

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

By Jeffrey M. Herman¹

Child molesters are looking for ways to get access to your child today. He wants your child and he is out there, right now, looking for opportunities. He is at your kid's school, Church or Temple, the Boy Scouts, Little League, Big Brothers, and every other place that your child frequents. The child molester is patient and he is persistent. He is clever. He will keep trying until an institution accepts him and gives him access to your child. Then his work begins. He identifies his targets. A child looking for a friend or a father figure. Usually, he is working several victims at the same time. Next, he starts the grooming process. Slowly he gains your child's trust and even yours. Eventually, he betrays that trust in the most tragic way. He sexually abuses your child. He murders your child's soul.

As a child advocate representing victims of abuse and a father of four children, I have come to learn the ways of the child molester. I have seen the dark side and it is your worst nightmare. I know this sick underworld is not in some foreign place. It is in our own backyards. I have seen families destroyed and lives lost at the hands of a pedophile. Parents ask me, what can we do? This article will explain the methods of the child molester and arm parents with information and tools to protect our children.

KNOW THY ENEMY. The enemy knows your child, so you better know him. To understand the child molester, you should know how he thinks. The child molester most dangerous to your child is not the stranger wearing the overcoat in the park. More likely someone you trust, such as the soccer coach, the pastor, or "Uncle Jimmy". Law enforcement historically taught us "stranger – danger" or "don't talk to strangers". Although this may be true in some cases, most child sexual abuse is committed by people that are known and sometimes related to the victim. Parents may place so much emphasis on warning their child to be fearful of strangers, that the child assumes all non-strangers are safe and will go off with them willingly.

¹ Jeffrey M. Herman is a nationally recognized attorney who devotes 100% of his practice to representing victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. He has been featured in international media relating to the issue of childhood sexual abuse and protecting children. In addition, he serves on the Board of Directors of KidSafe Foundation, Inc. Mr. Herman may be reached by email at jherman@hermanlaw.com or on his website www.bermanlaw.com.

All pedophiles are not child molesters and all child molesters are not pedophiles. A pedophile is a person who prefers to have sex with pre-pubescent children.² All pedophiles do not sexually abuse children. Some pedophiles are content with fantasizing about sex with children and will not act out. Others, of course, do act out and are referred to as preferential child molesters. Conversely, some child molesters are not pedophiles at all. A drug crazed psychopath may have sex with anyone in the immediate vicinity (the “opportunistic” child molester). Or a religious freak may engage in sex with children as part of some bizarre religious ceremony (the “ritualistic” child molester).

The most common type of child molester and the most difficult to defend against is the preferential child molester - the pedophile who acts out on his sexual desires for children. Typically, he does not believe he is doing anything wrong. He believes he loves children and that children seduce him.³ He thinks he would never hurt your child. He only wants to love your child. His sexual drive for children is compulsive and he spends most of his waking time looking for and creating opportunities with children. If given the chance, he will sexually abuse your child.

The internet is a haven for pedophiles and has made the problem much worse. A pedophile who in the past was content to only fantasize about children because he thought he was “weird” or different, now can communicate with others of his same mindset. Communication over the internet amongst the pedophile community leads to pedophiles acting out. A pedophile will share stories about his conquests over the internet. Pedophiles not previously disposed to acting out, feel that they are not so different after all and are empowered to act out. Pedophiles will share their grooming techniques and the best places to find vulnerable children on the internet. Pedophiles may even use the internet to establish contact with your child.

SEE THE RED FLAGS.

² A person who prefers to have sex with post-pubescent children is known as a paraphile. In this article, the term pedophile shall include paraphiles.

³ In a deposition of a pedophile who was the friend of the child molester, I asked whether he (the friend) was aware the child molester traveled to Morocco and sexually abused boys. The friend responded “no”. I rephrased the question and asked whether he was aware the child molester traveled to Morocco and was seduced by boys. He responded “yes” and went on to tell me how the young boys came on to his friend which led to the child molester engaging in sex with these 10 year old boys.

