



Understanding the California Sex Abuse Lawsuit: The LDS Church's Response in Context

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LEGAL

March 14, 2025

Are the California lawsuits proof of systemic failure? The numbers indicate otherwise, but every case warrants scrutiny.

Approximately one hundred people in California are alleging sexual abuse or misconduct linked to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in California courts. If these claims all turn out to be true, that would represent one hundred individual tragedies—one hundred instances of innocence lost and one hundred relationships with God potentially complicated by the grievous actions (or inactions) of leaders. It would reflect one hundred stories of emotional and psychological pain.

Even if some of the cases do not hold up in court or are found to be inaccurate, it is heartbreaking to think that someone might feel so angry or disaffected as to make a

false or exaggerated claim against the Church. Whether a claim is true or false, it indicates deep pain for those individuals and potentially serious consequences for the faith community they are accusing.

Responding with Care

As Latter-day Saints who have covenanted to mourn with those who mourn, we have an obligation to respond as best we can to these developments. Responding effectively to disclosures of sexual abuse requires empathy, active listening, and clear, survivor-centered steps. First and foremost, *start by believing the survivor*—thank them for trusting you and reaffirm that what happened was not their fault. As emphasized by [RAINN](#) and the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#), a supportive response prevents *secondary victimization*, where a survivor is retraumatized by disbelief or judgment.

There is a role for recognizing that false accusations exist. But that role is in broader policy conversations and in specific accusations where the legal system is equipped to provide the accused with the presumption of innocence.

Next, *listen without pressing for details* the survivor is not ready to share. Calmly acknowledge their pain: “I’m so sorry this happened to you. You’re not alone, and I’m here to help.” *Validate their feelings* of anger, sorrow, or confusion. According to the [Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs](#), avoiding “why” questions and blame is crucial for building trust.

Survivors need practical resources and emotional support. *Empower their choices*—offer options such as counseling, medical care, or contacting the police, but let them decide. For faith communities, consider how *spiritual care* can integrate with professional help. The [FaithTrust Institute](#) notes that survivors may grapple with spiritual doubts if the abuse occurred in a religious context. Faith leaders can provide prayer, scripture study, or pastoral conversations if the survivor desires it. We can privately implore that the atonement’s healing power will reach them if they do not desire in-person interactions of this kind.

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Above all, do not underestimate the healing power of *compassion and genuine support*. A caring, nonjudgmental environment helps survivors feel safe enough to begin rebuilding their lives. As followers of Jesus Christ this may be our best way to help as the Savior's hands in moving healing forward. By following these best practices—believing, validating, providing options, and ensuring accountability—you can be a steady source of hope and healing for those who have experienced sexual abuse.

What the Church Already Does

There are established mechanisms within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to handle and prevent abuse.

Their processes start with following best practices in [training and policies](#) that prevent abuse. The Church was a [leader in abuse prevention](#), starting regular public sermons on the subject in the 1970s.

The Church's sexual abuse prevention training is required for everyone who works with youth. Outside groups such as The [National Children's Alliance](#) have recognized the Church's efforts in this area.

The [Church's policies, including](#) its geographical boundaries and its calling system, also have the effect of dissuading predators.

When abuse has occurred, the Church utilizes a [helpline staffed by mental health](#) and legal professionals. These are the kinds of professionals that the best research suggests are in the best position to report abuse and result in lower abuse rates. When it is legal, the Church then passes on reports to local authorities. Regardless of the legal situation, the Church then begins to help the victims.

Statements from the Church indicate that their [first priority is providing healing for victims](#). This often starts with [professional mental health counseling](#). Bishops across the United States have access to networks of therapists that they can utilize, including trauma-informed therapy for abuse survivors.

Records leaked from church offices several years ago showed that the most frequent first step when victims were identified was to [connect them with therapists](#).

Additionally, the Church has stated that where it or its representatives are directly at fault, it has provided substantial funds for victims' medical and mental health care. Bishops have access to resources for professional counseling for members who need it, including specialized therapy for survivors. In cases where church leaders are at fault, the Church will work to compensate the victims to the best of their abilities.

In addition to directed funds, for which the Church's leaders are responsible, the Church provides financial compensation to help the healing process. Financial payouts can never really repair the damage, but they can help by providing time and resources to help recover. By all accounts, the Church's offers are **generous** and **well above** what would **normally be expected**.

The Church often utilizes **non-disclosure agreements** in cases like this. This part of their procedure is controversial. Some see the NDAs as following the Savior's example of asking those He healed not to broadcast it. Others see these NDAs as cynical attempts to protect the Church's PR.

Does the Church Make Abuse Worse?

While the Church's policies certainly are intended to prevent abuse, do they work, or are there cultural or implementation factors that result in higher rates of abuse among Latter-day Saints?

