Every child has the right to protection from any form of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse
(see article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child)

The dream
Every child should be able to grow up safely within their family and within their religious community. Children have the right to be protected from sexual abuse. Every child who has been abused, or is at risk of abuse, should feel recognised and be given protection and professional guidance.

The problem
High profile cases have already revealed the extent of child sexual abuse within the Catholic church, child services, and sports clubs. The same problem exists within closed religious communities, including Jehova's Witnesses. In these communities, the religious context plays an important part in how the problem is dealt with. There is a risk that the church or religious teachings become the focus of attention, rather than the child.

What can your religious community do?
The safety of children is a basic aspect of your religious beliefs. In many religious communities, children are regarded as a gift from God. You would expect, therefore, that children within these communities grow up in an environment of love and safety. Check whether children and their safety play a central role in your community's policy. Ask yourself: Is your...
community’s policy concerning child sexual abuse cases focused on the safety of the child? Is the entire policy available to all? Is it in clear language that even children can understand? A good policy allows everyone to understand how sexual abuse is prevented and how the community reacts if it does happen. Religious leaders and people in responsible positions should be trained by experts to recognise and report signals of child abuse.

How do you ensure that every child in your community can grow up in an environment of love and safety? Do you have the courage to speak up if the safety of children is not given the central role it deserves?

What can you do?
Whether or not you are part of a religious community, you can do something! If you feel that something is not as it should be, you can give the child the sense that he or she is being noticed. Give them attention, so that they feel some security and safety. This will help him or her be better able to process trauma. Small gestures can have a lot of meaning. Every child benefits from love, security, and acknowledgement. Do you dare to make a difference by using loving attention to create a foundation for trust, healing, and happiness?

If you have noticed strong indications of sexual abuse, report this to your local child safety report centre or the police.

Stronger together
You and I can stand together to tackle the problem of child sexual abuse. We want to contribute to a world in which every child can grow up with love and in safety. Don’t you?

This manifesto is endorsed by:
Eric van Oosterhout, Mayor of Emmen (The Netherlands)
Attje Kuiken, Member of Parliament, PvdA
Michiel van Nispen, Member of Parliament, SP
Kathalijne Buitenweg, Member of Parliament, Groen Links
Maud Kips, counselor and board member at Vrouwenplatform Kerkelijk Kindermisbruik (women’s platform church child abuse)
Alexander Veerman, PKN pastor (PhD on sexual abuse by preachers)
Anneke van Duin, remedial educationalist, teacher and expert on diagnostics regarding sexual abuse of children
Remy Jacobs, spiritual caregiver, theatre producer and experienced expert
Dilana Smith, singer songwriter, ambassador at centre human trafficking

Do you dare to make a difference by using loving attention to create a foundation for trust, healing, and happiness?

Reclaimed Voices