

## Israel's ultra-Orthodox community confronts child sex abuse with new book

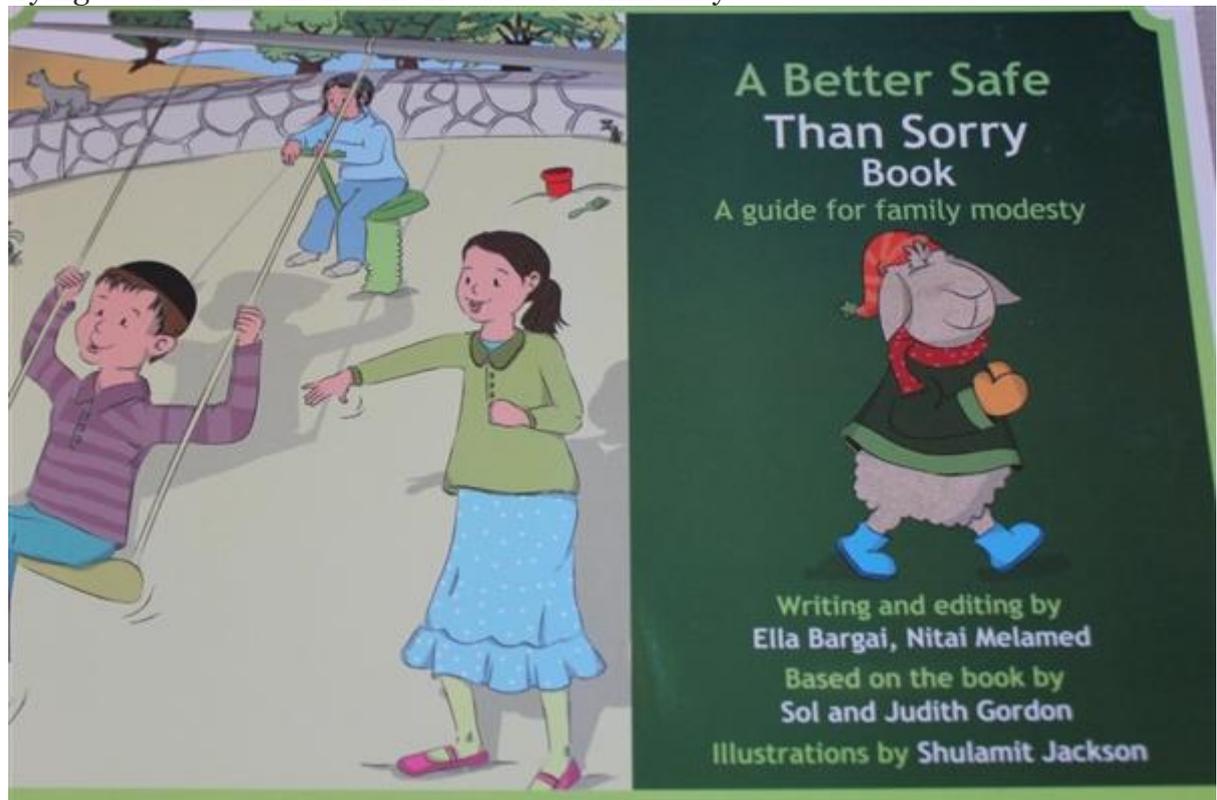
*By Paul Goldman , NBC News*

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TEL AVIV – The ultra-Orthodox community in Israel, known as Haredim, has a closed and secluded way of life. They look at the secular population with a degree of suspicion and try to manage their own affairs. To that end, rabbis try to deal with cases of violence and sexual misconduct internally – without alerting outside authorities.

That cultural mentality makes it even harder to tackle sensitive subjects like the sexual abuse of children.

Now, for the first time, a book published in Hebrew tackles the growing problem of sexual abuse among children in the ultra-religious community, trying to break the silence in the closed community.



Paul Goldman / NBC News

The cover of Ella Bargai's book that aims to educate ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews about the dangers of child sex abuse,

“Our main goal was to create a dialogue between children and their parents,” Ella Bargai, a secular Jew working at the Intercultural Center for Human Sexuality and Sexual Life near Jerusalem, told NBC News. She joined forces with Nitai Melamed, an Orthodox rabbi, to write a book called, “A Better Safe than Sorry Book.”

