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## TARAJI P. HENSON

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## Sexual Molestation:

IT'S TIME TO  
Speak Out  
AND LET IT GO

By Marilyn Okoye

Oftentimes, parents have to put their children in the care of other baby sitters, before care, after care, summer camps and other social activities. We do this to “keep our children safe”. But what do we do when one of these trusted individuals violates our children in the most unthinkable way? When our children have been touched, fondled, or made to perform sexual acts? It makes your skin crawl to just think about it. Now, let’s bring it even closer to home. What if this trusted individual is a close family friend? **What if...it is family?** What do we do? Where do we go? Who do we tell? **What if these unthinkable things happened to you...**you, as a child, were the one touched, fondled, or made to perform sexual acts by the very person or people you trusted?

According to a child molestation and sexual abuse web site, nearly 2/3 of all sexual assaults reported involved minors and roughly 1/3 involved children under the age of 12. **In most cases, however, child molestation goes unreported.** Estimates are that only 35% of sexual abuse is reported. Kids can be frightened or embarrassed and many times do not say anything. It is a subject that is still very much taboo.

The effects of child sexual abuse include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, propensity to re-victimization in adulthood, and physical injury to the child. **Sexual abuse by a family member is a form of incest, and can result in more serious and long-term psychological trauma, especially in the case of parental incest.**

It is said that approximately 15% to 25% of women and 5% to 15% of men were sexually abused when they were children. Most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims or are relatives of the child. Under the law, “child sexual abuse” is an umbrella term, describing criminal and civil offenses in which an adult engages in sexual activity with a minor or exploits a minor for the purpose of sexual gratification. **The American Psychiatric Association states that “children cannot consent to sexual activity with adults”,** and condemns any such action by an adult: “An adult who engages in sexual activity with a child is performing a criminal and immoral act which never can be considered normal or socially acceptable behavior.”

Grace Today speaks with Child Sexual Abuse Advocate, **Stephanie L. Jones**, author of “**The Enemy Between My Legs.**” In her book, Jones bravely tells her story of being sexually abused. She is transparent with her life, the choices she made, and her journey of healing and liberation. While this conversation speaks more of the female as the victim, male children are molested also. Roughly 33% of girls and 14% of boys are molested before the age of 18, according to the U.S. Justice Department. So be sure to talk to your sons and daughters because both are precious gifts

**GT:** The title of your book is quite powerful. How did you decide on the title?

**STEPHANIE:** I really didn’t decide on the title. I can truly say it was God. I was reading a book in my office at home. Quickly in my spirit, it was so sudden, I heard “The enemy between your legs.” Once I started writing the book, my mentor asked me if I had a title. I knew what it was. I struggled with it personally, until God asked, “Stephanie, how were you attacked?” I said sexually. “Well then, that settles it.”

**GT:** Who exactly is the “enemy”?

**STEPHANIE:** I do realize that a lot of people think that I am talking about myself. But for me, the “**enemy**” has been my attacker, definitely not myself.

**GT:** Speaking to parents, how do we get teens to understand that getting involved with someone older is not a good match and that they can easily be taken advantage of?

**STEPHANIE:** The problem is very difficult to get them to understand once they have been sexually violated by an older person. The attraction for older people is now there. That’s what I am saying in my book. **I was molested by older people for so long that as a young girl of 13, 14, 16, I was now attracted to older men.** And a lot of that had to do with the fact that they (older men) can do things that younger men, boys your age, can’t do, as far as buying gifts and giving you money. When we’re young, we always want to be older. Being involved with older men (for a girl) and young men with older women, it’s like you feel some sense of...it takes you to another level with your peers. I think that parents should deal with their children at a very early age to talk to them. If an older man shows interest or an older woman shows interest, the child needs to step back and ask, “Hey I’m a kid, what’s wrong with this person that they (an older adult) are even trying to approach me in this manner?”

**GT:** I understand that a five year old may intuitively understand something isn’t right when touched inappropriately. What can you tell us that will let us know our child has been violated? **Do you remember what you felt?** What were the words in your head?

**STEPHANIE:** Well, there are a number of things that parents can look out for such as:

1. playing sexually with other toys
2. fondling themselves or other children especially
3. bed wetting
4. afraid of the dark
5. afraid of certain people or wanting to be around particular people all the time

**My first two abusers were young boys.** One was a teenager, one was not. So it was kind of like “child’s play” for me, although I said it was wrong. I say in the book, “I knew that it was something that we were not supposed to do because whenever we heard someone coming I would pull my little pants up or my little dress down”. I knew that something wasn’t quite right. However, I was five and did not know the seriousness of the situation. I do remember in detail what was happening at five years old but I did not know just how wrong it was. Honestly, how many parents are really discussing child molestation with their five year old? They are not even discussing sex period, but especially child molestation.

