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**Time for a #MeToo Movement for Child Sexual Abuse Victims by
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The torrent of recent sexual assault allegations made by women against powerful men grows every day. Harvey Weinstein, Dustin Hoffman, Matt Lauer, Al Franken, Russell Simons... I'm having trouble keeping up with the news. The brave women who came forward should be commended. Many of them were in positions of prestige and power themselves. And, virtually all of them noted how very difficult it was to disclose the assaults, harassment and degradation that they endured.

It finally seems like the public at large has had enough. The "tipping point" has been reached whereby it's NOT okay for this assaultive behavior to continue. Perpetrators are being outed, fired, prosecuted and held accountable.

Now, let's consider children who were sexually assaulted. They too, must be supported when they have the courage to come forward and confront their perpetrator. They deserve their own #MeToo movement.

My hope is that this public outrage now funnels into action to pass the Child Victims Act – a piece of legislation that would eliminate time limits for child sexual abuse prosecution in New York. It is long overdue. The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children - New York are staunch advocates, as we work each day with children and families devastated by this crime. Numerous versions of this bill have failed to pass each year. A

current version would increase the time for commencing a civil action against the perpetrator until the victim reaches 50 years of age (the current statute of limitation is 23 years of age) and the time for commencing a criminal proceeding until the victim turns 28. The Child Victims Act needs to be passed now.

Children are taught from a very early age to obey their parents and other adults in their life. This can include their parent's boyfriends, girlfriends, their neighbors, teachers, coaches, priests, rabbis and family friends. The fact is that in close to 90 percent of child sexual abuse cases, family members and trusted adults are the perpetrators. It's not strangers that are molesting children, it is people that they know and trust. Imagine the confusion, anguish and fear that this breach of trust can cause for a child. This is a very complicated dynamic.

There are interesting parallels between child sexual abuse and the current cases in the news. Most child sexual abuse perpetrators are master manipulators. They can often convince anyone, even at times professionals, that they do not have a problem. At times, the perpetrators are so convincing that parents may even doubt their own child. Perpetrators may also be very good at giving excuses, such as being intoxicated or claiming that the child "came on" to them.

Children who are sexually abused can experience a myriad of problems including depression, anxiety, anger and aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, dissociation, sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse and self-injurious behaviors. Unaddressed, these symptoms can continue into adulthood, impacting their physical and mental health.

Many adults who were molested as children have confided that they only wish that they had known who to go to, who to tell, to stop the abuse. Instead, shamed, afraid, and embarrassed, they suffered in silence until they were old enough to get away from the abuser – one woman told me that she did not disclose the abuse until after the perpetrator had died due to her fears. The obstacles to disclosure can be overwhelming. That's why the current law in New York State to prosecute these cases, requiring disclosure by age 23, needs to be eliminated.

Survivors of child sexual abuse, whatever their age, deserve the right to hold their perpetrators accountable. Bringing them to justice will also protect other children from this horrific abuse.

For more information on keeping your children safe visit www.NYSPCC.org.