

How to Protect Kids from Child Molesters:

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Let my little light shine

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Introduction

The FBI predicts that one in five girls and one in ten boys will be sexually molested in their youth. Most of the time the molester will be somebody quite well known to the child's mother, and the youngster will say nothing until perhaps the far away moment in adulthood, when she says, *How could you not have known?*

But it doesn't have to be this way. There is nothing unavoidable about child victimization. The current epidemic of sexual crimes against children results from passivity and defeatism and a belief that modern society cannot avoid sexual attacks on kids.

In any society, traffic patterns reflect a consensus on what is an acceptable accident rate, and people drive more or less carefully based on how much automotive damage they believe is reasonable. In the same way, crime rates are a reflection of how much felonious damage people are willing to tolerate. Law enforcement is a last resort that tries to rebalance the forces of crime and social stability. Because crimes against children are largely invisible, they have been tolerated at relatively high rates, with damage to kids that may not become apparent until adulthood.

It's time that this changed, and change is not hard to come by in a nation that has proven itself capable of spectacular feats. But it will take an act of will on the part of every adult who cares about kids, and a willingness to change attitudes and learn new social behaviors, because the current ones favor sexual predators.

Where to start? We need to know more about parents and children, and why they act as they do. It isn't necessary to arrest and convict every sex offender to keep kids safe. Instead, we need to create a climate that is not conducive to child victimization. We need to rearrange the setting and change the subtle balances in the culture.

We can do this very quickly, in a matter of months, if we understand the reorganization that needs to happen. We must begin by understanding children's lives and how they have changed,

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because right now children deal with the problem of child abuse on their own, largely without help from adults.

In part 1 we begin with a discussion of the vast cultural changes that have resulted from the epidemic of sexual crimes against children, and then we look at the impact on parents of chronic fear and inadequacy in protecting kids. In part 2, we explore how adults unwittingly enable sexual criminals, and how loving parents are exploited. In part 3 we explore the behavioral changes adults need to make, and in part 4, we develop an approach to child safety in our major institutions and in our everyday behavior.

Part 1
The Problem

**CHAPTER ONE:
EMPTY STREETS**

Not so long ago in America on any Saturday or summer afternoon, the streets were teeming with kids and cars had to steer around clumps of youngsters at play. Children played made-up games, stickball or potsy, jump rope or cat's cradle; and sometimes when there was nothing to do, there was kicking the can or getting into mischief. Kids often ended up outside because if they were in the house too long, they'd get noisy and scrappy, and mothers would send them out and tell them they couldn't come back in until dinnertime.

But if you drive through residential neighborhoods these days, it's rare to see kids outside playing, and if you do, there will probably be parents close by. Sometimes you see youngsters on bicycles, but not often. If you went looking for the kids, you'd probably find them at home, watching television or going on the computer or playing video games. For young children, there is no wandering around and trying to find somebody to play with. Instead, parents arrange play dates, where children relate to each other with assigned toys while parents stand by.

The kids who might have been playing in the streets in another era now are more likely to be in organized, supervised play activity like sports, soccer, basketball, music lessons or dance lessons, to which parents accompany them.

Kids have become less free and less safe in recent decades. Children's play has become a pastime that is orchestrated by adults, so that kids no longer generate their own entertainment and work out the associated social complexities. Instead, adult ideas and adult organization structure their play, and then children are forced into the patterns the adults have chosen. Attention deficit disorder was unknown back in the days when kids were deciding what it was that needed to be paid attention to.

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The idea that a child could plan and arrange his or her own activities and take off from the home to pursue them, is unsettling to parents, who fear that a child may disappear or become the target of a child molester. In the same vein, children's own transportation, which included bicycles, tricycles, skates, skateboards, box carts and any other form of movement kids could create, now are restricted so that kids can't use them to explore their environs. Kids are limited to home or local play areas unless parents drive them to other places. Transportation abruptly becomes unrestricted when a youngster and his friends turn sixteen and get driver's licenses, because then they can roam freely and widely.

The transition to freedom is also complicated for families living in large cities, because by fifth grade, or age ten or eleven, kids begin to explore their surroundings. Parents must deal with children who need to travel using trains, buses, subways or taxicabs. Specialized urban schools chosen by parents to enhance their youngsters' education are rarely in the same neighborhood where kids live, and it is unwieldy for a mom to travel on public transportation with a youngster. Suddenly, a child who has been protected and supervised needs to manage the bus or the subway alone.

There are many ways that parents try to encircle their kids and protect them from harm, but there are no guarantees that they will succeed. It was after all, in a large city that six-year-old Etan Patz disappeared in 1979 from his SoHo street while making the two-block trip to the bus stop for the first time. His mother had watched him as he walked down the first block, and then she confidently went back upstairs to her apartment, never to see her son again.

Sometimes the issues surrounding youthful freedom are even more complicated, as in the case of the youngster who wants to use the elevator alone in his apartment building. Although the building is his home, a youngster who is fifty stories away in a locked metal box is beyond a parent's help.

There are also the optional, school-related events such as the drama production or athletic event that requires off-hour

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transportation when the buses and trains will not be filled with school kids. These may seem like simple, small permissions for an adult to grant, but they can be accompanied by the cold sweat of parental fear.

In suburban and rural neighborhoods, walking to a friend's house or playing in the woods can set off a shudder of adult terror combined with the thought that this may be the last time a child is seen alive. It's no wonder that parents find excuses to drive kids places and discourage their youthful wanderings.

Kids love independence and their adventures come either with parental help and guidance or in secret. If children are closely protected until adolescence, their teen behavior can become much too daring for a parent's comfort. In past times, adults could be reassured by the memory of their own childhood mischief and its harmless results. But federal funding requirements created in the 1970s produced data that ended the illusion of child safety in the United States.

The passage of the Mondale Act in 1974 required states to report suspected physical and sexual abuse of children in order for them to receive federal funds. As a result, there was an estimated 2000 percent increase in reports of sexual abuse, which seemed to indicate a huge, invisible threat to the safety of children. The resulting increase in parental fear as these statistics became public knowledge produced little societal change, but it became common for parents to caution kids to stay away from strangers and suspicious people. Parental concern and vigilance were reflected in these warnings to kids, which became the primary form of protection against abduction and abuse.

This approach to child protection has its drawbacks. In cautioning their youngsters, parents can inadvertently convey the message that a child can never make safe enough decisions to satisfy a parent. The pivotal issue here is likely to be parental anxiety and not child adequacy; for no matter how careful a child may be, a parent never stops worrying. Children who feel they can't depend on their own judgment look to other children or adults to decide what is safe or dangerous. In a cruel irony, kids who grow up depending solely on their parents for safety may

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become easy targets for sexual predators who seduce by encouraging a child's dependency.

Public awareness that there are a large number of registered sex offenders in the United States, and many more who are unregistered or undetected, creates a siege mentality and forces children to spend much of their free time at home. The news stories of children grabbed off the street, sexually assaulted, and then murdered create a constant underlying sense of horror that one's own child could very easily be the subject of the next headline.

As a result of increased parental vigilance, children become more passive, more easily directed by adults and less able to control their attention. They also become more isolated from other kids, which interferes with the development of social skills.

The Way Kids Live

Most parents carefully consider neighborhood safety in choosing a home, and many urban neighborhoods can seem too perilous for kids. Families with children are leaving American cities. Places like Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Miami now have a different character because of the declining population of youngsters. This is not just a melancholic observation, for the quality of life changes when children are not a factor in urban planning. Schools, parks, and recreational activities all become somehow less necessary.

There are many reasons why parents see less promise in city life for their families, and financial, occupational, and educational issues are all significant, but fear of criminals is a major parental concern. A home in a good school district with parks and playgrounds may seem like a safe haven but a youngster will still probably spend most of his time indoors. Parents are well aware that indoor time with electronic devices is not wholesome as a steady diet, but it offers a truce between a child's need for adventure and a parent's fears for his safety.

What is a child's indoor life like? The siege of childhood by sexual predators causes changes in family life. If a family has

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great financial resources, the home may be enlarged into a family compound with children's activities contained in a fenced backyard park. This may extend to the family vehicle, which becomes a rolling residence, a self-contained child maintenance facility that reduces a youngster's need to interact with the outside world.

Adults become very central in a child's life under these circumstances because they plan, direct, and arrange the schedule. Parents often are deprived of their own free time as a result of their heavy involvement with kids, and so they can become psychologically enmeshed in their children's development, which limits the growth of a child's separate personality.

Mom and child spend a great deal of time together, and mom becomes like a camp counselor, always present and directing activities so that it can be hard to determine where mom stops and a child begins. If mom and child "love" going to the French restaurant for example, it may not be clear whose needs are being served by the outing. The need to separate in adolescence may lead a young teenager to throw off a mother's involvement with too much energy when separate personalities have not been supported early on. Adolescent defiance can represent a youngster's fight to control his life, and a struggle with a teen's own self doubt.

