



## Statement on Penn State – November 14, 2011

The graphic imagery and evidence of appalling neglect spilling out of Penn State this week have been challenging even for many seasoned professionals in the sexual violence field. So far, the media has focused largely on the collapsing careers of famous and powerful personalities who failed to intervene to protect vulnerable boys from sexual abuse. Some of those Penn State leaders have even been portrayed as victims when held accountable for their inaction.

But the men and women across the country whose own lives have been affected by childhood sexual abuse know that the lasting story is the impact on the boys involved, on the men they will become and the long-term effects on their families and communities. Our challenge now is to find ways to help people cope effectively with the ongoing triggers prompted by the barrage of news coverage and its aftermath.

The disclosure of these former role models of masculinity betraying vulnerable boys is likely to be especially disturbing for the 1 in 6 men in the United States who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood. That's nearly 19 million men nationally.

Our society is confused by the image of boys as victims of sexual abuse. Society dictates that men are supposed to be strong, tough, protectors and self protective – this stereotyping of maleness does not allow for the possibility that males can be victims. We easily imagine men committing violent acts...news and entertainment gives us examples every day. But it's difficult for many to hold the image of 1 in 6 boys growing to manhood – going to school, to work, into the military, back to families, joining faith communities and civic organizations – while daily carrying the legacy of childhood sexual abuse.

Culturally, we support men's expression of anger, and celebrate their aggression. But we discourage boys and men from exposing their underlying, vulnerable emotions that often fuel anger and aggression. Prohibited from expressing feelings like fear, sadness, shame and depression, men often seek other ways of coping.

Men who have been sexually abused may use alcohol, drugs, addictions to pornography, work, or food, risky physical activities, problems with anger, physical and sexual violence to

tamp down forbidden feelings and memories, often adopting ineffective coping mechanisms. Sadly, it's these very behaviors that contribute to so much additional damage in their own lives, and the lives of those who are close to them. Sexual violence causes destruction not only in the lives of those who experience abuse directly, but also for entire families and communities; often passing from one generation to the next, via multigenerational cycles of violence.

As service providers, we're more likely to encounter men who have experienced sexual abuse in a substance rehab program or an emergency room, in courts or homeless shelters rather than in rape crisis or mental health clinics.

Now, with the Penn State coverage focusing so much attention on the sexual abuse of boys, we are compelled to recognize the rates of sexual abuse among males, educate our communities on recognizing the warning signs of those who are being victimized and of those who sexually abuse and allow for cultural space for men's healing from childhood trauma. The societal costs of ignoring the reality of the sexual abuse of boys is too great as those boys grow into men.

*1in6 is a Los Angeles-based non-profit whose mission is to support men who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood to live healthier, happier lives. The website ([1in6.org](http://1in6.org)) provides in-depth information in English and [Spanish \(1in6.org/espanol/\)](http://1in6.org/espanol/) about the impacts of sexual trauma on men, a [lending library](#) and links to valuable resources. The Website has separate sections for a "[Man Educating Myself](#)," for "[Family, Friends and Partners](#)" and for [Professionals](#). The [national, online 1in6 SupportLine](#) offers men and those who care about them one-on-one, online exchange with volunteers, specifically trained to address issues related to men's responses to sexual abuse. 1in6 also provides a selection of [trainings for professionals](#) working with men and families and a collection of co-brandable outreach materials in English and Spanish.*