

Protecting Your Children: Advice from Child Molesters

(This information was developed and written by child molesters in treatment at The Center for Behavioral Intervention in Beaverton Oregon.)

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child molestation usually begins with a sex offender gaining a child's trust and friendship. The offender then begins "testing" the child's ability to protect himself by telling sexual jokes, engaging in horseplay, back rubs, kissing or sexual games.

If the child appears comfortable or curious about this type of behavior, (and most healthy, normal children are) the offender will slowly increase the amount and type of touching to include more direct sexual touching. Child sexual abuse can include exposing, fondling, masturbation, oral sex, intercourse and pornography.

Many children do not understand that what is happening is sexual or wrong. Most offenders know that if they physically harm a child while molesting her, the child will be more likely to tell. They are also clever enough to make the child feel as if she is actually responsible for the contact. Children become trapped and are unable to tell anyone what is happening.

Research has demonstrated that most of our school-based child abuse prevention programs do not prevent children from being abused and have little impact on reporting. The reason for the lack of impact on abuse is that children are not in a good position to protect themselves from adults, especially if the adult offender is a parent or caretaker. Given the way child molesters operate, it is imperative that adults, not children, become educated about child abuse, supervise their children more closely and take action if they suspect someone of abusing a child.

Parents, schools, churches and community groups must also work together to develop prevention programs that incorporate parent training into prevention programs and encourage reporting.

The information in this article was compiled and written by several sex offenders in treatment with the Center for Behavioral Intervention (C.B.I.).

Who Are Child Molesters?

Research indicates that 25% of children are sexually abused prior to their 18th birthday. Most children are molested by someone they are related to or know very well like relatives, neighbors or family friends. One study indicated that one out of every ten men has molested a child.

Despite the high rate of child sexual abuse, only 16% of child victims are able to tell someone that they are being abused and only 3% of sex offenders are caught and prosecuted. Most offenders are able to "get away with" molesting children for years before they are reported to law enforcement.

What these facts tell us is that *all* parents, caretakers and community members must educate themselves about sexual abuse and child molesters in order to improve their ability to protect children. It is important for people to understand how “normal” child molesters look and how easily they can gain access to children, isolate them and manipulate them into thinking the abuse is “ok.”

Offenders also make children feel guilty and responsible for the abuse. These dynamics make it very hard for children to tell anyone what is happening to them. We hope this brochure will help you protect children from people who molest and abuse children.

Who is the typical child molester?

- I am probably well known and liked by you and your child.
- I can be a man or a woman, married or single.
- I can be a child, adolescent or adult.
- I can be of any race, hold any religious belief, and have any sexual preference.
- I can be a parent, stepparent, relative, family friend, teacher, clergyman, babysitter or anyone who comes in contact with children.
- I am likely to be a stable, employed, respected member of the community.
- My education and my intelligence don't prevent me from molesting your child.

I can be anybody. Parents can defeat me if they work together. Educate yourself, your family and your community.

How Child Molesters Gain Access to Your Child?

It is very easy to gain access to your child.

- I pay attention to your child and make him feel special.
- I present the appearance of being someone you and your family can trust and rely on.
- I get to know your child's likes and dislikes very well.
- I go out of my way to buy gifts or treats your child will like.
- I isolate your child by involving him in fun activities so we can be together—alone.
- If you are a single parent, I may prey on your fears about your child lacking a father figure or a stable home life.
- If my career involves working with children, I may also choose to spend my free time helping children or taking them on “special outings” by myself.
- I take advantage of your child's natural curiosity about sex by telling “dirty” jokes, showing her pornography and by playing sexual games.

- I will probably know more about what kids like than you do: (music, clothing, video games, language, etc.)
- I make comments like, “Anyone who molests a child should be shot!” or “Sexually abusing a kid is the sickest thing anyone can do.”
- If I am a parent, it is even easier for me to isolate, control and molest my own children. I can sexually abuse my children without my wife ever suspecting a thing. I gradually block the communication between my children and their mother, and make it look like I’m the “good guy.”
- I may touch your child in your presence so that she thinks you are comfortable with the way I touch her.

Why Don't Child Molesters Always Get Caught?

Remember, once I start, I will do everything possible to continue molesting your child. I am sexually turned on by kids and I enjoy being sexual with them. If I have had a lot of practice, I can become very skilled at offending. I will not stop on my own. I am very selfish and do not care if my behavior is hurting your child.

