



## **All Interactions with Children Require Vigilance:** **How To Report Suspected Sexual Abuse**

Officials in Rye, Westchester County, New York have agreed to pay \$3.25 million as settlement of a lawsuit filed by a man who had been sexually abused in a city firehouse in the early 1970s when he was only seven.

The victim was abused by Elwood Ferris, a Boy Scout leader and city fire lieutenant, who pled guilty to the crime in the 70s. He died in 1975 at the age of 55.

Ferris would get naked with the young victim and molest him at the Milton Firehouse and at the Durland Scout Center in Rye, where he was a caretaker. He "sodomized the victim, took naked pictures of him and even shut him in a crawlspace when it was cold out to 'punish and intimidate him.'"

The lawsuit also named a former fire chief of watching Ferris molest the boy and failing to do anything to stop the abuse.

The lawsuit was filed in 2020 under the state Child Victims Act. This law provided a window for those sexually abused as minors to sue, years after previous statutes of limitations might have expired.

The lawsuit included affidavits from volunteer firefighters and city employees attesting to statements they made to police accusing Ferris of inappropriate behavior with young boys who visited him at the firehouse in 1972. However, police were not notified until May 1973, after the nude pictures of Ferris, the plaintiff, and others were found in the defendant's locker at the firehouse.

Ferris was indicted on sex abuse and endangering charges and pled guilty later that year to a reduced charge of attempted first-degree sexual abuse. Jonathan Bandler ["Rye settles Child Victim Act lawsuit over 1970s abuse for \\$3.25 million"](#) (Jan. 04, 2023).

### **Commentary and Checklist**

Those who work with children and around children must be vigilant to protect them from those who would harm them. Even if children are only occasionally in your workplace, such as at a once-a-week meeting or present on a tour of the facilities, steps should be taken to make sure enough safe adults are present to protect them.

Often, police, fire, and other emergency personnel are considered mandatory reporters of child abuse; however, everyone who suspects a child is being abuse should report.

How can you report child sexual abuse?

- If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911.
- If there is no immediate danger, call your local child protective services agency.
- Be prepared with as much factual information as possible and include the name, date of birth or approximate age, race, and gender for adults and children involved.
- Provide addresses or another means to locate the subjects of the report, including the current location.
- Provide information regarding disabilities and/or limitations of the victims.

- Describe the relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child.
- Stick to facts and what you personally have observed.
- Avoid telling the person taking the report what you think should be done.
- Avoid offering opinions regarding the people involved in the report.
- When reporting, stay calm, polite, and professional.