By taking charge of all safety decisions, parents can limit the growth of a youngster's judgment because decision-making always involves risk taking. Trial and error, along with guidance and teaching, can steadily expand a youngster's capability, but this may not happen if a parent is too frightened of the dangers in a youngster's surroundings.

Excessive involvement in a child's life can have consequences for the adults as well. If fear stops a parent from hiring babysitters, adult social skills may atrophy and social agility with adults can diminish. This may affect more than social functioning, because a marriage may become unbalanced if both parents don't share the same anxiety about children's safety.

For children, the social skills that develop from free-ranging play are stunted when parents are excessively involved in monitoring their lives. Electronic play opportunities may become a

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substitute; but these don't supply human feedback, and they may interfere with the types of learning skills required for school achievement.

Reading problems or reading aversion, attentional difficulties and memory disorders can result from heavy computer or television involvement. It doesn't much matter what is presented, because the act of sitting passively in front of a computer or television monitor is not the profile of an active and successful learner. Inactivity leads to growth failure in learning mechanisms as children become conditioned to passive responses. Success in school is more difficult to achieve when kids have been "trained" to anticipate entertainment and simplicity. Adults sometimes interpret this behavior to mean that kids are intellectually limited, and the proliferation of recognized handicapping conditions serves this view.

Parental complaints at open school night rarely include demands that children be pushed to learn; instead, teachers are often asked to lighten the homework load. Perhaps this is an indication that parents are overburdened with the demands of excessive time spent safeguarding their children. It may also result from children who have come to see learning as a receptive process, rather than as the result of their own energetic exploratory behavior.

As kids become more limited in their ability to tackle life, more parental time is required to fill the gap between their needs and their effort. But adults have responsibilities outside of parenting, and these require attention as well. In addition, most mothers and fathers work outside the home, which means that all of the home chores get squeezed into less time.

Parents are often ambivalent about leaving kids with babysitters or in child care services. In earlier times when family members lived nearby it was easier to leave a child with grandparents, but living patterns have changed the availability of relatives. Using babysitters raises worries about child safety and leads parents to curtail their activities away from their children.

Increasingly, American parents bring their kids with them to establishments intended for adults. Vacations and nights out

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often include youngsters, and mom and dad then have little time alone with each other. There is no longer a clear-cut delineation between child and adult entertainment because children's play facilities are often made parent friendly, and adult activities develop "with children" extensions. Parents bring the kids to the wine-tasting reception at the vineyard, to the estate-planning seminar, and to their friends' dinner parties.

How does this affect the structure of adult lives? It limits parental time for health, recreation, and social needs when children are small because there is often no respite for parents. It also increases the stress of the adolescent transition to adulthood because then parents lack the separate adult life that balances a departing youngster. It also dilutes the intellectual complexity of adult entertainment because the kids won't understand if a play or musical presentation is too complicated.

A second major change that results from the "house arrest" of kids is an increase in children's weight, with the associated problem of diabetes. Although factors such as the availability of high-calorie, high-fat fast food have a great impact on nutritional habits, the restriction on children's physical activity outside the home is a major obstacle to maintaining healthy weight.

A child's "on-premises" restriction, whether by parental edict or by childish habits and fears, makes the refrigerator everlastingly available so that snacking is continuous, often as an accompaniment to watching TV. Both television and food offset the loneliness that goes with being home, often alone. But being in the house with nobody to talk to makes the opportunities on the Internet all the more enticing. It is so easy to sign on, locate a chat room, and find companionship.

The organizations that formerly drew kids out of the home for healthy activities, including churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions, may seem less secure because some religious leaders have committed sexual crimes. For parents who want to offer their children spiritual education and guidance through organized religious activities, this stirs concern. Although in the past, houses of worship were seen as strongholds that bolstered parental values, reports of sexual crimes raise doubts about the

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trustworthiness of religious authorities. If predators may be lurking among the clergy or congregants, how can parents believe that churches and temples are safe places for kids?

Summer camps and other recreational organizations have suffered less from fears of child abuse, perhaps because the incidence of reported crimes against children seems lower in these settings. However, liability still exists there, and the fear of such reports is ever present. Schools, in contrast, have fared better, perhaps because educational activities are highly structured and there is less opportunity for solitary involvement with children. It is in the extracurricular and off-hours activities that the risk increases, as well as when extra adults are brought into scheduled programs as helpers.

Kids as Crime Targets

For a child growing up in the twenty-first century, cultural messages continually reinforce the premise that children are fragile and need to stay close to home to be safe. Potentially helpless victims who must look to adults to protect them, kids are also told that adults cannot guarantee their safety, and sometimes parents seem to doubt that they have the moral authority to do so. Youngsters hear about sexual crimes from the media and over the Internet, so they are aware that there are real dangers. Does it inhibit their sense of adventure or their wish to explore and master the world?

Children usually believe their parents, at least until adolescence; and when parents tell them there are real threats out there, kids take it seriously. But dealing with criminals is an area where kids have little experience, and adults' suggestions often aren't useful, so a youngster has to come up with his own ideas. The standard *Don't talk to strangers, Don't get into a car*, doesn't begin to address the complexity of sexual predator behavior. When the man in a wheelchair in the church restroom asks a boy to help him unzip his pants, it's not likely that a boy will identify this as a criminal overture.

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If a child has missed the message that he is a crime target, then the names of laws in the news will certainly serve as a reminder. The Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children Act, named after a boy who disappeared after renting a video for his babysitting evening; or the Polly Klaus Act, named for an abducted and murdered twelve year old; or Megan's Law, passed to protect children from neighborhood sex offenders like the one that abducted, molested, and murdered seven-year-old Megan Kanka, all underscore kids' vulnerability.

Crime has become a national obsession as well as a form of entertainment, as evidenced by the phenomenal success of *Law and Order* and all of its spin-offs. The popularity of one of its derivatives, *Law & Order, Special Victims Unit*, may be the result of its satisfying if not always happy endings to crimes against the vulnerable, including kids. This is in marked contrast to the many warnings and fatalistic alerts to parents about the danger of child molesters.

As parents hunker down, trying to keep kids safe, it is tempting to dismiss their feelings as overreaction, but that is not the case. The danger is real and the consequences lifelong, both of crime and of the vigilance it provokes. Parental fears that their kids are in danger are supported by crime statistics.

Sexual crimes are primarily targeted against the young in the United States, with girls six times as likely to be victims as boys. According to the Justice Department, 67 percent of sexual attacks are against youngsters under eighteen. Even worse, more than a third of rape victims are *little* kids, with 34 percent of rape victims younger than twelve.

These are not occasional, unusual crimes; instead, they are the result of criminal careers that involve many victims. Those who prey on children as targets often have a history of many crimes. In one survey, sexual offenders who targeted girls had an average of 52 victims each, while men who assaulted boys had an average of 150 victims. The constant concern for safety that causes parents to restrict their kids' lives is well founded, but it has not led to success in keeping kids safe.

Parental Confusion

American parents are among the most active in the world in their tireless efforts to find new ways to raise healthy, happy human beings. An entire parenting *industry* has emerged in the United States, and it is devoted to enhancing child development. Over the decades, the focus of concern and the level of adequacy that parents feel have changed.

Parental worries of the past may seem silly by today's standards. In the last part of the 1800s, correct posture was a particular focus of childrearing, so much so that adolescents were photographed in the nude to determine whether parents were giving them enough guidance on this subject. During World War II, the effects of germs and feeding schedules became a focus of parental concern. Guests were cautioned not to pick up the baby, and meals were delivered by the clock.

Concerns about youngsters' hardiness have been replaced by worries about their vulnerability to crime. Children's literature can be an index of the perceived sturdiness of kids: although the girl detective Nancy Drew was originally fearless, brave and daring, in more recent versions of the mystery series, she has become a helpless and largely decorative female.

The perceived decline of children's sturdiness has led to a greater need for parental protection. This has occurred across most areas of children's development, and has often led to good results. The rise of driver education programs, for example, has produced skilled and responsible young drivers. In the area of sexual victimization, this has not worked as well.

In part, this is because parents have erroneous or incomplete information about criminal risk to kids and so they can offer little practical help. Warnings about taking candy from strangers rarely equip children for the more complex approaches of sexual predators. It would be hard to imagine a parent telling her elementary school-age child:

- *Grandpa is too eager to get you naked, so he can't baby-sit for you.*

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- *Your stepbrother likes pornography, so I don't want him taking pictures of you.*
- *That priest who loves to take the boys out for fast food is off limits to you.*

Instead of dealing with risks to children from familiar people, parents focus on the stranger, the person unknown to child or parent. Media headlines describing child abduction and murder fuel the belief that the major threat to kids is from strangers. In trying to deal with the psychological impact of these reports, parents are quickly defeated by the enormity of the problem. They search for an understanding of these horrible crimes, but often they are left with only the ghastly details and the permanent imprint of news stories.