**GT:** What can we say to our children before, during, or after such a violation to get them to understand that the abuser is using a fear/control tactic such as “I will hurt/kill you if you tell”, “I will hurt/kill your parents, “You will be taken from your home if you tell” or “**No one will believe you.**”

**STEPHANIE:** Well everything you just asked is it. The fact that you asked if someone is saying those things...don’t listen to it. It’s not true it’s not going to happen. No, you are not going to get in trouble. The parents will not go to jail if they do something that changes the situation. This needs to be stressed to the child. It’s when the parent doesn’t do anything that the child is at risk for being removed from the home. The parents have to be very, very careful in addressing that, but at the same time need to explain just who ‘anyone’ is. **The statement “don’t let anyone touch you” is too vague.** You don’t let your mother, father, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather touch you. When I’m talking to young people, I notice the difference on their faces when I run down that list. It’s like everything changes because it’s no longer ‘**stranger danger.**’

**GT:** You talk about some of the critical areas fathers need to be involved in their daughters’ lives—clothing, friends, free time and conversations about sex. What are some of the lead-ins you can give to help jump start these lines of communication with their daughters?

**STEPHANIE:** You know, here’s the thing, as young girls we want to be nurtured and loved. Fathers just have to ask. It’s not difficult because we want them to talk to us. Girls really want the affection of their fathers. If the father says to his daughter, “I know you’re getting older, you like young men and young men like you, but there are some things that we need to discuss because I want you to grow up and be a respected and respectable young woman.” It’s just that simple. I never got that from my father. I never got any type of nurturing from my father like that.

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**GT:** How do we look for signs of distress, especially in the “good child” who is making the grades and doesn’t “cause commotion”?

**STEPHANIE:** I think that no matter how much a child is “good”, the signs are still there—just acted out in another way. See, what we tend to think of as negative behavior (such as fighting or maybe getting kicked out of school) are not the only signs. Sometimes if you have a child that seems so closed in and quiet the parents may say, “Oh, she’s just shy.” She may be an introvert for a reason. But the thing is we need to pay really close attention and if something seems just a little off, don’t put it off as “he’s just getting older” or “she’s just going through puberty.” **Question your children. Ask them.**

**GT:** You have forgiven both parents. Speak to our children and the one who has been abused as to how and why you did that.

**STEPHANIE:** Both my parents were very negligent on many levels. It was not they who did it to me, so I cannot be angry at them for a choice that someone else made. I love them and they have both apologized for their negligence and sincerely meant it. We have to understand that **forgiveness is a decision.** It’s not saying, “I give this person a pass for what they did or did not do.” It’s saying, “I let go of this anger and bitterness in my heart so that I can move on”. I have to say this so that young people and adults can move on. It is so important that people understand that you may not have a clue as to what your parents have gone through that caused them to live out the cycle again.

**GT:** What can you say to others who are pretending that everything is ok?

**STEPHANIE:** They will be pretending for the rest of their lives if they never take the time to say “**Lord, help me**” and allow God to heal their soul and broken heart. That hurt, shame, pain, and guilt will never go away [without God’s help]. It may not appear on the surface where people can see it, but somehow it will manifest itself in some way in his or her life: in finances, bodies, health, friendships, attitudes, workplace, relationships, and families. **To pretend is a terrible place to be in.** There’s nothing like walking around in freedom. I don’t have to pretend anymore. I don’t have to be perfect Stephanie. I am out of that bondage now. Also, acknowledge and talk about what happened to them.

**GT:** Did you press charges and how did you handle the thought, “What if they did it to someone else”?

**STEPHANIE:** Well interestingly enough, I didn’t tell my parents and my family until I was 29 years old. At that point initially, I did not know about pressing charges. It had not crossed my mind. I was just seeking help for myself. But as time progressed, it did cross my mind: what if there are others? **Yes, it has crossed my mind and it has bothered me.** What I’m really hoping and really, honestly, all I can say is that I am hoping is that there is no one else. If it has happened to others by the individuals that violated me, I hope that by

my coming forth it will then give them [those violated] the courage to come forth in the present day. I hope that it is not still happening. I hope my coming forth and breaking the silence in my family will give someone else the courage to say something.

**GT:** What are your final words?

**STEPHANIE:** My healing and wholeness came, number one, through the word of God. Often time people will call me, and say they’re not feeling any better. I can ask them one question: How much time are you spending in the word? I saturated myself with the word of God and I went after the word of God at all costs. I staked my life on it. I had to make it my priority, looking in God’s word for me and what His word says about me, my soul and my past. That’s why I love the scripture *Isaiah 54:4*:

*“Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.” KJV*

Then there were the basic things that I did for my healing and my wholeness. **I had to change my environment.** There were certain things that I couldn’t do anymore, places I couldn’t go, and people I couldn’t be around. I can be around those things now but it took some time because I had to get strong enough. Then, I had to forgive myself for the wrong that I had done. A lot of people are living in self-condemnation and self-guilt for the wrong that they have done. **I also had to realize my self-value.** I think that is so important because a lot people don’t realize their own value. They don’t know that God created only one of them. They are God’s plan A. He doesn’t have a plan B for their life. God doesn’t have a plan B for my life. **I’m His first choice.** That’s what they have to realize. They are God’s first choice!

