



## From Dr. Seuss to Porn: Countering Normalization of Sexual Harm

*Cordelia Anderson, MA – Sensibilities, Inc.*

A mother takes her son trick-or-treating. She is dressed as a prostitute; the 3-year old boy is dressed as her pimp.

- A 13-year old goes to a slumber party. The usual “boys and sex” talk ensues, except now they watch adult porn films in order to learn about sex. The degrading language the males use with the females, the seemingly harsh and painful sex, and the lack of any caring feeling or romance makes her wonder, “Am I supposed to be turned on by that? Is that what boys like and want?”
- A 9-year old searching for cartoon images happens upon porn and struggles to get the image out of his mind.

It is well documented that children need developmental assets or protective factors in order to thrive. Such assets include caring connections with social peers and adults, a welcoming school, as well as a sense of competence and a way to contribute. Children also need to know what it means to be sexually healthy and to have healthy relationships. This is no small challenge when the adults who are supposed to guide and teach them are confused as to what is healthy versus what is harmful. We, like our children and youth, are living in a sexually toxic society that affects our perspective, challenges our values, and shapes behaviors.

It is not a stretch of the imagination to call our society sexually toxic when incidents of sexual exploitation and violence are as frequent as they are; when mass media is filled with “pornified” images that pair sex with violence; when dominant messages sell sex void of any sense of meaning, significance, or responsibility; when gender socialization continues to be destructive; and when adults are hesitant to proactively talk about sexuality. One of the realities of this sexually toxic culture is that the sexual abuse and exploitation has become normalized.

So what is normalization and why does it matter? Normalization is the process by which an idea or behavior becomes an accepted part of societal

culture. Once this happens, it is considered “just the way it is”, “just what people do”, and “no big deal.”

Once barriers are removed, behaviors that once were recognized or perceived as being harmful, degrading, or deviant become viewed as beneficial or preferential and then beyond question. Once such behaviors are normalized, anyone who is offended and questions such acts is likely to be met with, “What’s your problem?”

Working for change would be easier to challenge if there were any one industry profiting off the exploitive use of hypersexualized images of children and youth. It is the totality of it all that

makes it a tsunami of sexploitive messages. From advertisements, to books like “Gossip Girls A-list”, to cartoons with pornified images, to dolls that aim more and more hypersexualized playthings to younger and younger girls, to music videos that seduces the listener with a captivating beat and arousing images paired with words that degrade, humiliate, and spew hatred. There are multiple venues where the rigid gender roles are reinforced: girls are to be sexual objects – boys are to be users, takers, and pornography makers.

The American Psychological Association study in 2007 on the “Sexualization of Girls” defined sexual object as “a thing for others sexual use.” In reviewing over 300 studies the Taskforce who conducted the study concluded there was evidence to show that all of this has a negative impact on the girl’s mental health. The report states:

“As a society, we need to replace all of these sexualized images with ones showing girls in positive settings—ones that show the uniqueness and competence of girls,” states Dr. Zurbriggen. “The goal should be to deliver messages to all adolescents – boys and girls – that lead to healthy sexual development.”

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Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota is the Minnesota Charter of Prevent Child Abuse America and has been serving Minnesota families and communities since 1979.

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Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota also has regional offices in Northeast, Northwest, Western, and Southern Minnesota.

The mission of Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota is to prevent child abuse and neglect by promoting positive parenting, healthy families, and supportive communities where children are respected and valued.

The mission of Circle of Parents® Minnesota is to empower parents to create healthy and loving families through positive parenting and mutual self help

# letters

## Friends, Colleagues, Benefactors, and Supporters of Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota:

I can hardly believe that as I am writing this note to you my six year Board term at PCAMN is coming to a close. As you get older you realize that the idiom “Time Flies” is very much a truism, and my service here with PCAMN has certainly flown by.

During the last six years much has changed, and the organization that I joined as a Board member over six years ago has grown and developed, providing a broader array of services and commitment to end child abuse throughout Minnesota. Over those years, the Board has grown from 10 Board members to as many as 21.