<http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/news/2012/09/19/13965716-israels-ultra-orthodox-community-confronts-child-sex-abuse-with-new-book?lite>

Since the Orthodox community is so closed, there are no reliable statistics on the depth of the problem in Israel. In New York's ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, the crimes – and the effort to cover them up by prominent members of the community – gained widespread media attention and public condemnation, leading to several arrests this summer.

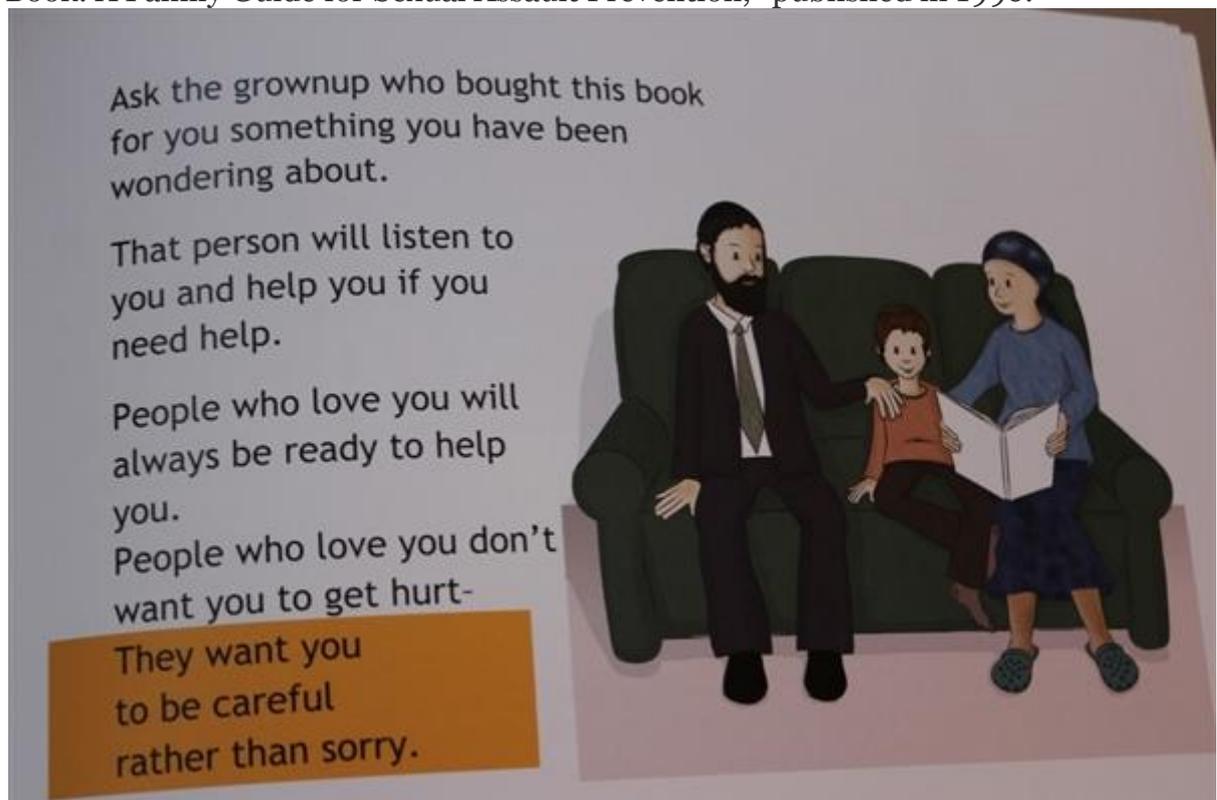
The book is unique for the Israeli Orthodox community because it encourages both religious children and their parents the importance of talking about the issue. The book's central message to children is the crucial fact that nobody has the right to touch your private body parts.

Bargai said the main obstacle religious kids have is the fact they just don't have the vocabulary needed to describe the bad things people can do to them.

For example, Orthodox children are not taught the Hebrew words for sexual organs.

"There is a huge anguish and pain trying to describe sexual abuse to a parent. With the book we try to break this taboo of not talking," Bargai said.

The book is based on American author Sol Gordon's "A Better Safe Than Sorry Book: A Family Guide for Sexual Assault Prevention," published in 1996.