Is this adult a pedophile? Of course, every priest, coach, teacher and scout leader is not a pedophile. In fact, most people who work with children are genuinely caring adults who enjoy helping children. On the other hand, some of these people are pedophiles. How do you know? In most cases, you will not know until it is too late. Parents should look for signs before that dreaded outcome becomes a reality. Pedophiles share many common traits and parents can look for these red flags. Many pedophiles are not married and do not have established romantic relationships with adults. (Unfortunately, some men will date or even marry single mothers to get access to her children. Beware.)

Is your child being groomed? Although pedophiles may have their own style of grooming, their techniques often share common characteristics. Watch out for men who give gifts to your child, spend time with your child outside of the activity, invite your child on outings (baseball games, Disney World, etc.), call your child on the telephone, correspond on the internet, say inappropriate things to your child, or in any other way do something to make your child feel special. We all know that our children are special and deserve the special attention, but when it comes from an adult who is not the child's parent, beware and be cautious.

Are you being groomed? Pedophiles often groom the parents as well as the child. The pedophile wants you to trust him and give him the benefit of the doubt. Be wary of men who give you gifts, offer to help you in your business, or otherwise make you indebted to him while at the same time getting closer to your child. The purpose of grooming the parents is so that if, and when, you question his motives with your child, you will want to look the other way or feel compelled to look the other way so as not to insult your benefactor or lose his assistance. No parent will ever intentionally sell out his child, but some will look the other way when faced with the realities of life.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS. You do know what's best for your child. Your instincts are correct. If someone makes you uncomfortable then remove your child from the situation. If an adult makes you suspicious, react before it is too late.

ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION. Too often, parents of victims tell me they were uncomfortable around the pedophile, or something made them suspicious. Too often, it is too late and the parents blame themselves. If

they only acted on their instincts, they could have saved their child. Be proactive. The worse that can happen is that you insult an adult who has only good intentions for your child. On the other hand, if you don't err on the side of caution, you may be handing your child over to a pedophile. It is an easy choice.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR CHILD WAS ABUSED? Many parents incorrectly believe that their child will tell them if they were sexually abused. This is not usually the case. Children do not generally discuss their normal sex life with their parents. Add in the fact that the partner is an adult, probably someone the parents know and trust and it becomes more unlikely that the child will report the abuse. In addition, since the sexual encounter does not take place until the child is groomed and the child "willingly" participates, the child feels that he is to blame. Feelings of guilt and shame are overwhelming. The child often feels that he did something wrong. The pedophile tells the child that he loves him and that they are not doing anything wrong. The pedophile tells your child that they must keep their relationship secret. The physical act may even feel good to the child which creates confusion in the young mind. Finally, the pedophile may make direct or implied threats against the child or his family designed to keep their relationship secret.

If your child was abused you may notice behavioral changes. These include sexual acting out, such as compulsive masturbation, sexual play, inappropriate touching of sexual organs, simulating sex with toys or other objects, and sexual comments that are age inappropriate. Other behavioral changes are sleep disturbances, anger, fear of going to certain places, low self-esteem and depression. Many victims of child sexual abuse develop addictive behaviors as teenagers. The frequency or intensity of these behaviors, as well as the combination of two or more of these behaviors, may be indicative of sexual abuse, particularly acting out sexually. If you notice such behavioral changes in your child, you should investigate further and speak to a psychological professional.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED? Do not ignore what happened to your child. Putting your head in the sand and hoping that your child will forget about the abuse is dangerous. Dealing with the problem head on will help your child cope with the abuse the rest of his life. Untreated, the affects of the abuse may surface during your child's lifetime. Get your child and yourself into

therapy with a professional skilled in the area of child sexual abuse. Help your child process what happened and everyone will benefit. Help your child become a survivor, not a victim.