

Sexual Predator Accusations Among Homeschoolers?

An Open Letter to My Fellow Homeschool Parents
by Lisa Cherry

As a homeschool mom of 25 years with ten kids, I am writing today to express my concern for the safety of my fellow homeschooling families, the protection of our freedom to homeschool, and my own personal reputation as a homeschooler. Like many of you, I am both heartbroken and disturbed by the recent alleged sexual scandals involving [Vision Forum](#) and [Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles](#). I join with all those praying for the recovery of those who were affected.

As sexual abuse allegations within these ministries have attracted media attention, I am also greatly concerned about how these scandals could negatively impact all of us in the homeschool community. Please allow me to share with you **seven vulnerabilities** and **nine suggestions for action** in light of recent developments. (Since the nightmare of sexual abuse happened to our own family, it's an issue that's very close to my heart.)

7 Potential Vulnerabilities of Home School Families

1. Misperception That Our Homes and Families Are Immune

After our own 15-year-old daughter was abused by a 46-year-old man in our congregation, we ended up in a jury trial. I still cringe when I remember how the prosecution portrayed our family and Kalyn as being "naive" about these issues. It also shook me to realize that, perhaps, in some

ways he was right. We should have been aiming to be as "shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16, NASB). With one in four girls, and one in six boys, being sexually abused in America by the age of eighteen, it was naive to believe we were somehow immune to risk.

2. Lack of Sexual Abuse Prevention Education

I am the first to admit that while Doug and I thought we had taken all the necessary steps to protect our family from sexual abuse, we were sadly misinformed. We were ignorant, before it happened to us, of the deceptive power of the grooming behaviors employed by abusers; and we believed that our family members—adults and kids alike—were too "smart" to be tricked. In researching how to help our wounded daughter, we discovered [important keys](#) that we now use to protect the rest of our kids.

3. Suspicious Behaviors

When people appear to be "hiding" or "protecting" known abusers, they bring suspicion upon themselves. No one wants to *ever* falsely accuse someone of sexual misconduct. However, once an accusation has been validated, we must establish an environment that encourages truth-telling, if victims are to heal and others are to be protected. If we silence or soften the truth, or allow leaders who have fallen into sexual sin to remain in their positions simply because they are good teachers, we contribute—either accidentally or intentionally—to the culture of grooming and lies.

4. Lax Attitudes and Systems

Mandatory reporting and sexual abuse prevention systems are the norm in schools and other institutions now, and rightly so. Because of some very public legal cases, and the increased

liability of churches, schools and organizations, sexual abuse policies are much more strictly enforced nowadays. *If we, as homeschoolers, do not also deal with this issue in a similarly forthright manner, we could appear to be negligent. This could attract further attention to us in two ways: (1) Child abusers will target our kids as easy marks, and (2) The homeschooling community will be under greater scrutiny in a way that invites regulation.*

5. Public Perception

Homeschoolers are frequently viewed as a single group, implying that our community is ripe with such predators. In every article I have read on the ministries mentioned above, the media has emphasized that they are "homeschool leaders." In my experience, most people in education, media, government, and social services do not understand homeschoolers. Recently Michael Farris, president of HSLDA, issued a [strong statement](#) clarifying that we're distinct individuals, and countering these misperceptions. While commenting on his recent interview in World News Daily condemning the actions of Doug Philips, Mr. Farris said on [his Facebook page](#), "I have admitted my errors in failing to speak out....I am convinced that this [patriarchal] movement is harmful to people—children, women, and even men who buy into these deceptive ideas. The freedom of the homeschooling movement is threatened if this kind of dangerous legalism is allowed to become the dominant view. I have tried to distance myself quietly and imperfectly for a long time. I am now convinced that I need to be forthright and say out loud what I have thought for a long time....It would be easy to contend that Doug's sin was separate from his patriarchy views. I am saying the opposite. His views of women were integral to his actions." (April 15) Mr. Farris's statements are [strong and clear](#). But, sadly, it will be hard to counter the hostile public perceptions created by these scandals.

6. Unnoticed Actions

The alleged immoral acts within these ministries appear to have gone unchecked for years.

Surely someone saw something that caused concern. But in their “trust” of the ministry leaders, most did what is all too common: they ignored or discounted what they saw. (Or perhaps they were ill-equipped to interpret what they observed.) This is truly unfortunate. The protective systems within these ministries were either inadequate, or they simply failed.

7. Hostility toward the Homeschool Community Is Increasing

Online responses to these stories are flying—especially by those hostile to homeschooling.

Honestly, I had not paid any attention to these anti-homeschooling voices until I saw them chiming in during the aftermath of these ministry scandals. But they are very real and very vocal. The implication that we, as homeschoolers, might need to be “watched more closely” is alarming. I do not want to dignify these comments further by providing a link, but I have seen them on several sites, and it is frightening. The hostile momentum that’s building—driven by those who would love to stop homeschooling or deeply regulate it—could be devastating to us all.

So what can we do, in the face of these challenges?

