presbyterian Church
Child, Youth, and Disabled Adults Protection Policy
Updated and adopted on January 19, 2021

General Purpose Statement

Hope Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children, youth, and disabled adults who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing these practices, our goal is to establish community standards for appropriate conduct that benefits everyone, in order that we may protect the children, youth, and disabled adults of Hope Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior. We are motivated by the love and teachings of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures:

Matthew 18:5-6

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Matthew 19:14

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. A "youth" is any child participating in youth group activities, usually between the ages of 11-17, or grades 6-12. A "disabled adult" is defined as any person 18 years of age or older with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities. "Session" includes church Elders. "Ministry Leader" includes Nursery Coordinator, Children's Minister, Youth Minister. "Parent" includes legal guardians.

Selection Of Workers

Beginning December 1, 2008, all new employees and all new persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes:

- a. Three Month Rule
No volunteer will be allowed to work with children or disabled adults until s/he has been a member or regular attendee of Hope Presbyterian Church for a minimum of three (3) months or are approved by the Session. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children or disabled adults.
- b. Written Application
All persons seeking to work with children or disabled adults must complete and sign a written application we provide. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, reference information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at Hope Presbyterian Church. *Objections to a written application will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by at least two people, including a pastor or elder.*
- c. Personal Interview

Upon completion of the written application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

- d. Reference Checks
Before a new applicant is permitted to work with children or disabled adults, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Hope Presbyterian Church.
- e. Internet and Social Media
Internet and social media searches may be used to collect data on new applicants' activity on these platforms.
- f. Criminal Background Check
A national criminal background check is required for all employees and for all adult volunteers working with children, youth, and disabled adults.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form (typically through the background check website). If an individual declines to sign, s/he will be unable to work with children. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the Hope Presbyterian Church.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Ministry Leader and a pastor or elder on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

Classroom Supervision

It is desirable to have two unrelated adult workers in attendance when supervising children. However, due to the size of the program and the demands on adult leaders, this is not always feasible. Therefore, when two adult workers are not present, the classroom door must be left open if the door doesn't have a window allowing an unobstructed view of the classroom and the participants.

Rule of Three

There should be no fewer than two children or disabled adults with an adult or youth worker. We do not allow minors or disabled adults to be alone with one other person on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation (See Open Door Policy below).

Travel

Adult Leaders who are unrelated to a youth may not transport a youth alone. Arrangements should be made for youth to be dropped off and picked up at events and activities.

Overnight Events

- No adult will ever share a bed with a youth unless it is a parent/child or sibling relationship.

- No males will share a room with females or vice versa.
- Unless a separate bed is available, adult leaders will sleep on the floor when the group spends the night in a hotel or similar accommodations.
- It is not always possible to have two adult leaders in each room. However, adults should never be in a room alone with a youth unless the door is open.
- On some occasions the youth and adult leaders will spend the night at a local church or other multi-purpose facility. At that time, the youth will be separated by gender and a clearly defined dividing line will be established, and adult leaders strategically placed to ensure the two genders do not sleep with or beside each other.

Student Drivers

No youth is allowed to drive a personal vehicle or ride with another youth driver to or from any sanctioned youth event unless given prior approval by the parent/guardian of both the driver and the passenger(s).

Personal Space Boundaries

Relational ministry often means an embrace or hug to show the student is welcome, loved, and cared for. However, any kind of touch should be welcomed by the child, youth, or disabled adult, and should be visible or accountable to other adults. No youth is allowed to sit on the lap of an adult leader. No adult leader will ever be allowed to engage in a physical relationship with a youth, even if both parties give consent.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child’s or disabled adult’s physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- Physical abuse – any physical injury to a child or disabled adult which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child or disabled adult is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child or disabled adult and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a child or disabled adult of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

(See Appendix A for a more detailed definition of child abuse.)

