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The Monster Behind The Mask

Child abuse seems to be a major problem in our society. The issue is growing, and as more is uncovered, still more goes hidden. Children should feel safe in their homes with the parents they were given as protectors, nurturers, and providers. Moneka, a registered nurse in the Emergency Room unit at the Riverton Hospital in Riverton, Utah let me ask her a few questions regarding what she sees when children come into her care. With her being in the ER she sees most child abuse victims and she said they send most of them to Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City, because that is what they specialize in. In the cases of sexual abuse they have a rape nurse come in and collect the clothing, and all evidence from the child and collect all evidence. These cases are treated with a lot of sensitivity and great care is given to the child. They do their best to make them feel safe and warm. The trauma a child goes through is indescribable, and as this is a serious topic it can no longer go overlooked.

Brennan Smith a journalist from the Salt Lake Tribune, in June 2012, reported on a nanny in Salt Lake City who was arrested for child abuse while she was tending a young set of twins. Not only was she being charged in Utah she was also being investigated for child abuse in Belgium. Smith stated, "Aubrey Alta Anderson advertised herself as an infant child care specialist and certified nurse's assistant, placed advertisements on several nanny websites." After reading this story and realizing many people have children of their own, and often times have to work to support their family whether by choice or need you want to be able to trust those you leave your child in the care of. Not all nannies' lie on their resumes and most

are very trustworthy, but it also wouldn't hurt to be informed of the state's policies and procedures if such a case were presented. Child abuse is on the rise and people around us need to be informed of the signs of a child in danger.

- Statistics from childhelp.org in 2010 show that, a report of child abuse is made every ten seconds.
- More than five children die every day as a result of child abuse.
- Approximately 80% of children that die from abuse are under the age of 4.
- It is estimated that between 50-60% of child fatalities due to maltreatment are not recorded as such on death certificates.
- More than 90% of juvenile sexual abuse victims know their perpetrator in some way.
- Child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions and at all levels of education.

Young children can't defend themselves and often times in cases like the nanny they can't speak for themselves and by the time parents or authorities realize the danger they are in they have broken bones like the two month old children this nanny watched, or could be in much worse condition. We need to be made aware of what is going on around us. Often times the reason people don't report it, is because they don't see it or they don't want to believe a parent could do that to their child especially if the family is close to said observer. Denial is one of the biggest reasons for why child abuse goes unreported.

When people think of child abuse they often think of parents abusing their children like in the case of Ethan Stacy. In May of 2010 four year old Ethan Stacy was beaten to death by his step-father as his mother sat close by and watched this tragic event occur. This story made national news which most child abuse stories that result in death do; Caylee Anthony, Shelby Andrews, and Savannah Hardin just to name a few. Ethan Stacy is a tragic sickening event that brought a nation together to fight for a specific cause. This event caused Shelby's law to be used for the first time ever in history, a law that was created when Shelby Andrews was found dead after a year of abuse by her father and step-mother, but unfortunately at the time there was no law in place for murdering a child, this innocent child's parents couldn't face the death penalty. Melinda Rogers of the Salt Lake Tribune who reported on the Ethan Stacy story back in 2010, stated that, "outrage over Shelby's horrific death spurred Utah lawmakers to toughen the penalties for murdering a child." In turn this would open a huge door for capital punishment for cases like Ethan and Shelby. The law was later signed in 2007 by Gov. John Huntsman Jr.

Many friends and family questioned the reasons for why he was placed with his mother and not his father who would have protected him at any cost possible. The answer to that may never be known but Cynthia Hunt a counselor for LDS family services may be able to shed some light on why Utah has the policies they have. Hunt stated that when they are called with a concern for a child in danger, they take these cases very seriously. No matter if the person calling has a legitimate reason for such accusations or not they handle each case keeping the life of the child in mind. Although they may not be able to visit every child the same day they get the call they go according to the severity of the case.

An example of this would be a child who was seen to have unexplained bruising all across her face was reported to child services by a close family friend of the couple. When asked, the mother often would change her story for how they appeared across the child's face and the dad had no reason for why they were there. With great concern for the child a friend who saw them called the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Hunt went on to explain that in such a case like this, DCFS would examine the child, the home they live, the bed they sleep in, they would call family, friends, the child's doctor, however, since this child didn't seem to be in any immediate danger and the case load for many social workers is so large they couldn't possibly visit the home the same day they would most likely be there the next morning to investigate.

Depending on what the social workers find in the home will determine what will happen with the case. If they find a valid reason to open a case they could do one of two things, if they feel the home is unsafe for the child they could possibly take the child from the home immediately and place them with a suitable family member, in a foster home, or if they feel that the parents just need to be educated on how to care for the child DCFS will give them guidelines on how to care properly for the child. Hunt stated in such a case like the one fore mentioned the child wasn't in any necessary danger and the house was trashed so they instructed the parents to clean the home and they would be checked up on at any time with no prior warning to the arrival of DCFS. After such an amount of time if they feel the child will be cared for properly they will close the case.

After the DCFS investigates and if a case was open the reporter or reporters will be kept informed on all that is taking place. If you care enough for a child to report child abuse DCFS

will write you a letter explaining to you what has happened with the case and you will remain anonymous, so report it. If you feel that a child is in danger and there are signs of abuse don't wait until it's too late make the call and let social services do the rest. Richard Gelles from the University of Pennsylvania stated in an academic journal "between 1998 and 2002, approximately one-third of 1.4 million children reported in nine states were re-reported, and approximately 17% of victims were re-victimized

within five years" In 2010 that percent has nearly doubled. Utah is making laws that encourage victims to come forward which gives every person the chance to report anonymously. This problem is a growing danger and anyone around you could be victimizing any child. Become aware of what the signs are. Even though not all cases are as tragic as Ethan Stacy or Shelby Andrews and result in the loss of a life, every case should be treated as though a child may lose their life.