



MEMORANDUM

To: Parents
From: S/HE staff
Re: Protecting against child molestation
Date: January 20, 2016

Sadly, the greatest threat to children are people who are supposed to love and care for them. Most child molesters are known to and trusted by the parents and the children.

Child molesters are not easily identified. They are often very charming and seem like wonderful people. Remember that Jerry Sandusky was one of the most loved and respected people in the state of Pennsylvania.

Child molesters “groom” both the parents and the children for abuse. Grooming the child can consist of building trust with the child, creating a climate of secrecy and isolation, and getting the child comfortable with pornography, nudity, and touching.

Parent grooming can consist of getting the parent comfortable with the predator and child having alone time, pushing boundaries with the parent, getting the parent to rely on the predator for child care or other favors, and winning parent trust. A recent case involving the Duggars illustrates the counterintuitive nature of grooming. The Duggars reported that their son Josh came to them and admitted touching his sisters inappropriately. They viewed this as a sign of integrity and a desire for help. But a professional (had one been consulted) would likely view this as Josh testing boundaries to see if how his parents would react. Given their reaction, Josh believed he had the opportunity to engage in further inappropriate acts, which he apparently did.

Any child can be molested, but the most vulnerable children are:

- Younger & developmentally disabled children, who may not even understand that what is happening is wrong;
- Loners, who are more easily isolated and groomed as they seek companionship;
- Kids with disciplinary or criminal problems, who are manipulated into thinking that no one would believe them, or “extorted” into sexual acts;
- Kids of absentee or single parents, who are more easily isolated and groomed; and
- Kids who have significant alone time with an adult or older child.



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A predator's weapons are secrecy, extortion, fear, and shame. Although a parent can do everything right and still have a child be victimized, there are some things a parent can do to reduce the odds of victimization.

- No secrets. There should be no secrets between a child and any adults, including the parents (except a gift from one parent to the other). An environment of "don't tell dad/mom" where the child is rewarded for not telling is an environment where sexual predation can thrive. This is the #1 rule.
- Tell the child "if anyone says they are 'going to hurt you or any member of the family (including pets) if you don't keep a secret', do not believe them. That is a lie. They cannot hurt us. Be sure and tell us about it."
- Make clear that your love is unconditional. No matter what you do, we will always love you. If someone is saying they will tell us about something you did unless you keep a secret from us, that is something you need to tell us about. We promise we will still love you.
- Inform the child that if anyone ever touches you in your private area or under your clothes (other than a doctor when we are in the room), you need to tell us about it no matter what. We will not be mad at you for telling us. Your pediatrician can help with this conversation. Use a pediatrician's visit to force yourself to have this conversation.
- Listen to the child and ask questions. If the child does not want to go to Uncle Willy's house (or daycare or somewhere else) alone again, ask why, but avoid leading questions. This conversation is much easier if you have laid the groundwork (e.g., "Why don't you want to go?" "I just don't." "What is the reason you don't want to go?" "I don't like it." "Why don't you like it?" "I just don't." "I feel like you are keeping a secret from me. Remember we agreed no secrets?" "Yes." "So what is the reason?").
- Pay attention to your child's behavior. Abuse is often accompanied by a behavioral shift, such as withdrawal, anger, acting out, bed wetting, abnormal sex play, nightmares, regression, stress, or anxiety.
- If you suspect abuse or if something just does not seem right, it is important NOT to freak out or interrogate the child Inquisition-style, but instead to get the child, as quickly as possible, to a licensed therapist who has experience with abused children. This is for two reasons: (1) you don't want to create a false allegation; and (2) if the allegation is truthful, you don't want to pollute it through leading questions or hysterical reactions, which a good defense attorney will use to discredit your child. Click [here](#) for a discussion on false allegations of child abuse. Click [here](#) for the reasons to involve a trained professional in these determinations.
- If you are suspicious of abuse, get the child a medical exam, which can help determine if abuse took place.