Information about sexual crimes against children is traumatizing, and most of the emergency services have planned responses for those exposed to this kind of information. But parents have no such support, and crime description details eat away at their sense of well-being and competence. There are no reliable ways for parents to insure their kids' safety in the current climate other than watching over them at all times.

In the drama of the abducted child, what is obscured is the fact that a crime like this is extremely rare—about one in three million children are victimized in this way. When parents concentrate on abduction as the major threat to kids, they overlook the real danger of their child being molested by someone they know.

We have sophisticated law enforcement responses in place to deal with child abduction or child rape, but we have no such procedures for crimes within the family and acquaintance network. What's worse, children usually don't report these crimes. In that rare case where a child does disclose improper behavior by grandpa or the stepbrother, a parent has no way of evaluating the information or planning an adequate response. This may explain the appeal of television shows like *The Jerry Springer Show* or *The Ricki Lake Show* where problems like this are discussed, because

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the programs serve as a source of information that allows parents to think about how to deal with this eventuality.

Without a good response plan, parents resort to other ways of dealing with indications of child sexual exploitation. Sometimes a parent may refuse to see or hear sign that a youngster is being molested. The youngster who doesn't like his coach, hates religious instruction, always has to go back for extra music lessons or who tells a parent that an adult is weird may be disclosing sexual exploitation in the hope that he can relieve himself of guilt and avoid further exposure. But parents who are not in the habit of listening to a child will miss the message if it causes them too much confusion.

When kids do disclose, it's rarely in a manner that parents would expect, and if they spoke straightforwardly, parents would probably be at a loss for a response:

- *Mom, the guy you married wants to show me porno flicks when you're out.*
- *Why does my cousin keep talking about how now I'm wearing a bra?*
- *Mom, your brother is always trying to rub spots off my clothes on my rear or chest.*

What is a parent's best response to these comments? Calling the police? Getting a divorce? Accusing the person of child molesting? Parents, particularly mothers, risk an embarrassing rift in a relationship if they act, and so often they advise the child to "stay away from" the questionable person. Fear of wrongly accusing someone of a dastardly act and the defensive reactions it will stir are powerful deterrents in families where these kinds of problems surface. A parent may feel sharply conflicted in her loyalties and protective of both the child and the other person. Avoidance and denial become the seemingly best option so that a parent takes no action after a child mentions sexual overtures by an adult.

Sometimes there is a complete refusal to accept a child's report of sexual abuse, and a parent says, *You're making that up.*

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Denial as a defense mechanism serves to protect the psyche against those threats for which there is no protection, and here it serves its purpose: the parental psyche is protected, but the child is not. This response recycles sexual predators who can learn what causes a child to tell and then change their tactics. The predator, who has escaped exposure one more time, can now refine his lures. Instead of showing porno flicks to a verbally skilled child, he may show cartoon porno flicks to a much younger child who will not be able to identify them as such to an adult, describing them only as “*Beauty and the Beast*” or “*Cinderella*.”

The brother who rubs spots off clothes may switch to targeting children outside the family, finding them in public places rather than in relatives’ homes. The cousin who comments on underwear may become vocal in criticizing the “repressive thinking” of a girl who isn’t comfortable with his comments, diverting attention from his behavior.

If the consequences of adult confusion are problematic to parents, the costs to children are staggering. Sexual crimes against kids involve massive victimization because for each predator, there are many children who are hurt. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates for example, that 453 convicted sexual predators assaulted more than 67,000 children in their careers. If the consequences for children as a group are terrible, the effects on individual victims are horrific. Molested kids are three times as likely to become substance abusers, become teen parents, and suffer depression and suicidal risk as they mature.

The consequences for a young spirit, a child growing and learning about the world, are far worse. For an individual youngster, abuse brings the awareness that one has been exploited, shamed, and conned for the sinister purposes of another and the anguish that one may have been a cooperative victim. The self-righteousness of the preferential pedophile leads him to tell a child, *This is good for you; this is right*, but a child senses something quite different. And when he has been used up and discarded, or when he has passed the age the molester prefers, then there is a profound loss of the sense of being special.

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In their fear of major crimes, sometimes parents try to appease the gods of child safety by sacrificing on smaller points. The subconscious reasoning is, *Perhaps if I accept that my child may be fondled, which doesn't really hurt him, I'll be spared the horror of an abduction and murder. Or perhaps if I put the community welfare above that of my own family, my children will find favor in the eyes of fate and remain unharmed by the dark forces that linger at the edge of their lives.* Obviously, this thinking is not voiced aloud, but it serves as a kind of magic incantation to protect against the unthinkable.

The wider culture doesn't offer parents much more to safeguard their kids. In fact, the attempts at protection are ghastly, useless, or dangerous. Grimmiest of all is the proliferation of child identification kits, which are actually child *corpse* identification kits that are meant to identify the remains of children who have been abducted and murdered. Surely we can do better than to offer this to our young families as a way to protect their offspring.

The approach of expecting and teaching children to report sexual crimes has had little success because children generally don't report. In those cases where they do, it is usually far later, when they have become adults. Nonetheless, we keep repeating to children that they should tell parents if anybody "bothers" them.

The result is that there is a shift in responsibility for child protection to the child because after all, if a youngster doesn't tell, what can you do? We expect younger and younger kids to report sex crimes when most of them have trouble relating anything factual. We give delinquents juvenile offender status under age sixteen because we recognize that they cannot be fully responsible for their actions, and their logic, reasoning and memory are not good; yet we expect children far younger to serve as witnesses to sexual crimes by reporting them. One reason that kids don't tell is because they can't, because they are cognitively far too undeveloped to manage such a complex task as identifying and reporting a legal infraction.

Sexual predators force children to relate to them on a peer level, but children are immature beings who can't remain integrated in trying to handle something as complex as human

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sexuality. The legal process requires the same kind of pseudo-adult performance when it expects kids to serve as accurate witnesses. The fact that children can occasionally do so is useful, but it cannot be the cornerstone for exposure of criminal activity.

When children are victims of sexual crimes, they frequently cannot identify them as such because sexual predators disguise the nature of their behavior. We have programs to prepare children for experiences like hospitalization, so that they can identify and label their feelings and understand what is required of them, but we have no such programs to prepare children to deal with crime victimization, although child abuse prevention programs hold kids responsible for their own safety.

Often, parents ease their fears by assuming that kids are taught to be safe in school by child safety programs. But these programs raise serious questions about what works, and the continuing rates of sexual offenses against children suggest that they are far from protective.

But let's imagine a very different world, one in which children are truly safe. They walk to school by themselves, they take buses and subways, and they play outside and investigate the neighborhoods and cities where they live. They are a vibrant part of religious institutions where they explore their place and purpose in the universe, and they have lots of adventures at camp and other recreational programs. In school, they begin to close the academic gap with the rest of the world so that their learning and achievement soar. They are brave and smart; they understand the risks in their lives, and parents are their best allies in staying safe. Crime statistics drop steadily, and sexual offenses against children become a relic of the dark past.

The kids sleep soundly, and it is the child molesters and pedophiles who have the nightmares. The criminals are forever looking over their shoulders in fear of who may be after them. And there are no more laws named for murdered children.

**CHAPTER TWO:
CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE: AMERICAN PARENTS AT A
LOSS**

*How Parents Lost Their Sense of Control Over Their Children's
Safety*

Perhaps it began with the Vietnam War, the baby boomers' great watershed of angst and self-doubt; the belief that individuals have little control over what happens to their children, that a parent's ability to protect kids from historic forces or a government's choices is limited. Through the hippie and drug years, and then into the technological age, the perception has been that what parents can do for their kids does not necessarily protect their future.

During the same period, the news/entertainment industry expanded with the development of new technologies that made live reporting possible. The thriller novel came to dominate light reading and the crime story began to lead broadcast news. Just as Nashville understands that there are some song themes that sell – railroads, dead children and broken hearts, so the news media has come to understand that some stories are riveting.

The search for a missing child, with the police team interviews and volunteer searchers' reactions, shots of distraught parents, and schoolteachers making their sad observations all draw public interest. Although a hundred children may die in car accidents on the same day that a child is reported missing, this is the story that scores the highest ratings.

The visual impact of these stories and the scripts that accompany them are melancholic and profound: *I always thought I'd see her again; There's not a day that I don't search the crowds of children at the school for him.* As in any powerful drama, these presentations are impressive because of their ability to stir a responsive chord in the viewers' hearts. *That could be me; that could be my child,* thinks a mother who is watching.

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Human beings develop an internal database that they use to make predictions about the likelihood of events. If two friends have a cold, it feels like the risk of catching a cold has increased. But three is the magic number for personal predictions, so if three friends have a cold, illness seems certain.

Informal predictive mechanisms are part of the human mental calculator, and they help us to establish order in our lives. If two members of the tribe were grabbed by the tiger outside the cave, ancient humans probably decided (nonverbally) that it would be unwise to venture out at night. And if it happened to three, then staying in at night became tribal law.