We have gone through the development of two multi-year strategic plans, changed the name of the organization from Family Support Network to Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota, provided a broader array of services and support to Circle of Parents® chapters in Greater Minnesota and in the Metro Area, and assisted in the growth of the organization from approximately \$610,000 in revenue in calendar year 2001 to \$876,000 in 2007 – representing nearly a 6% compound annual growth rate.

We have also had many challenges: some deficit years, including necessary efforts to trim expenses and reduce staff, changes in Circle of Parents® chapters, and changes in sources of funding from our ever-changing State Government support to broader support from many foundations, corporations, and individuals. Through all of these changes however, one thing has remained constant – the commitment of PCAMN to our mission: to promote positive parenting, healthy families, and supportive communities where children are respected and valued. This commitment is most engendered through the commitment of its people. I can assure you that as a Board member throughout my tenure, I have never met a more committed group of individuals who truly live and breathe the mission of an organization, and who firmly believe that we can and will end child abuse in this state, and in this country.

As I close out my Board term here at Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota, I would truly like to remember and thank those many Board members who have served the organization well during my tenure. It has been a pleasure to serve our community and PCAMN with you. I will always treasure the memories of our work together with such a diverse group of individuals who have an outstanding array of backgrounds and experiences to share. Most particularly, I will never forget those who have shared their own stories of abuse and neglect. It truly is humbling to have met so many who have suffered so much and yet have grown from that experience and been able to commit themselves to preventing similar tragedies from occurring to others.

Finally, I would like to thank those dedicated current and former employees at Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota who have given and continue to give so much for so little. Particularly, I would like to take a moment to thank and recognize two individuals with whom I have worked most closely and whom I have the honor of calling friends – Connie Skillingstad, Executive Director and Becky Dale, Associate Director. We have experienced and learned a tremendous amount together. I appreciate your patience, love, and understanding these past six years and I hope that we have the opportunity to work still towards our never-ending goal. Thank you for the experience from the bottom of my heart.

I close with reminding all of you that together, We Can and Will End Child Abuse. Thank You.



**David Turk**  
**Board Chair**

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## In this Issue . . .

In this issue of PreventionWorks we are highlighting some of the wonderfully talented and enthusiastic presenters that will be providing workshops and institutes at our upcoming conference in April. Our cover story is from Cordelia Anderson who will be leading an institute on Wednesday, April 23 about the normalization of sexual harm. She is an independent consultant and has been working in the field of prevention for more than 30 years.

Norma Bourland from Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota will be presenting a workshop about the Cradle to Prison Pipeline on Thursday, April 24. Her workshop will include a panel of local experts on juvenile justice, poverty, and race.

Our article on the Children's Museum is from Carlos Gallego, Director of Community Partnerships. He will be presenting a workshop on the Para los Niños Program for Positive Parenting.

Other speakers at the conference will include Judge William A. Thorne from Utah, and Professor Priscilla Day from the University of Minnesota Duluth. There is additional information in the insert of the newsletter, and on our website [www.pcamn.org](http://www.pcamn.org).



Cordelia Anderson

## Cradle to Prison Pipeline®

A very painful report on the crisis within our juvenile justice system has recently been released by the Children's Defense Fund. According to "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline Report", the most dangerous place for a child to try to grow up in America is at the inter-section of poverty and race.

A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance and a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance of going to prison in their lifetime. According to Marian Wright Edelman, the founder and president of Children's Defense Fund, "this is a national disaster and says to millions of our children and to the world that America's dream is not for all." Mrs. Edelman prefaces this report by saying:



*"Our 'child and youth problem' is not a child and youth problem, it is a profound adult problem as ... we choose to punish and lock them up rather than take the necessary, more cost-effective steps to prevent and intervene early to ensure them the healthy, head, safe, fair and moral start in life they need to reach successful adulthood."*

So many poor babies in rich America enter the world with multiple strikes already against them: without prenatal care and at low birth weight; born to a teen, poor and poorly educated single mother and absent father. At crucial points in their development more risks and disadvantages cumulate to make a successful transition to productive adulthood significantly less likely and involvement in the criminal justice system significantly more likely.

