

# Protecting children is critical

## *Resources available on sexual violence*

Harrisonburg, Va.—As disturbing as sexual misconduct headlines are in newspapers, on radio and television, and online, the tragic scandals provide a good opportunity to address this critical issue in Christian homes and churches. Mennonite churches have several resources to help in that regard.

Jeanette Harder, author of *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*, says “Churches need to do everything they can to protect children.” The book, published in 2010 by Herald Press, can be used as a study guide for adult Sunday school classes and small groups.

“This needs to happen within our own families and churches, as well as in the communities in which we live, work, volunteer, and play,” said Harder, who is on the faculty of Grace Abbott School of Social Work at the University of Nebraska.



Harder is also one of the founders of Dove's Nest, a Mennonite-based organization formed for “faith communities to keep children and youth safe,” according to its website. Harder encourages churches to draft child-protection policies and enforce them, such as doing background checks on anyone who has access to children, including pastors, youth ministers, Sunday school teachers, custodians, bus drivers, and nursery workers.

Dove's Nest offers the *Circle of Grace*, a Christian safe-environment curriculum that helps to form and educate children about the value of positive relationships with God and others.

The curriculum teaches children and youth how to identify and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries. It also helps them recognize when boundary violations are about to occur and demonstrates how to take action when boundaries are threatened or violated.

Harder emphasizes, though, that “it is the responsibility of adults to keep children and youth safe, not the responsibility of the kids.”

“The church, unfortunately, in my experience, is in denial about child abuse,” said Harder. “They tell me, ‘We’re good people here, it doesn’t happen here.’ And yet I’m hearing from so many survivors and victims of abuse saying, ‘Yes it does happen here.’ In fact, they’re saying the church sometimes re-victimizes us by not responding, by not listening.”

Harder continues: “So I’m trying to raise awareness in the church to say, ‘Hey, child abuse does exist, within your church community as well as in your neighborhoods.’” She feels that churches, of all places, need to be protecting children.

Harder appeared in the *Shaping Families* radio program of MennoMedia on Oct. 8. A podcast and transcript are available at [www.ShapingFamilies.com](http://www.ShapingFamilies.com) under “past programs.” More information on Dove’s Nest can be found at [www.DovesNest.net](http://www.DovesNest.net).

The book *Let the Children Come* (\$12.99 in the U.S. and \$14.99 in Canada) is available at [www.MennoMedia.org](http://www.MennoMedia.org) or by calling 800-245-7894 (U.S.) or 800-631-6535 (Canada).

Mennonite Central Committee U.S., a founding member of Dove’s Nest, has a website addressing all types of abuse, at <http://abuse.mcc.org>. It includes stories, worship resources, and prevention suggestions.

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center offers a list of organizations that can help: [www.nsvrc.org/organizations](http://www.nsvrc.org/organizations).

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