As reports of child abductions and murders are publicized, the inner database absorbs the information and generates predictions about kids' safety. After a decade of such reports, it may seem as though there is no security for children. Parental fears are heightened by crime statistics that indicate high levels of child abuse, without any visual evidence that these events are occurring.

Blurring the Line to Hide the Crime

Most adult women automatically recognize a man's sexual advances because females learn the difference between friendly overtures and sexual approaches by late adolescence. In the same way, sexual seduction of children would be easily recognizable if it were not masked by perpetrators.

Child molesters disguise their predations by blurring the lines and confusing the issues in child safety. Nonviolent sexual predators provoke uncertainty in others to protect themselves from exposure, explaining away a sexual approach as a misinterpreted friendly gesture, for example.

Criminal behavior that targets children often involves a large number of offenses:

After a report from Cybertipline in October 2003, Colorado police found 80,000 images of child pornography and child erotica on the computer of a suspect who had a prior list of crimes against children in Texas and Florida. He will spend a minimum of ten years in prison without parole.

From missingkids.com

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When a parent doubts her judgment, she is less likely to respond assertively to protect her child. A mother's sense of personal inadequacy is the strongest weapon that a sexual predator can hope for, because it immobilizes her in the face of danger. The child molester explains away his behavior as a misunderstanding, and an unsure parent fails to intervene.

Child abuse is a socially awkward issue because the topic is a distasteful one. Most adults prefer not to hear details of these crimes because sexual activity with children is revolting to visualize. People outside law enforcement have little conception of what these crimes involve, and so they shy away from this information, preferring to believe that sexual abuse involves minor social transgressions, like a hug that is too enthusiastic. In fact, most healthy, socialized adults cannot imagine the crimes that constitute child victimization, and so it is children who are left to deal with these realities by themselves.

Conceptualizing sexual crimes as small social improprieties further obscures their nature and the criminal behavior associated with them. The reassuring fantasy that "off-color" behaviors with children have no consequences for kids disguises the real effects of sexual crimes. Poor school performance or dropping out, drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, premature pregnancy, runaways, prostitution, depression and suicide are all more likely for kids who have been sexual exploited. The current culture is so inured to the social issue of child abuse, that there is more alarm about the effects of computer viruses than the effects of these crimes. In fact sexual crimes against children have become an accepted part of life, and academic publications like *Child Abuse Review* and *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* are an indication that nobody expects this problem to disappear soon.

In an effort to camouflage their crimes, sexual predators, particularly those with a public voice, often argue that they love children, and that the world cannot accept the innocence and purity of their motives. The objective of these arguments is to distract others from the significant and lasting harm done to children.

These protestations are sometimes used to lobby for legislative change. The legislative goal of those who represent

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pedophiles is to define sexual abuse as a low-level offense, a nuisance crime; relatively insignificant and basically harmless behavior that should be ignored because it represents no real threat to the broader society. More in the nature of a morals infraction, like public urination, it would be dismissed as having little impact.

Sexual abuse of children creates far more than a nuisance in the body politic, however, for it increases developmental risks to victims and fuels the development of increasingly deviant predator behavior. Sexual exploitation of children may begin with small crimes, but a career offender rarely restrains himself from progressive criminal activity.

Another strategy of the predator community is to define child abuse as a free speech issue and to argue that all people should be free to express themselves sexually without repression. This ignores children's vulnerability, which results from their immaturity and small stature, and attempts to eliminate legal protection of a child's weakness. Age of consent laws reflect the diminished capacity of youth to be responsible before the law and are aimed at protecting the powerless from sexual exploitation. Although pedophiles argue that children as young as four are capable of making informed decisions about their sexual behavior, this is meant to confuse and disarm those who would protect kids.

This philosophy carries over to child pornography, which is very different from adult pornography. Child pornography is graphic evidence of a crime in progress, because children are too young to consent to sexual acts and so sexual activity involving children is always illegal and always an assault. The same argument, that children and young people should be free to express themselves artistically and sexually, has been made to challenge smut laws.

Another distracting tactic is to argue that predators are victims, too. It is often reported in explaining sexual deviance, that those who sexually exploit children have been victimized themselves as youngsters. The belief that predators are as much victims as their victims, and that their crimes should not be judged harshly because their behavior is somehow programmed and beyond their control, is one that protects predators from the full

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legal consequences of their acts. To hold pedophiles responsible for crimes against children, in this view, indicates a profound lack of compassion and insight, and is socially irresponsible.

In fact, the claim that most child molesters have been sexually abused as youngsters is not supported by research. Neither is the claim that sexual acts are beyond their control. The behavioral choices of predators are influenced by circumstances, and they restrain themselves when the risks of exposure are high.

Another common argument is that effective control of child molesters would destroy love and affection for children by bringing under suspicion the normal affectionate behaviors of loving adults.

Implicit in this is the perception that the line between loving care of children and sexual victimization is extremely difficult to draw with accuracy.

But in fact, legislatures have been exquisitely clear in defining sexual exploitation of children, and most adults are intuitively aware when sexual behavior violates social rules, in the same way that an adult woman recognizes a man's sexual advances.

Sidebar

Indications of Sexual Exploitation of Kids

- **Inappropriate gifts**
- **Kissing on the lips**
- **Body pressing and long hugs**
- **Constant tickling, touching, grabbing, and wrestling**
- **Accidental genital contact more than once**
- **Making sexual comments or suggestions**
- **Describing one's sexual activities or feelings to a child**

Parents Under Pressure

If the glossy supermarket magazines are an indication of American cultural values, then American mothers are held responsible for keeping families together, husbands happy and children well-raised. The women's liberation movement, rather than freeing women, seems to have added yet another layer to their responsibilities.

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What promotes high parental self-esteem in mothers? A sense of social value and significance to others, and a feeling of personal competence seem to do so. But this is harder to come by since raising children became a scientific undertaking. The emergence of parenting as a science and the proliferation of associated experts have made parents distrust their own skills, and the lack of grandparents in the home has removed help and instruction for new parents.

Economic pressure on today's crop of mothers is very strong as well. Women have to work outside the home in order for families to have a chance at the American dream, illustrated by images like those in advertisements for lawn fertilizer, indoor carpeting and real estate. The American dream is the white two-story house in the suburbs with lovely lawns, children playing, a pretty wife and successful husband, and an endlessly promising future for the kids.

This is a very difficult goal to achieve without the financial resources of two adult incomes. Most young couples cannot afford a home mortgage unless both are employed, and so women have to work outside the home. These jobs are seldom inspiring and uplifting. Rather, they are jobs that fit with the kids' school schedule. A second income helps with the mortgage and allows for all the extras that kids seem to need: music or dance lessons, sports equipment and the other enriching items and activities. It also pays for the second car to drive the children to all their events.

But the wolf is always at the door, and the fear of failure is very real. The mortgage that becomes unaffordable and the private school tuition that goes up again threaten parental adequacy while other families seem to do so well, so easily. For married mothers, there is also the nagging fear that should they find themselves unmarried, they had better not be without the means to support their families because the struggle for adequate child support is an ongoing problem in the culture.

The need to earn more demands more work hours, and this translates to less family time. Already overworked parents end up feeling guilty because there is so little "quality time" with children. All of these pressures get multiplied several times over for both

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parents when there is a divorce. For some, the only solution is to exit a child's life in defeat, which may be the explanation for deadbeat dads.

The pressure on single parents—who are most often mothers—is enormous. All of the chores required to function as a parent, breadwinner, and homemaker fall upon a single adult, and the demands on that adult's time make satisfaction in any one task virtually impossible.

As hard as parents work, the American dream is often a mirage, with the goal of financial security endlessly receding into the future. This is best illustrated by the rising cost of private colleges, which continue to go higher and unbelievably higher. As the technological revolution progresses, parents are likely to feel increasingly uncertain about their ability to cover the costs of raising children.

The requirements for good parenting have expanded so that parents must now provide endless activities for their kids, as well as transportation to these events. Programmed activities take children away from the home and neighborhood where parents may have more control and information about the people who come in contact with their offspring. They also force parents to depend on other adults and the circle of strangers that come with them.

Pressure on parents has become an industry, with every news show introducing yet another problem or danger that parents need to know about and take proper steps to prevent. The media actively solicit stories with the format *horrible problem/why it's there/what you must do*. The implication is that failure to act on even one of these dire warnings is a clear sign of parental incompetence and probably parental malpractice.

This is also a very clear message that today's parents are not adequate, and unless they are coached carefully, they will fail to prepare the next generation for life. Whenever a child of any age fails at something, the question is *Where are the parents?*—suggesting that the behavioral transgression results from a parent's failure.

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It is easy for mothers and fathers to feel impotent because society requires more of them than anyone can realistically provide, and the newspapers are full of stories of parental failure as reflected in children's misdeeds or problems. A parent may feel so inept at building a child's future that he steps aside to let other adults, perceived as more able, fill the imagined gap.