The sobering facts in the report lead to the question, "what can be done to stop the Pipeline and reroute our children-at-risk into successful adulthood?" Nine suggestions are given as places to begin:

1. Name and change the Pipeline and work together, recognizing that children do not come in pieces but in families and communities and are profoundly affected by the norms, priorities, policies and values of our nation and culture.
2. Call and work for a fundamental paradigm shift in child policy and practice away from the too frequent first choice of punishment and incarceration to prevention and early intervention and sustained child investment.
3. We must begin early by ensuring every child a healthy start through guaranteed comprehensive health and mental health coverage and coverage of pregnant women wherever they live in America.
4. Ensure quality Head Start, child care and preschool to get every child ready for school.
5. Link every child to a permanent, caring family member or adult mentor who can keep them on track and get them back on track if they stray.
6. Make sure every child can read by 4th grade and can graduate from school able to succeed at work and in life.
7. Commit to helping the richest nation on earth end the child and family poverty that drives so much of the Pipeline process and the racial disparities faced by Black, Latino and American Indian children who are disproportionately poor.
8. Dramatically decrease the number of children who enter the child welfare and juvenile and criminal justice systems, stop detaining children in adult jails, and reduce the racial disparities in these and other child-serving systems.
9. Confront America's deadly, historic romance with guns and violence and stress more nonviolent values and conflict resolution in all aspects of American life.

*Excerpted by Norma Bourland, Children's Defense Fund Minnesota staff, from America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Report Children's Defense Fund, 2007©*

## From Dr. Seuss to Porn *(cont'd from page one)*

The full text of the Executive Summary, Report, and tips on “What Parents Can Do” are available at [www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html).

Forensic Pediatrician Dr. Sharon Cooper explains additionally that there are two other very important reasons for concern:

- 1) The studies that now show the brain is still under development into the early 20s.
- 2) The studies that show children are physically developing at younger ages.

Instead of doing all we can to see that children are protected from abuse and exploitation for individual or commercial reasons, our children receive a steady diet of harmful messages including the following big four:

**Marketing, Consumerism, Commoditization.** The Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood has been a leader in drawing attention to the problems in marketing and marketing to children as a target audience. They point out that \$15 billion a year is spent marketing to children, and that children see about 30,000 ads a year not including product placement. This is of concern not only because the fact they learn to value things more than anything else but also because they learn to think they can get all their needs met through acquiring things and learn to value themselves based on the things they have.

**Technology.** Growing Up On-line, a PBS Frontline show that aired in January 2008, noted that technology is here to stay, and it has brought about the biggest generation gap since the advent of Rock and Roll. It is commonly noted that children and youth are the natives in this land of technology and adults are the immigrants. Technology brings many wonderful opportunities for enhancing relationships and accessing information, but it also brings myriad ways to acts on destructive impulses, to put information out that is impossible to get back and to connect with others who feed deviant or harmful attitudes and behaviors.

**Pornography.** Some analysts suggest that pornography is a \$57 billion a year world wide legal business – bigger than Hollywood! The industry has worked hard to make it seem as if being a normal man means needing and wanting to be aroused by sexually degrading images of women and sexually objectified images of children and teens that make it seem as if they want to be exploited. Also, that a normal female wants to be a pornified sex object and is sexually repressed if she has any issues with it.

**Hypersexualized Mainstream Pop Culture.** From teen icons, to the glamorization and romanticism of the whole “pimp ho lifestyle,” to “To Catch a Predator” which makes entertainment and profit from child molesters, it is more than challenging to find healthy images of sexuality – those in fact, are censored for fear of harming the innocence of our children.

