Working With Families of Orthodox Jewish Culture

Understanding the Reluctance and Resistance:
What is Orthodox Judaism?

The primary definition of Orthodox Jewish people:

Is their complete and total dedication to

*Halacha* - Jewish Law.

However, within the umbrella of Orthodoxy there is a wide stream of very nuanced groups. To outsiders, they may all seem quite similar, but when dealing with a variety of issues especially within the field of abuse (sexual, emotional, physical or otherwise), their minutest differences can play a huge role.
Benefits of Orthodox Judaism:

- Tight, close knit communities
- Shabbat and Holidays as days of rest and rejuvenation
- Family Oriented
- Strong Moral Values
- Violent crimes rarely committed
Sects of Orthodoxy:

- **Modern Orthodox** - They blend into the general population by dress, and can be distinguished by Yarmulka.

- **Orthodox** - Beards (maybe trimmed), Payos/Sidecurls (at times short or hidden), Jackets, at times hats, many speak English as first language.

- **Ultra-Orthodox/Hassidic** - Beards, Payos/Sidecurls, Usually long jackets, Yiddish as first language- may present a language barrier

- **Conservative, Reform, non-orthodox** - may observe traditional Judaism, or parts thereof.
Basic Laws of Orthodoxy:

**Separation of Gender:**

Other than the Modern orthodox, all segments of Orthodoxy have strict separation and no-gender-mingling policies. This *halachic* (religious law) practice is an absolute given and meant to serve as a protection of basic family and moral values.

- Typically, this means that outside of immediate family, teens won’t be seen "hanging out" or frivolously talking to a member of the opposite sex. For some more stringent groups, this separation would even extend to playmates from a young age.

- Any *Shul* (synagogue) that is Orthodox would have a *Mechitzah* (separation), a wall of separation with women in one section and men in another. This is also the case in many social events, fundraisers etc. Female performers would typically perform for females only.

- Generally, schools are 'boys only' or 'girls only'
Basic Laws of Orthodoxy (continued):

**Modesty:**

- Basic rules of modesty are part and parcel of Orthodox living: girls cover elbows, knees, and necklines beginning anywhere from age 3-7 and continuing into adulthood.

**Yichud/Seclusion**

- Torah Law forbids seclusion between a male and a female, unless it is the male's immediate relative. Seclusion means being alone in a private/locked area. Even Rabbis are not exempt from this, hence why some Rabbis will have a glass window on their study door or will leave the door open a crack when meeting privately with a woman. Exceptions apply for male/females in the mental/medical health field.
Basic Laws of Orthodoxy (continued):

- **Shelter from Secular Culture**
  - Limited or no exposure to TV/Media
  - Use of Smartphones and Internet are discouraged, web filters are encouraged.
  - Secular Newspapers/Books, large variety of culturally sensitive books, magazines and newspapers.

- **Derech Eretz/Respect for your Elders**
  - Respect for parents, teachers, elderly and Rabbinic figures is of paramount importance in the community. It is ingrained in children from a very young age that they must obey and respect these individuals.
    - When a predator is in any of these positions, it makes it difficult, if not nearly impossible for a child to undo the conditioned respect they are brought up with and rebel against the actions and perpetrator.
  - In some communities, respect for those in the authoritative positions is so large that they can’t believe that such an individual could ever commit any sort of abuse.
Orthodox Lifestyle:

- Close-knit families - family values are stressed upon
- Close-knit communities
- Torah study, and halachic observance
- Rabbinical Guidance
- Community support groups, Financial, Medical, Crisis intervention, Tragedy assistance, etc.
- Private resources for charity, events, etc.
- Kosher Establishments - groceries, restaurants
- Kids attend Private Schools/Yeshivas separate for boys and girls
- Synagogue - prayer services is a daily routine
Why the Reluctance to Report:

**Shidduchim/Prospective Marriage**

- Family life plays a huge role in the Orthodox community, many will check out prospective dates extensively before deciding a date should be set up. During this research process, if a prospective date or parent finds out that the girl/boy or sibling of the girl/boy had been a victim of sexual abuse, the chances of them getting normal marriage prospects goes down by about 50%.

- Children and teens often don’t want to hurt a sibling’s marriage prospects, she/he may continue to keep the abuse a secret for many years...or forever. Parents are often torn between siding with the victim and the other children whom they know their marriage prospects will suffer as a result of going public or to trial.
Stigma/Backlash

After abuse, children are already confused and feel different than their peers. Add to that public knowledge of said abuse, and they are likely to suffer social shunning, judgment and a lack of understanding of what occurred to them. They feel their reputation is tarnished and they are labeled "problematic", "dysfunctional" and many times referred to as a "fabricator/liar" etc.
Religious Restrictions:

Even victims and their families, who would normally involve the authorities and report abuse, won't do so out for fear of their religious practices being violated or not accommodated/understood. Some of those include: Kosher food, Prayers, Language barriers, spiritual guidance and interference of Sabbath or other Jewish Holidays.