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported

immediately to the Ministry Leader and to Forsyth County Child Protective Services, as outlined in Appendix B.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child or disabled adult will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should also be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report.
4. We will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. (See Appendix B on Mandatory Reporting.)
5. We will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children, youth, or disabled adults.
7. Hope Presbyterian Church will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other workers should refrain from speaking to the media.
8. A pastoral visit can be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.

Mandatory Reporting

North Carolina law makes it illegal to not report child abuse. If you have reason to suspect that a child or disabled adult is abused, neglected or dependent, or died as the result of maltreatment, you must report it to Forsyth County Department of Social Services. See Appendices for more information.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Youth Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for youth under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers:

- Youth workers must be in at least the 6th grade.
- Youth workers will be screened as specified in "Selection of Workers" above, with the exception of (d) and (f).
- Youth workers must be under the supervision of an adult, in an *assisting* role, and must never be left alone with children or disabled adults.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

- For children fifth grade and below, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be checked in and checked out only by a parent or guardian.
- Upon arrival, the parent should check the child in at the designated check-in station and make sure to note any allergies or medical concerns. If a child has an allergy or medical concern, they must make sure it is listed on their child's name tag and speak to the volunteer assigned to their child's room to notify them of their child's needs.
- The child's name tag should be placed on their chest or back before entering their classroom.
- Parents should keep the security identification portion of the name tag to use at their child's pick up. The number on their child's name tag will be matched to the number on the parent's portion of the identification tag in order to pick up their child after the service, or to pick up their child early from Worship Class.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Hope Presbyterian Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should not be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease, including exposure to COVID 19 within the last 14 days.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Infection Control Procedures

- Use **NON-Latex** disposable gloves when changing diapers or dealing with any other fluid. Discard in trash after use.
- Sick children should not be in childcare. If you suspect a child is sick, please notify the Director or Coordinator and request that parents come and pick up their child.
- If a child spits or bites, notify the Coordinator immediately so that they can request parental attention for all children involved.
- Wash your hands frequently during your shift to cut down on transmission of disease-causing organisms.
- Clean children's hands before & after snack and after using the restroom. Use hand sanitizer if there is not a sink in your classroom.

- Use only diaper changing pad to change diapers. Do not change diapers on the floor, or leave a child unattended on the pad.
- Prior to diaper change, place a new disposable pad on the diaper changing pad, underneath the child.
- Use appropriate cleaner to disinfect diaper changing pad after each change and on all food contact surfaces before preparing food and after eating.
- Children are not allowed to share snacks brought from home, to prevent allergic reaction or possible transmission of germs.

Scheduling and Absences Procedure

If you know in advance that you will be absent, contact another worker/teacher or ask parents of the children in your class to substitute. Let your Coordinator know who the replacement is. You need a substitute if you have had a fever within the past 24 hours; if you have a communicable illness such as: chicken pox, ringworm, pinkeye or poison ivy/oak/sumac or a draining lesion on the skin that cannot properly be bandaged to prevent drainage.

If you are sick on Sunday, have any symptoms of COVID 19, or have been in contact with anyone with COVID 19 within the last 14 days, contact your Director or Coordinator.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of Hope Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) and a *Permission to Administer Medicine Form* should be completed. Parents of such children should address their situation with the Ministry Leader to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Hope Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Ministry Leader if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Children four years of age and younger should utilize a classroom bathroom if one is available. The classroom bathrooms at Hope Church have a Dutch door, so the worker should unlatch and open the top portion of the door if they need to assist the child in the bathroom.

If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child or disabled adult requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he/she assists the child or disabled adult. If a second worker is available, they should stay in the bathroom while the first worker assists the child or disabled adult.

For children ages 5 and 6, workers should escort a group of children to the bathroom, remain outside the bathroom door and then escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child or disabled adult in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child or disabled adult.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the Ministry Leader. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an *Incident Report Form* will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional, or when the skin has been broken for children two years old and under.