9 Suggestions that I Believe Are Critical

1. Pull Our Heads Out of the Sand

We can't ignore this issue any longer. We must address it, both personally and publicly. The problem of sexual abuse crosses all segments of society. We are not statistically at greater risk; but neither are we immune. (I have heard the stories from other affected homeschool families myself!) We must be willing to understand and confront our own unique set of risks.

2. Intentionally Include Sexual Abuse Training in Our Homeschools

The best abuse prevention for children is well-informed, alert adults. Parents must make the effort to study sexual issues that are prevalent in our society and dangerous to our kids. Read our story to see how we were tricked. Then do what it takes to launch your own protective strategy.

[\(Click here to find resources to help.\)](#)

3. Address the Issue of Sexual Abuse with Your Homeschool Co-op/Support Group

I suggest we launch a strategic effort to educate our families. It would not be that difficult. ([Click here for recommended materials.](#)) Homeschool group meetings on this topic could prevent a great deal of pain. At the same time, our homeschool co-ops need to review their own policies. Just as wise churches screen their own children's and youth workers, we should also. A good system of prevention is one of the best deterrents to abuse. Let's improve our own accountability so we are always above reproach.

4. Be Clear in Labeling Abuse as Abuse

We must call sexual abuse by its real name. Abuse is not limited to just rape or molestation. Here is an official definition from a reputable Christian book on the topic:

"Sexual abuse is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult (or older teen) when the child/adolescent is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person." (Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse*)

Let's face it: the term *sexual abuse* is loaded and ugly. So often people try to mislabel abuse as "inappropriate behavior" or an "indiscretion" or "immorality" to help remove its stigma. But renaming something just confuses the issue at hand and prevents us from dealing with the reality of its dangers. Children and youth who have been damaged by abuse—even if the abuse seems "minor" to us—will often live their lives through the lens of that experience; and frequently make poor relationship and spiritual choices as they mature. They need our help for recovery.

5. Support Organizations Fighting To Protect Us

We believe it is vital for homeschool families to stand together in this difficult hour, as we respond wisely to policies and laws that could challenge our freedoms. We must actively support those who stand up for our families. But while the legal teams have been wonderfully responsive to our homeschool community needs over the years, we must also recognize that they are only able to help us collectively when we choose to take personal responsibility. In other words, sometimes we need to take the initiative to police ourselves in private.....before they must represent us in public.

6. Permanently Remove from Your Group Or Sphere of Acquaintances Any Sexual Offenders

It seems like this would go without saying, but it does not. In the world's eyes, sexual offenders are considered "non-reformable," due to the nature of their problems. As believers in Jesus Christ, we know that God can deliver people from very complex problems. So, often, in our efforts to show mercy to these perpetrators, we give people the benefit of the doubt. We allow them second chances. Unfortunately, this has proven disastrous in many cases.

I propose that anyone who is *truly* repentant and *reformed* of sexually abusing a child should have no problem being under accountability, limits, and supervision. They would acknowledge their own risk for relapse, and not put themselves in a position where they could be even falsely accused.

Just as wise leaders would never send a former alcoholic into bars to do ministry, former abusers should never be entrusted with children alone. (This applies to families, as well as ministries.)

7. Pray

The battle of sexual abuse is part of the spiritual warfare being waged against this generation. Pornography has simply taken that fight to a new level. As believers, we recognize that we are not wrestling with flesh and blood here, but with powers and principalities and rulers of wickedness in high places (see Ephesians 6:12). The battle over protecting our children, and leading them to purity amidst a perverse generation, will be won or lost on our knees. Pray for your kids. Pray for all our kids. Maintain holy alertness in accordance with Ephesians 6:18. Intercede for your leaders. Receive from the Lord the wisdom you will need in this hour. And

most importantly, please pray for the healing of families who have already been affected by abuse.

8. Support Your Local Church Leaders

It is amazing to me when I hear church members complaining about protection policies implemented by local church leaders. Sure, I long for the "good ole days" when we didn't have to be so careful. But those days are truly gone, and it is time we adapt. Extra staffing and volunteers will be needed. Are we willing to sacrifice our time to serve? Our pastors and leaders deserve our support as they do their best to protect our families.

9. Pass This Letter On to a Homeschooling Friend

Together, we can take the steps necessary to protect our families...but only if enough of us are on board. Would you consider forwarding this article to 10 of your homeschooling friends? Would you consider sharing it on your social media site, [posting it on your blog](#) (link available at www.FrontlineMoms.com) passing it on to your homeschool group? Let's stand together as a community and continue to make homeschooling the safest option for our kids!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lisa & Doug Cherry are speakers who travels across the nation addressing parents, teens, and Christian leaders on the growing spiritual culture war. They are the parents of ten, grandparents of four and have enjoyed homeschooling their family for the last twenty-six years. Lisa is also the author of [Not Open: Win the Spiritual Culture War](#) and [Unmask the Predators](#). Her articles have appeared in The Christian Post, World Net Daily, cbn.com, and more. For additional information about Lisa, go to www.frontlinefamilies.org; and find her on her [Facebook page](#).



The Cherry Family