After I’ve begun molesting your child, I maintain his cooperation and silence through guilt, shame, fear and, sometimes, “love.”

- I convince your child that he is responsible for my behavior.
- I make your child think no one will believe him if he tells on me.
- I tell your child that you will be disappointed in him for what he has done “with” me.
- I warn your child that she will be the one who will be punished if she talks.
- I may threaten your child with physical violence against her, you, a pet or another loved one.
- I may have gotten the child to feel sorry for me or believe that she is the only one who understands me.
- If I am a parent or live in a home with children, my behavior may look accidental. I may “accidentally” expose myself or “accidentally” walk in on children while they are using the bathroom or changing clothes.
- If I am a father, my behavior might look “normal” to other people. I may use situations like tucking the kids in at night to touch them sexually.
- I may have told my children that “this is what all fathers do with their children” so they don’t know to tell.
- I may be so good at manipulating children that they may try to protect me because they love me.

Prevention

Don't feel that your child is safe from me! At least one out of every four children will be molested by the age of eighteen. Here are some ways to protect children from me:

- Don't expect your child to be able to protect himself from me or assume that he will be able to tell you that I am abusing him.
- Communication: listen, believe and trust what your child tells you. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.
- Education: teach your child healthy values about sexuality. If you don't teach your child... I will.
- Watch for any symptoms of sexual abuse your child might demonstrate.
- An excellent guide for teaching children about sexual abuse is *A Very Touching Book* by Jan Hindman; for teens *No is Not Enough* by Caren Adams, Jennifer Fay and Jan Loreen-Martin; for adults *By Silence Betrayed* by John Crewdson.
- Give your child specific information about where on her body she should not be touched or touch others.
- Let her know that people who touch children's private parts need help because they have a problem with touching.
- Remind your child that "secret touching" is never the child's fault. Talk to your child about the ways someone might try to "trick" him into going along with the "secret touching" or not telling you that it is happening to him.
- Make sure your child knows that you want him to tell you immediately if something should happen and that, despite what anyone else may tell him, he will not be in trouble.
- Get to know your child's friends and the homes in which your child plays.
- Be wary of older children or adults who want to spend a lot of time **alone** with your child.
- Trust your intuition: if you feel something is not right in your child's relationships, **act on it**.
- Learn about the prevention program that your school uses and discuss it with your children. Have "safety talks" with your children several times a year. Add information about the risk of encountering sexually explicit materials and adult offenders in the community **and** on the internet.
- Almost one quarter of children are exposed to "unwanted" pornography via the internet. Use an ISP that offers screening for obscenity and pornography.

Indications That a Child is Being Molested

Because each child is unique, symptoms of sexual abuse vary and can be hard to identify in some cases. Here are some things to watch for:

- Behavioral symptoms can include a change in modesty, ranging from becoming overly concerned about their bodies to engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviors.
- Physical symptoms can include genital pain, itching, discharge and bleeding.
- Children can also develop stomachaches, headaches and a variety of other physical complaints.
- Other changes can include sleep disturbances, bed wetting, unexplained fears or refusal to go certain places or be with certain people. School problems, difficulties with peers, excessive crying or depression, clinginess, aggressiveness or secretiveness are also common.
- Children who are being abused sometimes try to deal with their problems by engaging in “escape” behavior. This may involve running away, drug or alcohol use, day dreaming or becoming more isolated.
- Some children may not demonstrate any type of negative symptoms. Some offenders are able to “groom” children for abuse in a manner that makes the child feel comfortable, close to and even protective of the offender.
- Remember, if your child demonstrates any abrupt change in behavior, he may have something he needs to talk about. Repeated inquiries and supportive information may be necessary. If a child molester has begun isolating and manipulating your child, he may feel very confused about telling. The child may believe that if he tells, he will be the one in trouble or that he will lose his “friend” or parent.

Where You Can Get Help

Sexual abuse is a crime. If you believe I have molested your child or any other child, don't try to handle it yourself! I will *always* promise you that it was the first time and that I will never do it again. I will be lying and I'm good at it. Call the police! The best thing you can do for your child, and my past and potential victims, is to report me to the authorities. If I molested your child, I'll do it to someone else's child unless you stop me!