Sometimes it is a pedophile who tries to replace a parent in the central position in a child's life, which becomes more possible as a parent doubts his ability to adequately raise kids. Sexual exploitation of children is a physical crime, but the psychological drive behind it is the narcissistic need for dominance. When a child molester pressures a youngster to keep abuse secret, this breaks the primary bond between a child and his parents, and it is the pedophile who becomes central in the child's psyche. Child molesters are driven to fill an inner emptiness by gaining power over others, and to do so with children requires separating them from parents.

For a parent, another adult's seeming success with her child may look like a clear demonstration of her inadequacy. *If only I hadn't gone to work or gotten divorced, then my son would talk to me instead of idolizing his camp counselor.*

In the past, mothers and fathers have relied on religious and recreational organizations to bolster their efforts to raise healthy adults. But the institutions that parents have automatically trusted now seem less reliable. Crimes against kids have been perpetrated by clergy, teachers, school administrators, scout leaders, and family members. Without reliable allies, parents are isolated and helpless in distinguishing who is a threat to children and who is not. If policemen, pediatricians, and babysitters can molest kids, then who can be trusted?

Childrearing is a national obsession and a major industry in the United States. Derided by psychology and Freud, accused by the schools and courts when their children misbehave, parents often operate in an oppressive context. The pressures are not only on mothers; fathers often feel required to work long hours, act like good marital partners, work around the house, and coach the Little

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League team. Most men can't accomplish all this, and many withdraw, sometimes through divorce, sometimes in other ways.

In our society, men are marginalized as fathers, and the message to them is that it is more important for them to provide economically than to be engaged with their kids. In the empty space that is created, it is easy for opportunistic con men to fill the gap.

When those adults appear who have time to talk to kids, who seem genuinely interested in them, and who offer reassurance and support to a weary parent, it is easy to gain access to the family circle. It is these seemingly gentle and kindly outsiders who help to shore up the American dream as well as parental self-esteem. But sometimes the sheep is actually a wolf in disguise, perhaps as the loving stepfather who helps a woman rebuild a family and create a happy home, or the devoted teacher who singles out a child to help him get ahead.

Have Kids Lost Faith in Their Parents' Ability to Protect Them?

All current child protection approaches have as their central tenet the premise that children can be taught to recognize and report sexual crimes, and that this will stop these crimes. Research and criminal data indicate that this is not the case, for children rarely disclose sexual victimization. Perhaps kids sense that adults will not welcome information that is too shocking or disgusting to communicate; information that appears to dirty the child more than the offender.

The expectation seems to be that children will make delicate or oblique references to sexual behaviors, and that adults can then move tactfully and subtly to intervene. But children are not delicate or socially skilled. They cannot identify sexual behavior and then tactfully allude to it in the coded language adults use, like "Father Tom makes me uncomfortable because he sometimes behaves inappropriately." Even when they are aware of sexual behavior, kids are not likely to be able to report it as such. It is absurd to expect a child to report, *Mom, Father Tom makes me touch him under his robe.*

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Most elementary school kids would find it difficult to name specific sexual acts and to distinguish them as such, and they are usually not familiar with the terms *sodomy*, *masturbation*, *fondling* and *intercourse*. Kids have a horror of discussing sexual matters or their private parts with parents, and the more graphic the sex, the less likely it is that a child will have the courage to describe it. Children, in effect, try to protect their parents' innocence. Experienced sexual predators are aware that the more deviant the sex, the less likely kids are to disclose it.

Youngsters are aware by the time they begin school that adults don't talk socially about sex or voice complaints about sexual behavior. School-aged kids can sense the social awkwardness of a situation that Miss Manners doesn't cover: What should you do about the neighbor who loves to wrestle with kids and rub against them in front of parents?

The entire child protection system is based on the assumption that kids can be taught to report sexual overtures and exploitation, but research repeatedly demonstrates that this is the exception rather than the rule. Because kids don't report sexual crimes, parents can't protect them; but the adults are also coincidentally spared the embarrassment and self-doubt of dealing with predatory behavior among friends and relatives.

Kids are generally quick to complain about injustices, and all parents have heard the cry, *It's not fair!* or reports of a sibling's bad behavior. *He hit me! He hit me first!* are the refrains that dull the delight of raising children; and a day spent with complaining kids can feel like a real test of patience. So what happens when there is real injustice and real physical consequences for kids, as in sexual assault? Why is it that children don't begin yelling and complaining and insist that parents take action?

Some kids don't tell and hope that a parent won't ask. The perfunctory *Tell me if anyone touches you* can never cover the range of predatory activities, such as the coach who shows a youngster pictures of naked athletes, the relative who wants a child to watch animals having sex, or the older teen who has drinking and disrobing parties. Kids may be embarrassed and pained by the

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sexual abuse, but talking about it with a parent can seem worse in a child's view, as it seems to prolong and enlarge the incident.

Perhaps children think they can differentiate a stranger's dangerous threats from the softer overtures of familiar adults, and they assume that parents want to hear only about the stranger's threats. Perhaps they recognize that news of sexual advances by a family member or friend would not be welcomed by a parent. Perhaps parents appear to have a limited commitment to protecting kids from sexually predatory adults and will tolerate some damage to kids rather than accept that a trusted adult has targeted a child. Kids are part of this culture, too. How much faith can a child have in a parent who buys a DNA identification kit meant to identify his corpse in the event that he is abducted or murdered? How would a parent feel if he found his offspring buying such a kit for *him*?

Kids Don't Tell Their Parents About Sexual Crimes

Research consistently indicates that approximately two-thirds of children don't disclose to others when they have been sexually molested. Even when children are directly questioned about such events, the majority deny that it happened, although there may be clear physical evidence that this is so. When there are medical indications of sexual abuse, such as pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease, only about half of child victims admit to abuse.

For those children who report sexual crimes, the average delay between the beginning of the abuse and the disclosure is 15 years, well into adulthood and far past the time the information could be used to help a youngster and protect other children.

David Finkelhor, Director of the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center has tirelessly explored the nature and impact of a wide variety of offenses against juveniles, including conventional crimes (e.g. homicide, rape, robbery), child abuse, peer violence, family abductions and the exposure of children to domestic and

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community violence. His findings regarding children's disclosure of sexual abuse are startling.

When children do report sexual victimization, less than one-third of these cases are reported to the authorities. This means that one third of victims report to adults, and of those, one third are reported to law enforcement, so that the estimate is that one ninth of these crimes are investigated. For many victims, and almost half of all males, the abuse is never disclosed to anyone, except in the occasional research study that poses a direct question.

Disclosure makes a difference in how sexual crime affects children. When a child tells what happens soon after an incident occurs, the risk of later emotional difficulties lessens, but keeping the secret increases the probability of long-term damage. When victims do decide to tell what has happened to them, the average delay between the beginning of the abuse and the disclosure is 15 years, well into adulthood and far past the time the information could be used to help a youngster and protect other children from the perpetrator. This may explain how serial child molester Dean Arthur Schwartzmiller was able to molest thousands of children in the course of his criminal career.

Sometimes kids do disclose abuse to adults, but the message is not recognized as such, as when a youngster says he doesn't like an adult and offers no reason. Children may dislike an adult for noncriminal reasons—because he smells bad or has an odd gaze or reminds them of a bad guy they saw on television—but sometimes the resistance is based on fear and repulsion resulting from sexual exploitation.

The haranguing of children to get them to report abuse serves little purpose, because kids are poor witnesses to events and process information differently than adults do. Often youngsters share information in a free-associative manner, gradually and in pieces over time. Young children usually can't recognize sexual crime as such, particularly if an offender frames it in a misleading manner (*Isn't this game fun*).

Youngsters have trouble giving verbal updates to others on any subject, which results from immature memory and cognitive disorganization. They often fail to share routine information, like

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the teacher's request that everybody bring in the plastic container or permission slip on Monday. Information that is important to adults is generally not important to kids, particularly where subtle meanings are attached.

There are very different levels of memory function that relate to intellectual level. A young or developmentally disabled child may be able to recognize something that he or she can't find words to describe. Reactions to the question, *What did you and Uncle Bob do?* may be very different to answers to *Did Uncle Bob touch the parts of you under your bathing suit?*

Most important, children don't like to talk about sexual matters or private body parts, and they are usually embarrassed when adults wish to do so, whether they be loving parents or sexual criminals. Kids recognize that this is touchy ground from the absence of discussions about sexual matters in public and from parents who shush them when they giggle about bathroom words. It is instinctively clear to kids that telling Mom, *Uncle Bill wants me to touch his penis* won't get the same reaction as, *Hey, Mom, I got an A in Math*. They also learn that telling tales or telling on others is frowned upon, and tattling on an adult friend or family member may not meet with a positive response.

The current advice to children who have been abused is to *Keep telling until somebody believes you*. This borders on the absurd because most kids find it hard enough to make one report and will not find it easier to disclose again. When adults reject a child's report of sexual crime, the child is probably at risk if he continues to repeat the accusation. It would be comforting to believe that reporting results in greater protection for the child, but this is not necessarily true; and when a parent refuses to believe or accept the report, the child has created a very awkward situation for himself.