To the contrary, the best evidence suggests that Latter-day Saints commit sexual abuse at lower rates than the population in general.

For example, Latter-day Saint troops within the Boy Scouts of America **historically had lower rates of documented abuse** compared to national Boy Scout averages. While no reliable system can ever guarantee zero incidents of wrongdoing, a review of Boy Scouts' so-called "perversion files" showed that LDS-sponsored troops constituted roughly 20–30% of overall Scout membership but only around 5% of documented historical abuse cases in that organization. This discrepancy suggests that whatever measures were put in place—such as two-deep leadership or vigilant local oversight—may have contributed to a statistically lower rate of reported abuse.

Another data point cited by some Latter-day Saints is the relatively [low incidence of sexual misconduct](#) at church-affiliated universities. While sexual assault does indeed happen at BYU and has been the subject of intense scrutiny in recent years, climate surveys still place its abuse rate significantly lower than the national average.

Recent research suggests that these trends may begin in adolescence when Latter-day Saint teens are [less likely to participate in violent behaviors](#).

Overall, the best evidence seems to suggest that while Latter-day Saints are certainly not immune from violent or abusive behaviors among their number, there is something about our culture, norms, and policies that make Latter-day Saints an outlier in preventing abuse.

While not immune from abusive behaviors, evidence suggests our culture, norms and policies make LDS outliers in preventing abuse.

Does This New Lawsuit Mean We Must Reevaluate Our Effectiveness?

While past evidence might suggest that Latter-day Saints are doing well in this space, this newest lawsuit in California might suggest that we need to reevaluate these beliefs. One hundred is an awful lot of sexual abuse cases and may suggest that the problem is considerably more prevalent than previously believed.

And to the extent these revelations prompt self-reflection on how to continue to improve, that would be a welcome result.

To understand the extent this should revise our understanding, we must understand the context.

The most important context here is that California passed a law allowing victims to file lawsuits within three years, which would otherwise have been too late. So, we would expect a bunch of lawsuits to come forward.

For example, the Los Angeles Diocese of the Catholic Church faced a similar lawsuit. There, approximately [1900 victims filed suit](#), at a rate of approximately 43/100,000

Catholics within the diocese.

While [cases against school districts](#) are still accumulating, there are some rough numbers. Reports suggest there are a few thousand lawsuits; if that ends up being about 3,000 victims, it would equate to a rate of 50/100,000 students. Many districts are concerned the cases could bankrupt them.

The [91 suits](#) across California for Latter-day Saints represented 12/100,000 Latter-day Saints within the state—a little less than a third as often. This is about the same comparative rate as seen in the BSA case.

Essentially, no institution has been spared. Sexual abuse, as disgusting as it is, exists. The fact that it exists among Latter-day Saints should certainly humble us and cause us to continue to seek the best ways to eradicate it. But the fact is that even in this case, the numbers suggest that Latter-day Saints are effective in reducing sexual abuse numbers.

There are other matters to consider here. This lawsuit was aggressively marketed, the Church's wealth and generosity in these cases have been widely reported, and early investigations suggest a [higher incidence of discrepancies](#) than you might expect.

The sad truth is that approximately [1 in 10 adults](#) in the US have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime. Even if Latter-day Saints were successful in eradicating 99% of abuse compared to other groups, there would still be thousands and thousands of victims.

We also recognize our responsibility as members to do all we can to protect children and vulnerable adults.

What Can We Hope For?

The proper response to these allegations, first and foremost, is mourning. Even if one single Latter-day Saint was abused by someone in the Church, that is a tragedy that demands our empathy and our resolve to do better. The stark reality that an abuser could be a friend, neighbor, or even a trusted spiritual leader is painful. It reminds us that no institution is immune to predatory behavior.

We also hope that justice is served through the legal process, whether that means validating the claims of those who were truly harmed or filtering out any disingenuous lawsuits. The Church has a longstanding track record of responding responsibly in these cases.

None of these points justify complacency. What is needed is sensitivity and support for those who have gone through trauma and vigilance in preventing future abuse. As Latter-day Saints, we also understand that whenever a non-mainstream or “out-group” religion faces such allegations, the public commentary can be harsh. People who already dislike or mistrust the Church may seize upon these scandals as evidence of broader failings. It’s possible we will see sensational coverage or commentary that fails to address how the Church responds or how it compares statistically to other organizations.

In such an environment, we pray that sober, thoughtful journalism will prevail. We also recognize our responsibility as members to do all we can to protect children and vulnerable adults, ensuring no policy or practice inadvertently shelters abusers. That means continuing to refine our safeguarding measures, increasing transparency wherever possible, and emphasizing personal accountability among leaders at every level.

About the author



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