Security Procedures During Lockdown

In the case of an emergency lockdown, parents or guardians will not be able to collect their children until law enforcement or the fire department gives the all-clear that the building is secure. Trying to retrieve children at this time may hinder those trying to maintain order and secure the building.

APPENDIX A DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse Is...

- Inflicting or allowing someone else to inflict physical injury on a child by other than accidental means, causing death, disfigurement, skin bruising, impairment of physical or emotional health or loss or impairment of any bodily function.
- Creating or allowing to be created a substantial risk of serious physical injury.
- Using or allowing to be used grossly inappropriate devices or procedures to modify behavior.
- Domestic violence.
- Committing or allowing to be committed any sexual offense against a child as defined in the criminal code. This includes but is not limited to rape, crime against nature, incest, preparation or distribution of obscene material of the juvenile, sexual exploitation, promoting the prostitution of the juvenile, and/or taking indecent liberties with the juvenile regardless of the age of the parties.
- Creating or allowing to be created serious emotional damage to the juvenile as evidenced by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal or aggressive behavior.
- Encouraging, directing, or approving of delinquent acts involving [immorality] committed by the juvenile.

Child Neglect Is...

- Failing to provide proper care, supervision, or discipline from the juvenile's parent or guardian.
- Abandonment by the parent or guardian.
- Failing to provide necessary medical care or necessary remedial care.
- Living in an environment injurious to the juvenile's welfare.
- Creating a substantial risk to the physical or mental health or development of a child.

Child Dependency Is...

- Needing assistance or placement because the child has no parent, guardian, or custodian responsible for care or supervision.
- Needing assistance or placement because a parent, guardian or custodian is unable to provide for care or supervision and lacks an appropriate alternative childcare arrangement.
 - The parent or guardian's inability may be due to physical or mental illness, substance abuse, developmental disability, arrest or natural disaster and may be temporary or permanent.
 - The parent or guardian's inability may be due to the child's extraordinary needs such as severe illness or disability.

Source: NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTES - Chapter 7B Juvenile Code

Recognizing Child Abuse¹

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home

The Parent:

- Shows little concern for the child
- Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home
- Asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome
- Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs

The Parent and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other
- Consider their relationship entirely negative
- State that they do not like each other

¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/signs.pdf>.

Statutory Rape and Statutory Sexual Offenses in NC²

Q: What distinguishes “statutory” rape from “forcible” rape?

A: Our criminal statutes distinguish “forcible” rape from “statutory” rape. “Forcible rape,” as you would expect, is “vaginal intercourse” which is achieved “by force” or “against the will of” the victim. “Statutory rape” does not depend on force or consent at all. Sexual acts that violate “statutory” rape and sex offense laws involve young people and older people or two people that have a special relationship, such as teacher and student.

Q: What criminal statutes does North Carolina have that apply to age-based statutory rape and sexual assault?

It can be difficult to determine whether a sexual act is a statutory offense. It can be even more difficult to determine which statute the act has violated. If a criminal case is pursued, the district attorney handling the case can tell you which charges are appropriate. Here are the age-based statutes concerning statutory rape.

- § 14-27.23 – Statutory rape of a child by an adult – When one adult over 18 engages in vaginal intercourse with a victim below 13 years of age. (Example, two people aged 30 and 12)
- § 14-27.24 – First-degree statutory rape – When one person, who is at least 12 years old and four years older than the victim, engages in vaginal intercourse with a victim under 13 years old. (Example: two people aged 17 and 12)
- § 14-27.25 – Statutory rape of a person who is 15 years of age or younger – When one person who is at least 12 years old and six years older than the victim engages in vaginal intercourse with the victim, who is 15 years of age or younger. (Example: two people aged 21 and 14)

Q: What about sexual acts aside from “vaginal intercourse”? Are those covered by statutory sexual assault laws as well?

