

Child abuse — many solutions, no solutions

by KAYE BARTON

This is the first of a two-part story on child abuse in Clackamas County.

Child abuse is an issue on which no one takes a neutral stand.

Beating or sexually abusing youngsters is not the kind of incident anyone chooses to defend, but opposition to it can take many forms, and those forms often conflict with one another.

Law enforcement agencies such as local police and county juvenile courts emphasize prosecution of the abusive adult, while the state Children's Services Division often strives to reunite the family and rehabilitate the abuser.

Parents, too, are confused. They are shocked and appalled by mass media images of the battered child, but the wonder: where does normal discipline of the child end and abuse begin?

Police and juvenile authorities echo their concern.

"We get a lot of unfounded reports of so-called 'child abuse,' said Margie Burkhardt, counselor for Clackamas County Juvenile Department and a member of the interagency Protective Services Team.

"A school nurse might notice bruises on a boy and inquire about them," she explained. "The boy might tell her, 'My dad beat me,' and the nurse is required by law to report the incident."

Investigation might reveal that the boy is a rebellious and defiant child who pushed his father into a situation requiring corporal punishment and

then struggled against the spanking, causing bruises.

"We don't go after cases of what is considered socially acceptable discipline," Burkhardt said. "It's a fine line, but if Johnny's getting smacked for misbehaving, we generally don't pursue it."

Her co-worker, Trish Hetzler, agreed. "We can usually tell what the situation is by the parent's attitude. If the parent's not defensive, but is open with us; and if the kid says, 'I love my parents — it's okay,' then we don't consider it an abuse case," she said.

Oregon law defines child abuse as: (a) any physical injury to a child which is caused by other than accidental means. The law also covers injuries which appear to be at variance with the parent's explanation of the "accident"; (b) Neglect which leads to physical harm, and (c) sexual molestation.

Of the 1,023 reports of abuse received by the CSD in 1977, less than 5 percent involved neglect. Bruises and welts on a child accounted for 49 percent of the reports, and 25 percent involved sexual molestation.

The number of CSD abuse reports have climbed each year. In 1975, there were 555 statewide; in 1976, 909; in 1977, 1,023 and in 1978, 1598.

That does not mean abuse is occurring more frequently, however, as juvenile counselor Hetzler pointed out. "The rate of reporting is rising," she said. Public awareness of the problem is growing, bringing reports from



onlookers who in the past would have remained silent.

To be sure, any of them are required by law to report. Recent changes in the

child abuse statutes have increased the number of professional persons who must contact CSD or a law enforcement agency when child abuse is suspected.

Among them are school employees, medical personnel, ministers, providers of day care, social workers and police officers. The law requires only that the reporting individual has "reasonable cause" to believe that abuse has occurred.

Sandy Police Chief Fred Punzel said most reports of abuse he handles come from local schools. This is consistent with statewide figures, which indicate the highest number of abuse reports, 19 percent, come from school personnel.

"Most of the doctors who report abuse go directly to CSD or the juvenile department," Punzel said. "It may be that they want to protect the doctor-client relationship and they feel there's a stigma which surrounds the local police."

"Or they may simply know that we don't actually handle abuse cases ourselves, but turn them over to the juvenile department, anyway."

Punzel said his agency's part in processing an abuse report is to contact the person making the report and determine the likelihood of actual abuse. "What we do is really just an initial screening," he said. It is an attempt to eliminate unfounded reports before passing them on to the county or the state.

If a child has been battered or sexually abused immediately prior to the report, Sandy police will make sure he or she receives proper medical attention, including transportation to a hospital.

In spite of the number of unfounded reports, Hetzler and Burkhardt said they "go on the assumption that the reports are true." They investigate each abuse account and take seriously the allegations made.

"The things we jump on quickest are the sexual abuse cases," Hetzler said. Fewer of those reports prove to be unfounded than battering cases do, she said.

Teen-age girls have occasionally reported molestation to provide a distraction from their own misdeeds, sexual or otherwise, the counselors said. But the juvenile department proceeds on the assumption that each report of sexual abuse is valid.

Hetzler recounted an incident in the county which involved a 10-year-old girl who talked at school about "her daddy making love to her." The school contacted the juvenile department, and Hetzler went out to interview the child.

The girl was at first reluctant to talk, and Hetzler said she required considerable reassurance. "Finally she asked me, 'What would happen to a little girl whose daddy did those things to her?'" Hetzler recalled.

