

Eubank shares the work of SART

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Brad Eubank, Chairman of the Sexual Abuse Response Team (SART) and Pastor of First Church, Petal, joined Tanner Cade, Director of Communication Services, and Jon Martin, Director of Men's Ministries, on the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's (MBCB) "Around the Table" Podcast. They discussed the new booklet for Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response and how this resource is a valuable, Gospel-led tool for Mississippi churches.

The need for effective prevention and response in matters of sexual abuse is nothing new, as the MBCB offered trainings even a decade prior to today. With the Houston Chronicle's article in 2019, however, detailing hundreds of abusers associated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the report revived our collective responsibility to protect not an associational name, but the children and vulnerable individuals entrusted to us, by our charge as Christ's church.

Dr. Lloyd Sweatt, former President of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, formed SART in 2022 to train and support Mississippi churches against the threat of unseen, inside abuse.

"We have an unbeknownst crisis of survivors, victims sitting inside of our churches that either have never told anyone or they told somebody, and it wasn't handled in the right way," Eubank, a survivor of sexual abuse himself, expressed on the podcast. "Some of that probably was out of ignorance... The vast majority just didn't know what to do or how to handle it. So

our hope was to try to bring ways that we can further prevent sex abuse, more than what we've done in the past, and then how do we respond when these issues come about, and how do we care for folks who are sitting in our sanctuaries every single week and are walking wounded."

Awareness of the issue is the first leap to confronting it. By state law, *every person above the age of 18 is a mandatory reporter of sexual abuse.* By God's Word, every Christian must *speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves* (Proverbs 31:8, NIV).

"(This) *is* a Gospel issue because if we fail in this issue, if we fail to respond and prevent, then we are proclaiming a gospel that is not the Gospel Jesus proclaimed." Eubank quoted Matthew 18:6, in which Jesus states, *If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea* (NIV).

"The first step in our whole process is training the church, helping raise awareness to understand why this is an issue, and what this looks like statistically."

In 2021, Mississippi Child Protection Services reported 1,008 cases of sexual abuse that year. On average, almost three Mississippi children were sexually abused every day in 2021. Now consider that only 16% of victims ever report their abuse. Thousands and thousands of children are abused every day, and a number of these happen within our churches, where predators hide under a cover of religion and target the children entrusted to them.

Church, you do not have to combat this issue alone. SART offers multiple resources to train your staff to detect signs of abuse and set preventative measures in place, as well as resources to consistently care for survivors and their families. Online resources include a 40-page Sexual Abuse and

Prevention Response Guide free to download, a brochure which acts as a summary of the booklet and can begin conversations on this issue, and a link to Ministry Safe training. Meticulously, the booklet walks churches through each step to preventing abuse, and how to respond if an allegation should arise.

Eubank stated that his prayer for Mississippi churches is to see sexual abuse prevention become an exceedingly practiced standard and principle. "There's a lot to do," he acknowledged. "But I am hopeful. I'm very hopeful that the tide is turning...By 2030, we (want to see) 15,000 churches doing these kinds of trainings. I think to myself, how many children can we stop (the abuse of) in the next seven years if we equip these 15,000 churches to protect and prevent? How many more survivors can we care for well and see them brought from the darkness into the light to find help, hope, and healing in the next seven years? It will be life changing. So I'm hopeful."

For the full podcast episode, visit Podcasts – Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (mbcb.org). For SART resources, visit [sart](http://sart.org) – Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (mbcb.org).

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