

# Breaking taboos to protect children National campaign for the first time

UBS Optimus Foundation supports campaign by Kinderschutz Schweiz to protect children

**Sexual violence against children is a particularly disturbing issue in light of the high incidence of such acts: two in nine girls and one in twelve boys are sexually exploited and abused before they reach their sixteenth birthday. It is also a shocking fact that the majority of perpetrators come from within the victim's own family. To be able to offer real help to these children the issue must become a task on the socio-political agenda. What is needed is a well-researched effort to inform and educate the population at large. In response to this, Kinderschutz Schweiz (the Swiss association for the protection of children) has launched a child abuse prevention campaign which will run for several years.**

Sexual abuse of a child is defined as any act committed by an adult with or against a child which serves to sexually arouse or satisfy the adult concerned. Child molesters do not always use blatantly violent methods. Quite often a child is subtly coerced into sexual acts: their doubts are allayed, they are brainwashed into thinking such deviant behavior is normal and their attempts at resistance are consistently ignored. So where does affection end and sexual abuse begin? It is easy enough to draw a line between the two and has to do with the intention of the perpetrator: we are not talking here about a continuum, starting with tender physical contact with a child and ending in sexual abuse. On the contrary, paedophiles have a definite plan of action; they seek out and facilitate opportunities for sexual gratification.

The issue provokes huge conflicts for the victims and any adults affected. The child does not know if they can voice their concerns or to whom they should turn. If he or she confides in someone they trust they have to raise the issue nine times on average before being taken seriously. A mother and wife cannot decide whether she should take the side of her child or that of her husband. Many people feel deeply affected but take no action, turn a blind eye and remain passively accepting of the situation. The notorious scandals only represent the tip of the iceberg.

## Experts take action

The Kinderschutz Schweiz association was founded in 1982 and campaigns for the protection and welfare of children. It is the only national organization committed to fighting all forms of violence perpetrated against children. The main focus of Kinderschutz Schweiz is on protecting children from violence through preventive measures; if violence has already taken place it offers the necessary help.



## National campaign

2005 will see the launch of a long-running national campaign – the first of its kind – to combat sexual abuse against children. The aim is to teach children how to gain greater power over their own bodies and thus to be in a position to better protect themselves. Adults will be made more aware of tell-tale signs of sexual exploitation and taught how to recognize the strategies employed by abusers. The help of major figures from the worlds of politics, law and science will be enlisted in order to introduce efficient and successful measures. The modular campaign will run for a three-year period and involve local and regional child protection organizations, as well as other partners such as schools, municipalities and firms.

During the first year, the campaign will focus on those children directly affected by the issue. In the second year, the spotlight will be turned on perpetrators and their milieu, and in the third year the socio-political angle and practical measures against sexual violence will be under discussion. The campaign comprises a total of 14 modules. It will communicate its message via traditional channels such as radio and TV commercials, posters, adverts and various types of printed material. However, use will also be made of innovative ideas such as an interactive Internet platform and CD-ROM, building up a network of individuals in “ambassador” roles, a drama competition, an exhibition and a range of events.

The UBS Optimus Foundation supports this project with an annual donation of CHF 200,000, which will fund the campaign management plus three modules.

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