A: Yes. The criminal statutes that cover statutory sex crimes are similar to those that describe forcible sex crimes in the way they separate “rape” from “sexual offense.” There is a separate offense of “forcible rape” for vaginal intercourse by force and against the will of a person and an offense “forcible sexual offense” for all other penetrative sexual assaults. The same is true for statutory crimes. For example, “Statutory rape of a child by an adult” involves vaginal intercourse of a person over 18 and a person under 13, while “Statutory sexual offense of a child by an adult” covers other sexual acts between people of the same age.

Here are the statutes that cover statutory sexual offenses:

- § 14-27.28 – Statutory sexual offense with a child by an adult – When one adult over 18 years old engages in a sexual act with a victim below 13 years of age.
- § 14-27.29 – First-degree statutory sexual offense – When a person who is at least 12 years old and more than 4 years older than the victim engages in a sexual act with a victim under the age of 13 years old.
- § 14-27.30 – Statutory sexual offense with a person who is 15 years of age or younger – When a person who is at least 12 years old and at least 6 years older than the victim engages in a sexual act with a victim who is under the age of 15.

Q: What does “age of consent” mean, and what is the “age of consent” in North Carolina?

A: An “age of consent” is the age at which they cannot be a party to a sexual act that is considered statutory rape or statutory sexual offense based on age alone. In North Carolina, the “age of consent”

² North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault: <http://www.nccasa.org/cms/resources/criminal-statutes/statutory-rape-nc>

is 16 years old. This means that on their 16th birthday, a person is a “legal” sex partner for anyone over the age of 16.

Q: What if the younger party agrees/consents to have sex with the older party?

A: For statutory sex offenses, consent is not a defense. The older party may still be charged even if the younger party agreed or consented to the sexual activity.

Q: What if the older party didn't know the younger party's age?

A: Statutory rape and sex offense crimes are called “strict liability” crimes, meaning a defendant's intent to commit the crime doesn't really matter. In this context, it is enough that a person had sex with the underage party to violate the statute. This is true regardless of whether the person intended to have sex with an underage person, or even believed they were having sex with a person of a legal age.

Q: What about those statutory rape/sexual offense laws based on relationships?

A: We also have laws that prohibit sexual acts between, for example, school personnel and students and “substitute parents and guardians” and their children. They are:

- § 14-27.31 – Sexual activity by a substitute parent or custodian – This covers people who have “assumed the position of a parent in the home of a minor victim” or an agent or employee of an agency or institution that has custody of a victim of any age.
- § 14-27.32 – Sexual activity with a student – This covers teachers, school administrators, school safety officers, and coaches and students at the same school.

APPENDIX B MANDATED REPORTING

Mandated Reporters are required by law to make a report of suspected child abuse. A report of suspected child abuse or neglect should be made to the local Department of Social Services (DSS) in the county where the child lives or is found. Forsyth County DSS Phone Number: (336) 703-3800. Ask for the child protective services intake worker. If after hours, call 911 and ask for the social worker on call. Call 911 if the child is in immediate danger.

Who Should Report?

North Carolina's reporting law applies to every person and every institution in the state. It requires "any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent, as defined by NCGS 7B-101, or has died as a result of maltreatment" to make a report to the county department of social services.

Are There Any Exceptions?

North Carolina law provides that "no privilege shall be grounds for any person or institution failing to report that a juvenile may have been abused, neglected, or dependent, even if the knowledge or suspicion is acquired in an official professional capacity." The Juvenile Code contains only one exception for the otherwise universal duty to report. An attorney is not required to make a report if "the knowledge or suspicion is gained by [the] attorney from that attorney's client during representation only in the abuse, neglect, or dependency case." In any other situation the law requires attorneys to report like anyone else.

How Do I Report?

Call Forsyth County's Child Protective Services or visit the office in person to make a report.