The same goes for people who are aware/informed of an abusive situation. They may be apprehensive of not being accommodated.
Ostracization:

Biblical law compares a molester to a murderer, but many Orthodox people will rather think that it’s a violation of Jewish law to tell on another fellow jew especially if it may result in incarceration or ruining an entire family who may be ostracized once abuse is exposed.

NOTE: Most Orthodox Jews will consult with some sort of Rabbinic authority before deciding to reveal their stories or even pursue pressing charges to law enforcement/DCF. Rabbis/Community Leaders/Religious Child care providers, need to be continuously educated and reminded in the laws of Mandatory Reporting. They need to be educated and understand how important it is for them to encourage victims to report abuse to authorities. These authoritative figures play a very big role - because if the Rabbi supports the victim and the family, they will feel supported and more comfortable to speak with authorities.
Why the Reluctance to Report (continued):

- **Fear of the Unknown**
  - Victim/Family do not know what would happen if they report the abuse, and are afraid of the unknown process of an investigation. Meaning: the process of investigation, would an arrest be made, testifying, trials, will it be in the news, confronting the abuser etc.

- **Fear of Not Being Believed**
  - Victims/children worry that they won’t be believed and possibly punished for fabricating such a shocking story, sending a strong message to potential victims that reporting anything will not only not help them but will label them as liars.
  - Little, to no, evidence of abuse, as in the case of grooming or molestation, unlike physical abuse, where there may be more concrete evidence.
Helpful Tips for Investigations:

- Educate yourself about the community you are dealing with.
- Speak to and establish good relationships with Rabbis and Community Activists, leaders etc. With a stronger connection and support network in the Jewish Community, members of the community will be more comfortable speaking with and corresponding with law enforcement.
- In the Orthodox Community, males and females don’t have physical contact nor converse with members of the opposite sex. Therefore, it is very helpful to have a male investigator deal with a male, and female investigator deal with a female, in order to put them at ease and be able to speak more comfortably.
- Reassure the victim that everything will be kept strictly confidential.
Helpful Tips for Investigations:

- Discretion - avoid meeting the victim in public areas or among the victim's peers. If possible, make arrangements to meet in a private location, as to not shame them. The schools and families will be pleased to accommodate.

- Sabbath & Holiday restrictions:
  - Shabbat is a day of rest and celebration that begins on Friday at sunset and ends on Saturday at nightfall. It is a spiritual day spent dining with family and praying at the synagogue.
  - During the Sabbath the use of electronic devices is prohibited. Activities such as driving, turning on or off lights or operating electrical appliances (including phones), Cooking and writing are not permitted.

- If Kosher food is needed, CSE can make the proper arrangements.

- Sensitivities such as the above examples may make a world of a difference.
How Can We Help?

- Locate family members and acquaintances
- Provide connection with spiritual and community leaders
- Provide therapists/social services
- Encourage victims, provide emotional and social support
- Explain the process to victims and their families
- Provide translators if there is a language barrier
- Provide contact information that you may not have
- Answer any questions that may arise and assist accordingly
- Guide the authorities and the families throughout the entire process
What is being done?

- Jewish Community Watch, a nonprofit organization that is geared towards combating Child Sexual Abuse, was founded in 2011 and has quickly established itself as the leading organization dealing with this issue in the Jewish Community.

- It works to:
  - Educate the community about the dangers of child sexual abuse
  -Expose convicted molesters in the community to prevent other victims from being hurt
  -Heal survivors by paying for therapy and acting as a support group

- The organization also helps victims report their abuse to authorities, having built up positive relationships with law enforcement officials across the country.
How Can We Be Reached?

Chesed Shel Emes (CSE)
Rabbi Mark Rosenberg
O. 305.359.5700 /24hr
C. 917.578.8911
E. markrosenbergfl@cseinfo.org
Emergency Number: 305-590-8005
Why the reluctance to report?

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How can we be reached?

Mark Rosenberg
Director Florida Division
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Working with families of Orthodox Jewish culture

Understanding the reluctance & resistance

Jcw
Prevent | Educate | Heal

CSE
CHESED SHEL EMES FLORIDA
800 NE 171 Terrace,
North Miami Beach Fl 33162
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④www.CSEflorida.org

Emergency number
305-590-8005
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