As we discuss in detail later, it would work much better if we taught kids second-degree reporting, encouraging kids to save other children from criminal activity. The twelve-year-old who hears stories about a camp counselor or music teacher in love with a preteen could alert parents of the need for more supervision of and intervention on the behalf of children. This makes safety a

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community issue, rather than an individual one, and allows kids to be altruistic in their concern for other youngsters. People are more apt to do difficult deeds if they believe that others will benefit from them, and children are more likely to disclose if a younger child or a disabled child is in danger.

What Determines Whether Children Disclose?

Age is a major influence on whether kids tell about sexual crime. Before age five, most children don't have the language or the cognitive development to transmit subjective information accurately. This makes very small children safe targets for child molesters because of the reduced risk of exposure. The high rates of assault on preschoolers reflect this fact.

At the other end of childhood, adolescents are unlikely to disclose information of any type to adults, particularly information that casts them in an unfavorable light. The drive for independence and self-reliance can lead teenagers to adventures that are beyond their capabilities and produce guilt and humiliation when things go awry. This may explain the Internet adventures that end in sexual assault because a teenager believes that she can "handle things." When adolescents do get in over their heads, they may not tell their parents, but they often do tell a friend or a sibling.

For an adolescent, sexual victimization may seem like falling in love because the elements of seduction and obsession are present in both. The words and the behaviors look like classic infatuation, even though a youngster is thirteen and her lover is fifty, but the experience may suddenly elevate a girl to adult status in her own eyes. Warnings about child molesters may have been heard and heeded, but the adult man who gives a girl gifts, takes her to fancy places, and gives her money is not likely to be categorized with the dangerous stranger on the playground.

Teenagers, with their growing social sophistication, can grasp the consequences of disclosing sexual exploitation. Adolescents who are in conflict with parents may fear that they will not be believed or that they will be blamed for the incident. —I

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told you not to dress like that!—or they may fear the results if the predator is a stepfather or mom's boyfriend.

Gender has an influence on disclosure, and boys are more reluctant than girls to report sexual victimization. Race or ethnicity is also significant, and Afro-American children are more likely to receive a mother's support than are Hispanic children on disclosure. Contrary to popular belief, when kids do disclose sexual abuse, they seldom recant their disclosure.

If a perpetrator spends time developing a relationship with a teenager, gaining her confidence and encouraging her affection, she may be reluctant to divulge information about it. Adolescents look for relationships outside the family as a way to develop a social network for themselves. First attachments are often experimental as kids develop crushes on people who are not peers, such as teachers or rock stars, all of whom are safely out of reach.

These attachments serve as a way to practice affection and imagined intimacy without having to deal with the complexities of adult relating. In cases of sexual exploitation, however, the youngster is suddenly confronted with adult issues in a relationship loaded with complexities. This is also an illegal and socially outlawed relationship, with sexual practices beyond a child's capacity to integrate. In addition, there are real risks in these relationships. Adult men fathered two-thirds of babies born to adolescent girls in one survey.

It is difficult for adolescents to report these liaisons as sexual crimes. The Patty Hearst phenomenon of the hostage-converted-to-ally may underlie some of these relationships, because youngsters may feel guilt and a sense of betrayal at reporting a molester who is a friend or an admired adult. Sexual predators may tell a youngster how much he is loved and insist, *I would never do anything to hurt you*; this said as an adult criminal destroys part of a youngster's childhood.

A molester may genuinely believe his own words because he usually is the most credible audience to his own propaganda, and the child may be convinced by the adult's apparent sincerity. It is always adults who define reality for children, so that exploitation is difficult to recognize independently.

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The self-righteousness and narcissism of a pedophile are further confusing to a youngster because this may be the first adult who is known intimately, whose thoughts and feelings are forthrightly shared. A child becomes little more than an audience to this type of intimacy because he cannot participate on a peer level, which is part of the attraction of children to the pedophile.

Within the growing intellect of a youngster, experiences of victimization are processed and absorbed. It is confusing to a child to try to understand how something that may initially be thrilling becomes shameful, demeaning, confusing, and guilt ridden when he has heard that love is supposed to make you feel good. To a child in a relationship with an adult, the older person's size, intellect, and personality control the interpretation of events.

Beliefs about causation also affect a youngster's inclination to disclose because kids often feel responsible for sexual victimization. This may be why very young children are more likely to spontaneously share this type of information, because they probably see it as a random event rather than as something they set in motion.

Often sexual predators give victims toys, money, outings, or other inducements to keep them compliant. Where bribery doesn't work, fear is sometimes used to persuade a child not to tell. As the level of physical threat increases, however, the likelihood of disclosure increases also, perhaps because a child feels less guilt about his participation if it has been forced.

A child's natural shyness about sexual matters is a powerful tool in the hands of a sex offender. Children don't like to admit to anything sexual about themselves. When five- and seven-year-old girls were asked in one study whether a doctor touched their genitals as a necessary part of a physical exam, many of them denied this had occurred.

The behavior of the girls in the study is illuminating, because they denied that something real had occurred, probably because they believed it was a bad thing, even though it was part of a routine medical exam and they had no responsibility for it. Children may avoid admitting to anything that sounds like misbehavior.

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If three-year-olds are told that a behavior is naughty, like their parents kissing them in the bathtub, they become hesitant to admit that such behavior has happened. Apparently bad behavior doesn't have the same causal lines when it involves adults and children, so that where adults may see a perpetrator-victim relationship, children may see this as two people participating in bad behavior. If this is the case, then kids may respond to good touch/bad touch training by assuming that some touch is bad and not admitting to it when it occurs.

In a similar vein, when a sex offender frames abuse as play or religious activity or education, it is very difficult for kids to form an independent assessment of what is actually happening. This is well illustrated in those porno flicks used to introduce children to sexual activity, which include standard fairy tales done with graphic and obvious sexual plots, for example, Goldilocks having sex with the three bears.

Causing confusion is a strategy of sex offenders, and when accused, a perpetrator can muddy the waters in various ways. If arrested, as a last resort, a predator may try to explain his sexual acts as the result of a psychological problem or alcohol, or mistaking a child for an adult in the night. When sexual abuse is identified as a criminal issue, this traps the perpetrator in the law enforcement process with clear consequences.

Where the child molester is a parent, there are many factors that make disclosure unlikely. Children are taught to obey and respect their parents, who are assumed to be protective and morally justified in their actions. Not until adolescence does the myth of parental infallibility begin to come apart, and for elementary school-aged kids, adults are to be trusted and not questioned. To acknowledge that a parent may be wrong or evil and then to publicly accuse him requires character strength that doesn't develop early in life. It also requires the intellectual capacity to form complex categories, such as *parent* and *criminal* and to see that these two can overlap.

All of these factors are important to the sexual predator, for the choice of a crime target is seldom random. Offenders have a vested interest in preventing disclosure, and so they choose their

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victims and their circumstances accordingly. To sexually exploit a very small child who has no words, or a “wild” teenager with little credibility minimizes the risk to a criminal.

False Accusations

In the face of a child’s disclosure of sex abuse, a powerful source of parental ambivalence is doubt about whether what is reported is true. If a report is substantiated by other information, such as a diagnosis of a child’s sexually transmitted disease, then the issue is clearer. The child who says that a stepbrother came into her room at night and rubbed against her while she slept presents a different challenge.

Youngsters don’t like to tell about misdeeds, particularly if they could be implicated in them. The concepts of causation and responsibility are complex ones for the law and far more complicated for young children. If a youngster is connected to an event, particularly a bad event, his natural narcissism may lead him to believe himself the cause. Seeing another as the locus of control and oneself as irrelevant is not a construct that children easily grasp. For adolescents, fantasies and daydreams about an adult may seem to have caused inappropriate sexual advances.

When a child reports sexual abuse, particularly where there is an ongoing relationship with the abuser, it can feel like confessing to a crime, and a small child may be confused enough to believe that the police will come to arrest *him* for the abuse. Often a parent’s first questions, *Why didn’t you tell me? How could you let this go on?* can reinforce a child’s self-blame. In the shortsighted judgment of youth, a youngster may believe that he has little to gain by reporting sexual exploitation, and that he may suffer should he do so.

If the predator is an authority figure, a child may have realistic doubt that he will be believed. Parents may not accept that a beloved teacher, a wonderful school principal, or a great pediatrician could be a sexual predator who targets kids. For a child to report this takes a level of courage that most youngsters don’t have.

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In the realm of sexual offenses, children are far more likely to fail to report abuse rather than to fabricate behavior that never happened. Although children may be fooled into agreeing that imaginary events occurred, research finds that they are far more likely to do this with positive or neutral events than with negative ones. A young child may agree that she plays with her brother, and that she plays nicely with her brother, but not that she was mean to him, if all of these events are fictional. False reports of sexual events require a level of knowledge about sexual acts that most kids don't have.