## RESOURCES

### Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse

24-hours: Counselors, counseling, referrals, and research available.

Phone: 1-800-4-A-CHILD ® (1-800-422-4453) or 1-800-2-A-CHILD (TDD line).

[www.childhelpusa.org](http://www.childhelpusa.org)

### Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)

24-hour confidential national hotline for survivors of sexual assault.

Phone: 800/656-HOPE

[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

### Darkness to Light

1-866-FOR LIGHT (367-5444)

[www.darkness2light.org](http://www.darkness2light.org)

# Where is Your Insult Level?

By *Bathsheba Wyatt-Drapper*



Before we talk about what it is, let’s look at the definition of insult:

An action or form of speech deliberately intended to be rude; anything that causes offense by being of an unacceptable quality; to offend someone by being rude, insensitive or insolent; to demean or affront—(*en.wiktionary.org/wiki/insult*)

I am concerned about our individual insult levels. **What kind of insult makes you mad enough to write a letter, make a call, join an organization or march in a protest?** My concern about this comes with the arrival of my first grand gift from GOD, a wonderful baby boy named Shaun Michael. As I looked into his eyes, I saw myself as a vessel of knowledge pouring into him an awareness of the past, an understanding of the present, and belief in his dreams for tomorrow.

I recently attended the regular Saturday morning meeting of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition where Rev. Al Sharpton was the speaker. In his message, he talked about how we have become so complacent with hearing about the 40 students of the Chicago Public School system being shot or murdered that we don’t talk about it. **We have adjusted to hearing the media tell us about what is going on where we live rather than getting involved in the community we live in.** We have adjusted to the complaints about how we don’t need affirmative action anymore, but we are still being victimized by the same old acts of injustice.

We are still okay with the fact that our children are graduating from high school based on their athletic skills and not their academics. I don’t mean to insult anyone, but I have seen more mothers upset about a broken fingernail than the fact that their child does not have homework or books. **More fathers are concerned about the size of the tires for their car than the quality of education for their child.**

I know that Rev. Jackson and Rev. Sharpton aren’t the only ones talking about this, but are we listening?

**Have we forgotten how we got where we are?** I was there and recall that we had no e-mails, we wrote letters; we had no cell phones, so we kept change in our pockets to use the phone; and Dr. King and others organized the March on Washington without a listserve, Facebook or MySpace. Back in the day, we talked to one another, we planned, we prayed and we cried; we didn’t just sit back and do nothing.

**The road to where we are today was paved with blood, sweat, tears, plans and a high INSULT level.** We have got to stop waiting for something bad to happen in our homes or to someone that we love before we want to do something.

We are the “**now people**”. You know, not senior citizens yet, but past being called the new generation. Many of us are the now people in the middle. We have made great strides and worked hard, but we may not be able to reap the benefits of our hard work through things like Medicare and social security. **How does that make you feel?** Have you made a call or left a message on your elected official’s voice mail telling them what you think? To just sit back and allow things to happen in our communities, workplaces and homes without ever saying anything because we are waiting for leaders like Rev. Jackson or Rev. Sharpton to do something, then complaining about what they do is an **INSULT**. It is an insult to all those who came before us and is a set back for our children and grandchildren.

**Why am I so upset?** Glad you asked.

I recently was asked to speak at the Parent Association Council’s resources event at a high school on the south side of Chicago. When I arrived, the room was full of balloons the table was full of food and punch, but only one parent showed up. **Where were the other parents?**

Recently CBS reporter Jim Williams reported the story, “**Nearly 60% Won’t Graduate**”. As a Chicago predominantly black south side school, 44 of the 77 eighth grade students at Bradwell Elementary did not pass eighth grade. He also said that there was a fierce debate about who is to blame (I question just how fierce the debate is since only the parents seemed to know about the problem before the media reported it the day before graduation). In the article, Williams made the statement and asked the question: “It is a debate that has gone on for years in poor communities: do you blame the schools for the students’ poor performance or do you blame the parents?”

The 8th grade children were notified that they would not be graduating the day before graduation. A high school senior from Bowen High School (another school on the south side of Chicago) was told the day before graduation that she would not be walking or graduating the day before the graduation because she was one-half credit short. I was very angry when I heard about this and my first question was, “**Where are the parents meeting and when?**”

**Why am I so upset?** Glad you asked.

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