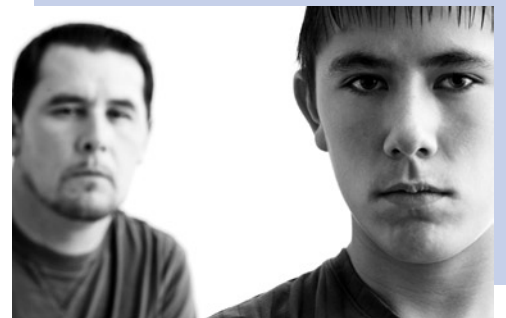
It is easy to be overwhelmed. But being silenced or being overwhelmed doesn't help. We've all been affected by living in this sexually toxic culture, and we each need to struggle with the ways in which we've bought in, given in, or been silenced. More than

that, we need to recognize this is a major public health problem. Individuals can become better educated and can take individual actions, but broad-based changes are needed and are possible. If you don't think so, consider what worked around smoking; educating individuals about the hazards of smoking and helping those who smoke to quit were important, but policies to change advertisements, place hazard labels, and limit access to youth were all critical to the success of the movement.

### What can parents do? Conduct a sexual reality check.

- 1) Identify ways we've each been affected
- 2) Talk to your children about healthy sexuality and normalization. Don't allow the pornography industry to be their main sexuality educator and don't be afraid to set limits. Children can't afford to have adults be sexually neglectful; they need us to help them navigate through the toxic environment.

- 3) Work your spheres of influence whether it is inviting your book club to read Pamela Paul's “Pornified,” David Walsh's “NO and Ways Parents Can Say It,” or Susan Linn's “Consuming Kids” – encourage



discussions with your friends. If you happen to have a position of influence in your organization or corporation, work to make sure the policies discourage any profit from sexual objectification of children and encourage healthy development.

- 4) Write letters or call when ads or products make you uncomfortable. It can indeed make a difference.
- 5) If you need help to deal with too much time on the Internet or with pornography or just need help to have positive and proactive discussions about healthy sexuality and relationships, reach out for help – there are many resources available.
- 6) Give your children and teens as much caring and respectful touch as you can. Children need caring touch so they learn that not all touch is sexual abuse and are not so deprived of touch that they only know how to get it through violence or through risky sexual behaviors.

After 30 years of working on various types of prevention efforts, I am hopeful that there is a synchronicity of efforts that may really help build a movement necessary for significant, positive social change. As our national plan says, the intent is “to keep child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention in the forefront of people's minds and hearts in such a powerful way that the normalization of such exploitation for individual or commercial gain becomes socially, economically, politically, and spiritually unacceptable in our communities, nation, and the world.”

*Cordelia Anderson, MA, has her own prevention training and consulting business, Sensibilities, Inc., based in Minneapolis. She can be reached through her website at [www.cordeliaanderson.com](http://www.cordeliaanderson.com).*

# articles

## Para los Niños

Carlos Gallego, M.Ed. – Director Community Partnerships

**P**ara los Niños (For the Children) is a program that focuses on strengthening the parent's preventative factors by increasing the level of awareness of what parents can do to help their children succeed at home and at school. Developed by the Children's Museum of Houston, Para los Niños is a research-based program first piloted by the Minnesota Children's Museum in 2006. The program is offered in English and Spanish and will be available in Hmong this fall.

Para los Niños is a series of eight themed interactive parent/child workshops for Spanish-speaking immigrants and other low-literate families with children ages birth-8 years. The program seeks to educate parents on the developmental stages of their children and what they can do to support their child's learning. Each session will focus on a specific topic. Below are the eight topics and the concepts they cover:

### Raise a Reader

- Reading with your children is very important
- Books should be appropriate for age and ability
- Reading connects you with the world

### Math at Home

- Math should be hands-on
- Math is in everything we do

### Loving Limits

- Setting limits and being consistent
- Talk about parent styles
- Active listening

### Healthy Minds

#### Healthy Bodies

- Importance of eating well and exercising
- Importance of emotional health
- Importance of early brain development
- Importance of small and large muscle development