What is the likelihood that a young child will fabricate sexual exploitation and accuse an adult wrongly in order to escape some unrelated punishment or to gain special favors? This is highly unlikely, for it requires a level of intellectual sophistication uncommon in children. It would also demand behavioral organization and response consistency not seen in kids. Perpetrating a fraud is far too complex for most adults, let alone children.

Kids have much stronger motivation to deny sexual victimization, particularly if the abuser is a beloved family member. There may be fear (encouraged by the offender) that the abuser will go to jail, have a heart attack, commit suicide, or suffer other dire consequences; and a child may feel, and be told he is, directly responsible for what happens to the offender.

Accusing a parent of wrongdoing is psychologically difficult in childhood, and when a youngster is very dependent, there is a powerful need to see a caretaker in a positive light. To accuse a parent of behaving malevolently or illegally sets up a conflict inside a child that is hard to tolerate. Kids are more likely to deny that abuse has happened rather than deny that a parent is good.

False accusations can and do occur, albeit with extreme rarity and so infrequently that they have little effect. They are not to be confused with unproven assertions or a "not guilty" verdict or pleading to lesser charges, for none of these is proof of a false accusation. We will argue in later chapters that child protection cannot hinge on fine legal distinctions but must focus on creating a

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climate where sex crimes are unlikely. To safeguard children, parents need to consider all sorts of information from a child's surroundings rather than depending on a youngster's disclosure and its substantiation or lack thereof.

Parental Ambivalence

It is not only children who may resist disclosure, but parents as well because they may fear the consequences and the obligation to act entailed by reports of illegal acts. A mother may be afraid, for example, that she will be held responsible for the crimes against her child, and that the child may be removed through a custodial or social services action.

When cases of child exploitation come to the attention of authorities, concern for a child's safety may take precedence over a mother's needs. In some cases, a mother overwhelmed with guilt may fear that her child will be taken from her or that she may have to prove that she was not aware of the abuse.

When the offender is a family member, the situation becomes even more complicated for the child. If a mother's new husband or boyfriend is the perpetrator, the child's place in the family changes. In a youngster's view, this becomes a love triangle, and it may explain why it is easier for a child to report to teachers or others than to tell a mother that her partner is unfaithful to her.

A mother may refuse to accept a child's disclosure of sexual abuse by her partner. This can be the result of shock, but it may also indicate a highly conflicted parent-child relationship. When kids tell a mother about abuse by a family member, one study found that a quarter of parents rejected the charge, and another third gave very limited or ambivalent support.

What happens where there is irrefutable evidence of sexual crimes? Do parents believe a child? Not necessarily, as indicated by research on a group of twenty-eight girls, with an average age of seven, who tested positive for a sexually transmitted disease. When their mothers were first informed of the STDs, they had varied reactions; some were helpful and some were resistant to the

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obvious implication that sexual exploitation had occurred. To put this plainly, when some mothers of seven-year-old girls, first- and second-graders, were told that their daughters had a sexually transmitted disease, they refused to accept that the girls had been molested, even when all other plausible explanations had been ruled out.

In those instances where mothers were supportive, 63 percent of the girls then described the acts that had happened, while the remaining 37 percent denied sexual activity. When a parent refused to believe that her child had been abused, only 17 percent of the children disclosed in detail. Other researchers have found that children are much more likely to report abuse when a mother is supportive and accepting. A child may be affected by

how close the offender seems to be to either parent. If dad's best buddy molests a child, a girl may believe that her father would not believe her accusation.

The most important factor determining whether or not a mother acts

protectively is whether the abuser is her sexual partner, which reduces the likelihood that she will believe her child. Other factors also play a part, including the age of the mother at the child's birth (with older mothers more accepting). In addition, a mother's awareness of the abuse before the child discloses affects how she responds.

On hearing a child's accusation, it may seem to a parent that the choice is to protect her child or to protect the integrity of the family. The way that the family operates also has an affect on

Many a parent who takes a child's abuse report seriously has found herself alone, roundly criticized by a community that idolizes an abuser or by a family that is outraged by her seeming attack on all family members. She is likely to hear:

How can you attack somebody so good?

Children love to make up tales

He's just trying to get attention.

You're making a big deal out of nothing.

You're just saying that to hurt him in the divorce.

You must have an evil mind to imagine such things.

At this rate, anybody could be accused of abuse.

A parent who finds herself in this position is not there by accident. A capable, career child molester has usually thought about how to arrange circumstances so he will be protected if discovered.

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whether a mother can respond protectively to a child's disclosure. In families where there are inflexible gender roles in a patriarchal structure, it may be difficult for a mother to react in a way that challenges fixed roles. Where there is a history of family violence, there is additional complexity.

But the biggest factor is likely to be the mother's relationship with the perpetrator, and if he is her partner and she has no negative feelings toward him, then she is much less likely to accept a child's claim of molestation. This may result from a wish to protect the union, a strong sense of trust in the other partner, or suspicion about a child's motivation. A career sexual predator can recognize and exploit this contingency and persuade a mother to accept his view over a child's.

This may explain why sexual exploitation is reported during a marital separation: with the mother's rising negative feelings toward a partner, it then becomes safe for a child to disclose and to hope for a supportive maternal reaction. If a youngster who has been a sexual target perceives her mother moving away from the predator, it may seem safer to tell about the abuse. Telling may also be a way to prevent visitation alone with a predator parent.

Are children "set up" to make claims of sexual abuse in a contentious divorce, where there are large financial issues at stake or personal animosities in play? This is theoretically possible but difficult to implement in practice. It would require a level of behavioral complexity that is beyond the skills of most children. Regardless of the claims made, the same legal standards of proof apply in these situations along with the risk of slander, libel, and defamation. It is at least as risky for the perpetrator of such a fraud as it is for the target.

Far more likely is the possibility of a child telling about sexual victimization during a period of family turmoil, when a mother who has strong negative feelings about her partner is more likely to be sympathetic to a child. Because a mother's relationship with the offender is ending in a separation or divorce, a child may feel safer.

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When a youngster says that there has been sexual activity with an adult, most parents are at a loss about how to respond. Adults rarely have a plan for dealing with sexual exploitation within family relationships because it is incomprehensible that a family member could harm a child and betray the family's trust. The child protection process is an unfamiliar one to most adults, and reporting the abuse to law enforcement can appear to make things worse. For those parents who do report abuse, the child protection process is difficult to navigate and only sometimes does it bring real satisfaction. As with any bureaucracy, there can be long waits, a lot of paperwork, and a sense that nobody cares about what is happening.

The legal process is a difficult one for parents to navigate, but for the child molester, it is often familiar territory. An experienced perpetrator is likely to be skilled at refuting claims, disqualifying the accuser, muddying the waters, and rallying his supporters. If he has previously been indicted or incarcerated, he knows what to say and do to stay out of prison.

When parents hear a child tell of sexual activity, they will probably listen to the disclosure with some probing, perhaps talk to the adult involved, and then keep the child away from that person. It is far less common for a parent to call in police for an investigation when a family member is involved because this generally causes additional turmoil. Men and women have very different perceptions of rape and sexual abuse, which may further polarize family members.

With sexual abuse outside the family, the situation is also complicated. Parents may fear that a public accusation will lead to a lawsuit or community censure if the abuser is a public figure. In some situations, children may warn other kids that a public figure is a molester long before they tell adults.

These types of circumstances are disabling to the natural protective inclinations of parents. By neutralizing mothers and fathers in this manner, a child molester replaces the parent as the central person in a child's life. This is a predatory emotional relationship because the pedophile offers nothing that the child can

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use in his growing years. He exploits the child until he is too old to fit the pedophile's fantasy and then discards him.

The difficulty parents have in accepting the potential for sexual exploitation by friends and family members causes them to doubt themselves. The idea that a family is united in its love for children, that all are trustworthy, mature and of high character, is a seductive fantasy. But the wish can blind parents to the real danger to children that can come from familiar people. If parents cannot set aside these wishes to critically examine the risks to a child, then is it as though the parent didn't exist. When children are left to deal with child molesters alone, because a parent can't see or accept their risk, they are isolated victims with no way to reach out for help.

Adults hold onto their cherished illusions, and so children face a criminal underworld that is horrible in the graphic and cruel nature of its sexual exploitation—and they must face it alone. For a substantial proportion of children, this is their first introduction to sexuality.

**CHAPTER THREE:
AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS UNDER ATTACK**

What happens to a culture when major institutions are perceived as dangerous to kids? If there is continuing evidence of sexual crimes against children in American educational, religious and recreational organizations, this could become the public perception and it would change American society. It would be likely to affect parental decisions as well, with some parents becoming more involved in organizations and others withdrawing their children entirely.

If the high level of sexual crimes against kids persists, parents with available time would probably accompany their kids to organizational outings and perhaps volunteer as well in these places, serving as parent aides who would help to make organizations function. Those without free time, including single parents, those working two jobs, or those dealing with illness, unemployment or other social burdens would have fewer options. For parents without the time or money to help out kids' organizations, youngsters might simply be left to fend for themselves outside the home.

