

WATCHTOWER  
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.  
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February 3, 1993

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Dear Brothers:

In the March 23, 1992, letter to all bodies of elders some valuable suggestions and guidance were offered to help victims of child abuse. However, one aspect of this problem not covered by that letter is how to help individuals who only recently stated to have memories of abuse that happened at a young age.

Some Christians may become troubled with memories and feelings dealing with past sexual abuse. They may even allege that as children they were abused by adults who apparently engaged in demonic activity or worship. When an elder is approached by someone concerned or distraught about such memories, he should "speak consolingly. II (1 Thess. 5:14) Elders should manifest an empathetic, compassionate, and supportive response to those approaching them about such memories. Elders should listen patiently to the victim. Regardless of their own point of view or of how seemingly strange and even bizarre these memories are, it is wise for elders to avoid intimating that such 'memories' are unbelievable. -- Prov. 18:13.

Elders will want to follow carefully the helpful suggestions in the March 23, 1992, letter to all bodies of elders. This letter should always be reviewed when there is a need to assist those who report they were abused as a child. There especially is a need to avoid insensitive remarks such as 'Just forget about it!' or 'Are you making this up?' Also, that letter explained, "Someone who has a serious mental or emotional illness may need professional help." As long as such assistance does not conflict with Bible principles, seeking such help is a personal decision. (See w75 4/15 pp. 255-6 and g75 4/22 pp. 3-21.) Therefore, the elders should not make disparaging comments regarding a Christian's decision to obtain professional help. It is also a personal decision if the alleged victim chooses to report such accusations to the secular authorities.

Elders should encourage the sufferer to use discretion if that one chooses to confide in a mature friend. They can help him to see that the matter should not be indiscriminately discussed in the congregation. However, in a balanced way and without neglecting other spiritual responsibilities, elders should be sympathetic and compassionate listeners. You want to use God's Word skillfully to encourage and upbuild. (Rom. 15:4; Eph. 4:29; See section "Balancing Your Responsibilities" in our March 23, 1992, letter, page 2.) If any allegations of such abuse involve accusations against active or inactive members of the Christian congregation, you are directed to contact the Society before initiating an investigation of the matter. We take this opportunity to commend you brothers for your diligent efforts in shepherding the flock under your care. -- 1 Pet. 5:2.

Your brothers,

WTBS

P.S. to the presiding overseer: After reading this letter to all elders within one week of receipt, please attach it to your file copy of the March 23, 1992, letter.