### How Your Child Learns

- Everyone has certain things they are really good at
- Parents should observe their children to identify what their children are good at



### Family Communication

- Communication is essential to family relationships
- Communication requires action
- Family pride

### Self-Esteem

- Positive self-esteem is essential in a learner
- Parents can help their child build self-esteem by allowing them independence
- Parents can help their child build self-esteem by praising their efforts instead of emphasizing perfection

### Taking Turns and Taking Time

- Spending time with your child is important
- Taking turns when talking and listening will build mutual respect
- There are many occasions when families can work together and have meaningful conversations

*For information about Para los Niños, please contact Carlos Gallego at [cgallego@mcm.org](mailto:cgallego@mcm.org) or (651) 225-6085.*



**CIRCLE of PARENTS®**  
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### Free community-based support groups for parents and their children

A program of Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota, Circle of Parents®, is a statewide network of parenting support groups that is open to all families in Minnesota. During weekly meetings, parents come together to exchange insights into common parenting challenges. Led by parents with the guidance of a trained facilitator, all programs are free, confidential, non-judgmental, and designed to promote positive parenting.

**To find out if there is a Circle of Parents® group near you, call (651) 523-0099 or 1-800-CHILDREN. Our Web site is [www.pcamn.org](http://www.pcamn.org).**

## PCAMN Welcomes our new Northwest Program Coordinator

**R**uth Whitefeather joined Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota as the Northwest Program Coordinator for Circle of Parents® on January 1, 2008. She is a graduate of Bemidji State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education with emphasis in Indian Studies and Early Childhood Education. Ruth is a Red Lake Nation tribal member and has worked in the field of program development for the tribe. She has many years of experience working with children of all ages.

Family plays a very important role in Ruth's life and has been her main focus both personally and professionally. She recognizes and acknowledges the important role family plays in the development of child to adult.



**Ruth Whitefeather**



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## **Albert Lea Circle of Parents®**

*Barb Sorum, Senior Program Coordinator – PCAMN*

**P**revent Child Abuse Minnesota Albert Lea Circle of Parents® Chapter volunteers provide parenting support groups using the principles of mutual self-help, family support, and shared leadership. Since its inception in March 1989, these volunteers have served over 1400 parents and children. With three children’s and five adult’s groups volunteer facilitators and advisory team members have developed exciting and unique programs.

Eleven volunteers support weekly meetings that are open to the public. There is an English-speaking and Spanish-speaking group, as well as the Father’s for a Lifetime program specifically for dads. Another parent group concentrates on troubled teenagers while the fifth focusing on incarcerated parent. Three of five sites have free children’s programs which are conducted by trained Circle of Parents® volunteers.

Education topics offered to the groups include parenting teenagers, stress and anger management, conflict resolution, crisis management, family dynamics, children with ADHD, co-parenting through and after divorce, and fathering for a lifetime. Parents with troubled teenagers learn about eating disorders, anger management, conflict resolution, depression/suicide, teen relationships, alcohol, tobacco and other addictions, parenting on a budget, and letting go. In 2008, the Circle of Parents® program will work to offer a curriculum that focuses on providing support, guidance and education to area children of divorce.

Existing and exciting new programs are the direct results of Prevent Child Abuse Circle of Parents® volunteers taking their heartfelt beliefs in child abuse prevention and positive parenting and turning them into life-changing community action.

The dedication and determination of our volunteers has made the Albert Lea Circle of Parents® a success and it will be that same inspired volunteer involvement that results in continued growth and quality service delivery.



**From left to right in the photo: Katherinne Martin, Luz Sanchez-Kramer (seated), Carlos Kramer, Gail Levorson, Faith Sorum (seated), Jim Pierick, Stephanie Pirsig, and Carol Woodruff.**

**Not pictured are Jackie Pederson, Nancy VanderWaerd, Carolyn Lamson, and Randy Kehr.**