"I explained to her our procedure and assured her it would be okay," Hetzler continued. "And finally she told me what had been going on. It involved not only her, but her two younger sisters as well."

Next week: a look at how the abuser and the abused are dealt with and some preventive measures.

Truancies, citations occupy police

Sandy police responded last Thursday to six complaints of truant high school students loitering and fighting on Hood Street during class hours.

Steven H. McGinnis of Portland was cited Sunday evening for having an open container of an alcoholic beverage in his car.

Douglas L. Gillum of Gresham was driving a car which struck three parked cars on Tupper Road north of Sandy Heights Boulevard. Police reported that Gillum's vehicle hit a patch of slush and went out of control.

The incident occurred Saturday. There were no injuries, and all cars were

drivable after the accident.

Sandy police Sunday morning recovered a 1977 Camaro which was repor-

tedly stolen from Gresham last Thursday. The vehicle was abandoned on Baumback Street in Sandy.

Nicholls to represent Pioneer

Pioneer Real Estate will be represented at the 1979 international convention of the Homes For Living Network, to be held at the new MGM Grand Hotel in Reno, Nev., Feb. 12-16.

Representing Pioneer will be Dale D. Nicholls who will be among the expected 2,000 brokers, managers and sales associates who will attend the convention.

Keynote speaker of the Reno event will be U.S. Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), who will discuss how high interest rates and inflation have adversely affected American families.

Features of the five-day convention will be workshops and roundtable discussion sessions for principal brokers, office managers and sales associates.

Library Notes

New adult books in the Sandy Public Library include "Your Income Tax, 1979" by J.K. Lasser; "The Growing Powers of the Presidency," by Nicholas Masters; and "The Tell-Tale Eye" by Eckhard Hess.

lewiczowa; and "Olga Korbut" by Jay Smith.

Other children's books are "Charlie Brown's Third Super Book of Questions and Answers," by Charles Schultz and "Carly Simon" by Charles Morse.

New juvenile and easy books include: "The Little Green Man," by Mischa Damjan; "The Sparrow Magic," by Maria Nik-

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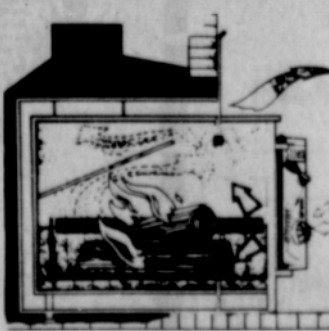
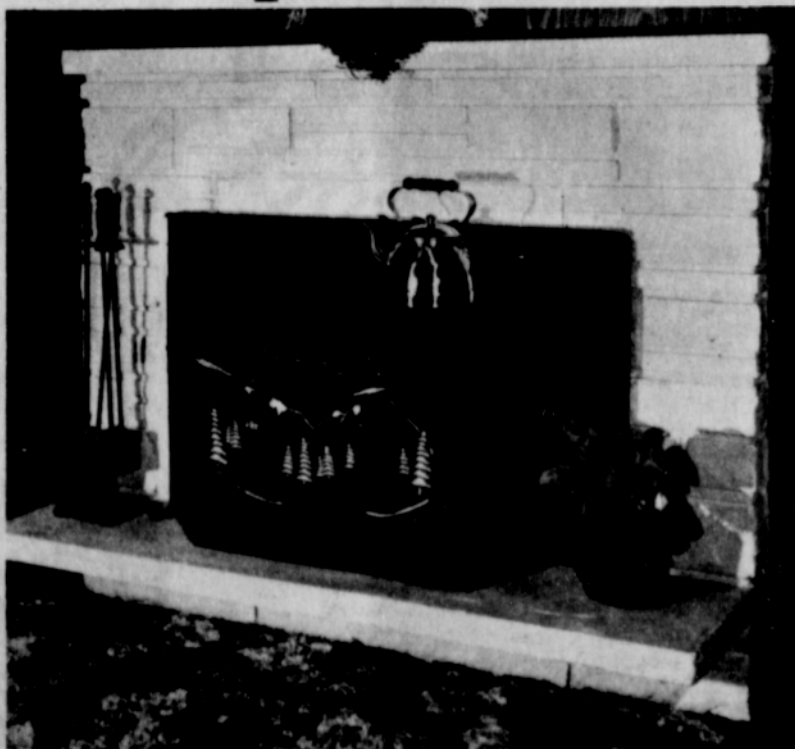
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