

Reveal

from The Center for Investigative Reporting

(<https://www.revealnews.org/>)



SHARE

A reader's guide to the Jehovah's Witnesses child sex abuse scandal

Topics: [Hidden Abuse Under the Watchtower \(https://www.revealnews.org/topic/jehovahs-witnesses/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/topic/jehovahs-witnesses/) / [Religion \(https://www.revealnews.org/topic/religion/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/topic/religion/) / [Religion and Government \(https://www.revealnews.org/topic/religion-and-government/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/topic/religion-and-government/)

Categories: [Dig \(https://www.revealnews.org/blog_category/dig/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/blog_category/dig/)

By [Trey Bundy \(https://www.revealnews.org/author/treybundy\)](https://www.revealnews.org/author/treybundy) / February 29, 2016



Jehovah's Witnesses leaders are fighting on multiple fronts to hide what they know about child sexual abusers in their religion.

Facing more than a dozen civil lawsuits in the United States and a government investigation in the United Kingdom, the Witnesses are continuing to withhold court-ordered documents from authorities. In England this month, the religious organization went to court for a fourth time attempting to block investigators from looking at their child abuse records.

It's been just over a year since Reveal began publishing and broadcasting stories about Jehovah's Witnesses covering up child sexual abuse. Since our [first story aired](https://www.revealnews.org/episodes/the-secrets-of-church-state-and-business/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/episodes/the-secrets-of-church-state-and-business/>), hundreds of Witnesses and ex-Witnesses have contacted us, mostly to share their stories.

We're continuing to report (<http://revealnews.org/watchtower>) on the issue, but in the meantime, here's a quick rundown of nine major findings so far:

- 1.** For more than 25 years, the global leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses has instructed elders to keep cases of child sexual abuse secret (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/>) from law enforcement and members of their own congregations.
- 2.** The Witnesses' parent corporation, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, issued the directives in a series of confidential memos dating back to 1989. The child abuse memos were approved by the Watchtower's governing body, a group of men who are the spiritual leaders of the religion, like the Pope in the Catholic Church.
- 3.** Instead of reporting child abuse to law enforcement, elders form their own judicial committees to deal with child abusers. The process can include having the victim confront the alleged abuser in person.
- 4.** Watchtower policy directs elders not to take any action against an accused child abuser unless the abuser confesses or there are two witnesses to the abuse.
- 5.** The Watchtower argues that its child abuse policies are based on Scripture and that police and court scrutiny violate the organization's First Amendment rights (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/are-jehovahs-witnesses-covering-up-child-abuse/>).

6. The Watchtower says its elders report child abuse in states where they are required to by law. In many states, they get around those laws by invoking a loophole that allows clergy to keep quiet about spiritual confessions – even when the issue is first raised by a victim, not an abuser.

7. Dozens of current and former members told Reveal that they were threatened with disfellowshipping – the Witnesses' version of excommunication – if they spoke up about child abuse. Once a Witness has been disfellowshipped, he or she is shunned by all other Witnesses, including family, friends and employers. (The Watchtower says it does not discourage victims from reporting their own abuse.)

8. The Watchtower has gone to extreme lengths to hide what it knows about child abuse. Since 1997, the Watchtower has required all elders who learn of child sexual abuse in their congregations to report it to the the organization's headquarters in New York. The Watchtower keeps the names and whereabouts of known or suspected child abusers in an electronic database. The Watchtower has twice violated subpoenas by refusing to produce the database in civil court. Meanwhile, no federal agencies have stepped in to obtain the list.

9. The Watchtower's policies have allowed child abusers to move freely in communities around the world.

Government commissions in England

(<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/in-england-more-accusations-that-jehovahs-witnesses-hid-sex-abuse/>) and Australia

(<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-shield-child-sexual-abusers-from-police-report-says/>) currently are investigating the Watchtower's child abuse policies in those countries. The

Australian commission found that since 1950, the Witnesses have covered up the crimes of more than 1,000 child sexual abusers. Investigators in England have not yet released any findings.

To read more, go here (<https://www.revealnews.org/topic/jehovahs-witnesses/>).

Trey Bundy can be reached at tbundy@cironline.org (<mailto:tbundy@cironline.org>). Follow him on Twitter: [@TreyBundy](https://twitter.com/treybundy) (<https://twitter.com/treybundy>).

SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

Stay up to date with the latest investigations and episodes from Reveal delivered to your inbox.

Email Address	SUBMIT
---------------	--------

[About Us \(https://www.revealnews.org/about-us/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/about-us/)

[Where to Hear Reveal \(https://www.revealnews.org/where-to-hear-reveal/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/where-to-hear-reveal/)

[Privacy Policy \(https://www.revealnews.org/privacy-policy/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/privacy-policy/)

[RSS \(http://www.revealnews.org/feed/\)](http://www.revealnews.org/feed/)

[Audio RSS \(http://feeds.revealradio.org/revealpodcast\)](http://feeds.revealradio.org/revealpodcast)

[Twitter \(https://twitter.com/reveal\)](https://twitter.com/reveal)

[Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/ThisIsReveal\)](https://www.facebook.com/ThisIsReveal)

[YouTube \(https://www.youtube.com/reveal\)](https://www.youtube.com/reveal)

[iTunes \(https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/reveal/id886009669\)](https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/reveal/id886009669)

[Newsletter \(https://www.revealnews.org/newsletter/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/newsletter/)

[StoryWorks \(https://www.revealnews.org/storyworks/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/storyworks/)

[Dig \(https://www.revealnews.org/blog_category/dig/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/blog_category/dig/)

© Copyright 2016, The Center for Investigative Reporting