Public Disclosure of Private Information About Victims of Abuse

Publication of information about child abuse victims and their families may be detrimental to the victims. This is particularly true of sexual abuse but may be just as serious in some cases of physical abuse and neglect. Many states lack laws that restrict publicity on child abuse victims and their families. As a result serious harm to children has occurred.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all states adopt laws forbidding public disclosure in the mass media of information that identifies victims of child abuse, their families, and perpetrators, who may be minors, unless ordered by a judge who has jurisdiction, as in a dependency hearing or in the trial of a perpetrator. The judge's criteria for public disclosure should be that the public interest in the case is already great and that the risk of harm to the child is small. Furthermore, the Academy recommends that the media exercise great caution in publishing any information that includes the names of victims of sexual or physical abuse.

This statement has been approved by the Council on Child and Adolescent Health.

The recommendations in this statement do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.

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