Paul Goldman / NBC News

A page from the Israel book educating ultra-Orthodox children and parents about sex abuse.

The Israeli version represents a breakthrough because the authors worked closely with religious leaders who understand the importance of establishing a

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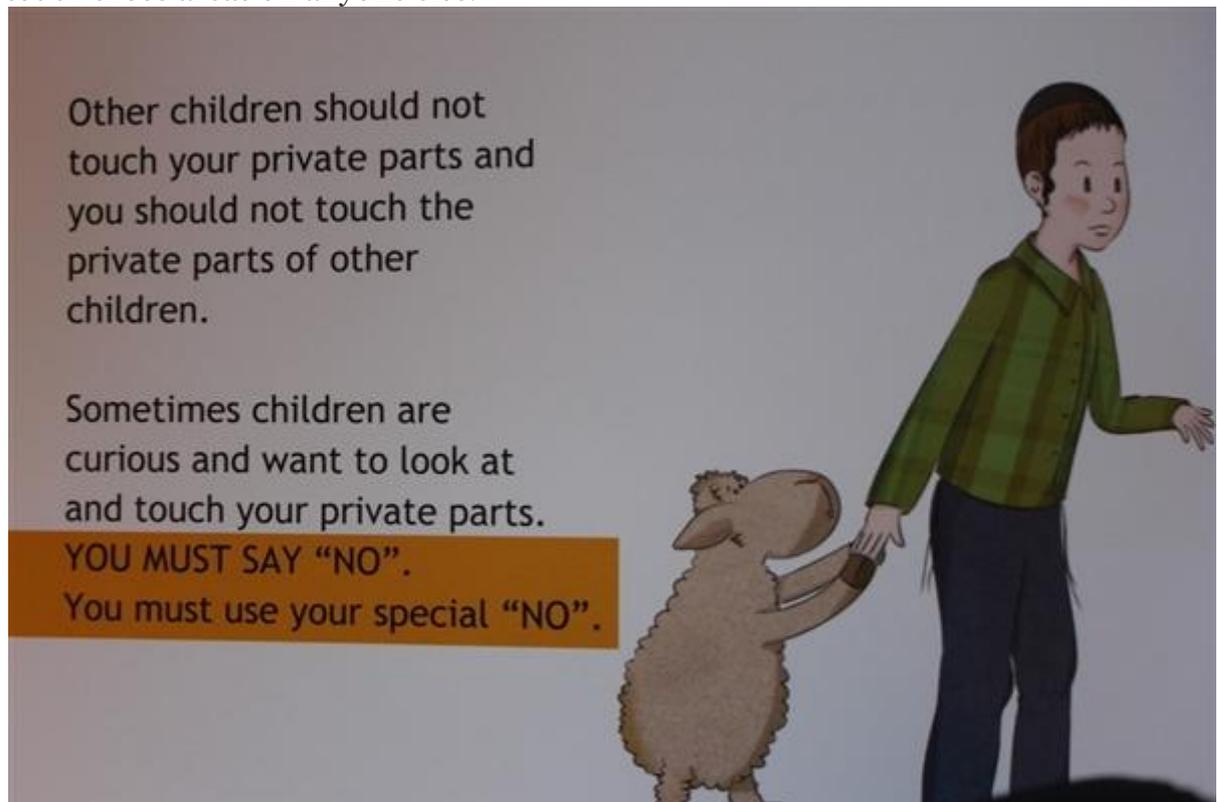
dialogue that can combat sexual abuse. It is being distributed by religious teachers to parents and their kids in Israel and they are encouraged to read it together.

Its drawings show religious characters in the modest dress they are familiar with – men have beards and sidelocks, while women have their heads covered. There is even a cuddly lamb that Orthodox children can relate to because the lamb is a kosher animal.

On one page a religious man offers candy to a girl who is warned that this kind of behavior is dangerous and that she should be cautious.

"Children are curious," said Bargai, "and the information we provide will help them to protect themselves."

In the book there is an illustration of a girl with the warning caption: "Nobody has any right to touch your body's private areas and you are not supposed to touch those areas on anyone else."



Paul Goldman / NBC News

A page from the new book in Israel aimed at educating children about the dangers of sex abuse.

So far, the book has been well-received in Israel; it sold out of its first printing soon after its publication and will be reissued soon. The book is also available in English.