IN PERSON:

Monday - Friday
(8:00 am - 5:00 pm)

Child Protective Services
Forsyth County Dept. of Social Services
Ground Floor
741 North Highland Avenue
Winston-Salem, NC 27102

BY PHONE:

(336) 703-ABUSE (2287)

BY EMAIL:

reportchildabuse@forsyth.cc

Child Abuse Recognition & Reporting

Employees are required to complete the online seminar "Recognizing and Responding to Suspicions of Child Maltreatment Course" and provide a copy of their certificate, which will be kept on file. Volunteers are not required at this time to complete the seminar, however, they are strongly encouraged to do so. Recognizing and Responding to Suspicions of Child Maltreatment Course can be found at the following website: preventchildabusenc.org/recognizing-responding-online-course.

APPENDIX C WHAT ABOUT FALSE ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE?³

When people speak of false allegations they usually have in mind a string of day care cases from the mid-1980's in which a handful of day care providers were convicted of sexually abusing multiple children only to have their convictions reversed on appeal. The appellate courts expressed concern that untrained investigators had unwittingly planted the idea of abuse in the minds of these young children and, once it was planted there, the children came to believe something that in fact did not happen.

In the wake of these high profile cases, there was a rash of studies which found that, with enough effort, it might be possible to convince a small percentage of typically very young children that something happened to them which in fact did not happen. In one study, for example, researchers got some very young children to believe they got their finger caught in a mousetrap when, in fact, they had never had this experience.

Of course, there is no study in which researchers try to convince young children that they have been sexually abused by someone but existing research does make clear that children should be interviewed by well trained professionals skilled in child development, cognitive development, and a whole host of factors that may contribute to a child's susceptibility to suggestion.

Since the 1980's, however, federal and state governments have poured significant resources into improving the quality of interviews with children suspected of being abused. Many states have developed intensive, 5-day interviewing courses for front-line investigators. Although these reforms do not eliminate the possibility of a false allegation, they greatly reduce the possibility.

It is also helpful to remember that, even before the investigative reforms, several studies confirm what common sense teaches—that it is extremely unusual for a child, particularly a young child, to make a false allegation of abuse. There are at least three reasons for this.

First, young children have limited knowledge of sexual activity. A 4-year old child who describes performing an act of fellatio on her father did not acquire that knowledge from watching Sesame Street. Even if the child was exposed to explicit pornography, it is unlikely that she could describe the sights, smells or sounds of sexual abuse unless she actually experienced the event.

Second, in most cases, tremendous familial and societal pressure is placed on the child not to make an allegation of abuse. A child disclosing abuse may be removed from the home, forced to live with strangers, may have to endure an uncomfortable medical examination, may have to speak with adults about uncomfortable sexual matters, and will often be ostracized by their families, and in their homes, schools, and churches. These pressures are so great that many abused children will decide that living with the lie is easier than telling the truth and will recant a truthful allegation.

Third, children are not the sophisticated liars that adults are. Although all human beings can and do lie, young children are not very good at it. A young child may deny taking the last cookie from the cookie jar—but the crumbs on their face give them away.

³ G.R.A.C.E., "What about false allegations of child abuse?" <https://www.netgrace.org/common-questions>

Given the unsophisticated nature of children's lies, it is doubtful that many, if any, young children could concoct a detailed, believable story of sexual abuse and keep it intact over several recitations and under the scrutiny of cross-examination at the hands of a skilled defense attorney.

When people speak of "false allegations," then, they are typically referring to the suggestibility issues referenced above or the possibility that an ambiguous statement was misinterpreted. In one case, for example, a child said, "Daddy put his pee on my pee." Although this statement could indicate abuse, the investigation revealed the child had used the bathroom, but her father instructed her not to flush the toilet because he was going to use it after her. Even if a well-trained interviewer had not gotten the child to provide these additional details, the original statement, though suspicious, lacked the information necessary to make a charge of abuse. Remember, to convict someone in criminal court of child sexual abuse, the prosecutor must prove his case beyond a reasonable doubt. Standing alone, the statement "daddy put his pee on my pee" would not come close to meeting this burden.