

## Talk to Children About Sexual Abuse

Children's Advocate, Diahann Gordon-Harrison, is appealing to parents to find creative and age appropriate ways of talking to their children about sexual abuse in an effort to make them more aware of the challenges that they could face.

The appeal comes against recent statistics, which show that children continue to fall victims of all categories of abuse. The Children's Advocate, who was addressing a recent parenting seminar at the Knutsford Court Hotel in New Kingston, noted that girls are particularly vulnerable and focus should be placed on equipping them with the skills to protect themselves. Of the number of cases of child abuse reported in 2012, there were 4,204 cases featuring girls against 2,890 boys. "It is clear therefore, that while the 2,000- odd numbers for the boys is nothing to sneeze at, we still have a comparatively greater problem with our girls and so I implore you to ensure that you equip your girls. I know we can't cage them up, but we need to give them tips to make them streetwise. We need to make them aware of some of the issues and the challenges that they will face," she stated. The Children's Advocate noted that despite the difference in figures, "we cannot neglect the boys." She informed that there was a 74 per cent increase in the number of buggery cases in 2012 over the previous year. While the Government has been putting measures in place to crack down on abuse, including legislation to make it mandatory for persons to report all cases of abuse; establishing agencies and institutions to investigate and protect the rights of children; and making interventions at the community level, society needs to do more to protect children. Mrs. Gordon-Harrison pointed out that there is overwhelming evidence to show that the people, who are abusing the children are persons whom they know.

"They are the people in church, they are your neighbours, they are the people in schools and they are family relatives," she stated. She noted that statistics from 2012 reveal that of the 2,000-plus cases of sexual abuse, over 1,000 took place in the private homes of the children. She said 261 fathers and stepfathers, and an equal number of mothers and stepmothers abused their children. The goals for the parenting seminar, organised by First Heritage Co-operative Credit Union in association with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), were to: educate parents/guardians about positive methods for parenting a child; create an outlet for concerned parents/guardians to share experiences and get questions answered; and highlight the connection between good parenting and nation building. The seminar was free to the public and was held under the Distinguished Patronage of Her Excellency, The Most Hon. Lady Allen. It had the endorsement of the Ministry of Education and the National Parent Teacher Association of Jamaica.