Can the first set of parents be expected to fill in for the second set? If there are a small number of children without extra parental help, other parents might be able to pitch in, although this exposes children to unfamiliar adults. In those communities where most parents aren't available, organizations which offer services to kids would probably function poorly or not at all. Where youngsters participate without any parents in attendance, the structure and administrative organization would be forced to carry the full responsibility for child protection.

This situation creates an inviting picture for sexual predators: here are kids who are essentially unsupervised or at least not supervised closely, and parents who are off site and unlikely to be aware of the details of their kids' activities. The high school play advisor who drives a girl home from rehearsals has an open

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field to persuade her that sexual activity is the same thing as falling in love.

What happens as these incidents come to light includes more than the consequences for individual youngsters and their families. When a Boy Scout leader is arrested for molesting cub scouts, the community is likely to be devastated by the report. Shock, disbelief, outrage and cynicism are among the responses. But when the Boy Scouts of America next solicit support from the community, in the form of either financial contributions or volunteers, the response may be cooler because the organization's good name has been tarnished.

An organization whose program experiences sexual crime loses public trust and support. Parents who were once the backbone of these organizations may transfer their energy to other, seemingly safer children's activities, or they may provide their own activities. Instead of a Cub Scout troop, mothers may make their homes available for neighborhood play groups.

This represents a loss on several levels. An organization that has spent decades developing and refining its programs usually offers enormous opportunity to children and their families. Kids from families that have neither the time nor the resources to create alternative activities suffer a complete loss of organized programs.

If an incident occurs in a church youth group, the result may well be a diminished interest in encouraging kids to join. This means that kids who have limited parental involvement in their lives are cut off from another source of adult guidance and help. The stature of children's service organizations will be continuously diminished by high rates of child sexual victimization.

These are the immediate consequences of sexual predation on children's institutions, but the long-term consequences are far more grave. According to the U.S. Conference of Bishops, the American Catholic Church has paid out over one billion dollars in damages and legal fees arising from sexual crimes against children. In Boston alone, the archdiocese settled claims against it for \$85,000,000. This is not likely to end immediately because there is usually a fifteen-year lag in the reporting of child sexual crime, and

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any recent or ongoing crimes have yet to come to light. If an institution is continually drained of its financial resources, the likely results include the elimination of programs and a loss of paid staff with a resulting increased dependence on volunteer help. This destabilizes the administrative structure of a group, because volunteers cannot be held to the same standards as paid employees.

The institutions that offer services to children do so in many forms. Public and private schools have tightly structured programs taught by trained, licensed and often tenured faculty. Religious institutions offer educational, childcare and recreational programs with far less planning and structure than schools, and they are run primarily by volunteers. Recreational programs, both civic and commercial, often operate on a seasonal basis with frequently changing personnel.

Public and Private Schools

Public schools have usually mounted a more active response than have other organizations to criminal threats to children, and consequently they have experienced proportionally fewer reports of sexual crimes. Because of state laws that mandate incident reporting and that direct administrative response, sexual victimization is likely to be identified and reported more rapidly in schools. This reduces the number of victims of any one predator and invokes legal consequences that allay the community's anger. The prompt response also protects schools from charges of systemic irresponsibility and limits the exposé-like atmosphere of incidents because the victims and perpetrator are likely to voice their positions immediately, and there is limited continuing media coverage.

Public schools are not completely safe from sexual crimes; any place where there are children draws predators, although public schools have been more successful in changing their climate to make it a less attractive venue for sexual crime. Staff training and open evaluation of risk in school policy-making add more protection for kids. Most school districts have procedures in place so that when a janitor is arrested for downloading child

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pornography, the matter is turned over to the police, the janitor is placed on leave and all relevant materials become part of the case. Quick response reduces public confusion and outrage, which minimizes the effects of the incident.

Community notification laws, which require or permit communication regarding repeat sex offenders, have been incorporated into many school district policies. These policies typically direct school administrators to immediately notify parents if there is a charge of sexual abuse against a school employee.

In contrast, reports of sexual abuse at day care centers have sometimes been handled in a disorganized manner in the past. When stories of crimes against children surfaced, police investigations were often blocked by confusion and bias, witnesses were handled poorly and some cases had to be dismissed. This is unfortunate on several levels because children were not adequately protected in these circumstances, the guilty were not prosecuted, the innocent were not cleared and the childcare facility was likely to have been damaged permanently.

It is difficult to assess the impact of crime on American education, and it may be more illustrative to consider the general effectiveness of American education in preparing kids for adult life. American children often rank below other nations in their knowledge of math and science. Could we raise our expectations of American kids if they lived in a safe environment?

When kids are crime victims, it is usually not during the school day. In all areas, students are safer at school than they are away from school or on the way to school. When sexual abuse happens as part of the school structure, it often results from connections made in school but away from the classroom and the building where school is in session.

For preschool children, the situation is different, and there are higher rates of sexual abuse. Surveys indicate that 5.5 of every 10,000 kids in day care are reported sexually abused. The perpetrators were most often teachers or owners, and a quarter of those were family members of the staff.

Religious Institutions

Albert Einstein said that the most important scientific question for man in the modern era is whether the universe is a friendly place. Religious institutions seek to explore that question and to develop insight into man's relationship to the rest of creation. When a child's first sexual experience is exploitation by a religious leader, he gains a very different understanding of what can be expected of the universe and his value therein.

For a child of faith who is molested by a member of the clergy, abuse has an additional ramification in that it confuses spiritual issues. The sense of wrong, secrecy, stigma and spiritual estrangement can be very painful for a child, and can produce a lasting despair that is difficult for adults to reach. Fears of demonic influence are more understandable in the case of a child who has been exposed to satanic rituals that usually involve sexual crimes.

In American society, mainstream religious institutions are generally seen as benevolent. They teach forgiveness, compassion, and care of children and other vulnerable populations. But the incidence of sexual abuse among the Catholic clergy has stirred concern about all religious institutions that involve children and has demonstrated that an institution's stated goals can be undermined by individual behavior within.

Faith, trust and forgiveness are complicated concepts in dealing with child molesters, and without open discussion of the complex issues these matters raise for all religious faiths, denial becomes the major form of defense. Child-protection policies are written, mentioned at the beginning of the church year, and then filed and forgotten.

The crisis in the American Catholic Church that has caused great anguish in many quarters does offer the opportunity for religious growth and renewal among all religious faiths. It raises powerful questions, and the answers to these will affect the future of religious institutions.

How will religious institutions deal with the problem of sexual crime in the church or within the family? Will houses of worship be a refuge for children or a hiding place for predators?

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Although debate about gay marriage rages, what is the meaning of marriage at all if the children produced therein become targets the marriage cannot protect? When a religious leader uses his position of authority to exploit a child, what is the organization's priority, protecting its leaders or protecting its children?

For those who are dedicated to a religious institution, it can be painful to hear a religious leader or a congregation member accused, and it may seem to require a defense, a standing by that person, as an act of faith. The conflict among religious faith, good citizenship practices and child protection can be an agonizing experience.

But blind faith is seldom the best course, and even those with deep religious convictions can allow their reason to take precedence over their emotions. Standing by someone accused of sexual exploitation may be the equivalent of standing against a child victim.

Sexual abuse of children is criminal behavior, and reporting it to the police may put a religious organization under the control of civil authorities. This has occurred for the American Catholic Church because of the great number of crimes against children committed by priests. Allegations of child sexual abuse have been made against 4,692 priests and deacons, which is between 2.5 and 7 percent of diocesan priests.

Almost all major religious institutions emphasize love, faith, trust, optimism, forgiveness and compassion in their religious teachings. To implement child protection policies and put them into practice in houses of worship may seem cynical. To doubt fellow believers and see them as potentially dangerous may seem to indicate a lack of faith in man's goodness. Even though crime in religious institutions is not new however, and churches and temples have always locked their doors, sexual crimes seem to involve a different type of thinking.

How can religious institutions deal with the fallen, those who have admitted or been convicted of sexual offenses? A nonsexual criminal may be easier for religious communities to accept because his presence in a house of worship indicates a wish to reform and be forgiven. Although he may have deceived others,

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deception was not necessarily part of the reward he sought in his crimes. In the case of child molesting, deception is an integral part of the crime, and the distasteful nature of the act presents a situation to which there is no easy resolution for people of faith.

The theological requirement of integrating one's religious faith with the idea of a priest threatening a child with a weapon in order to gain sexual access is too difficult to embrace, and so denial becomes the response. In many ways this is similar to the parental fantasy of child safety, which uses denial to construct an imaginary nurturing world for a child.

It may be that those religious traditions that deal with spiritual issues by presenting specific behavioral proscriptions may find child protection more straightforward. By emphasizing behavioral compliance with religious rules, these institutions have fewer gray areas. In contrast, institutions that take a more abstract and philosophical approach to spiritual matters may have greater difficulty in dealing with the hard realities of child protection. These institutions may also incur the greatest risk in terms of liability, for they may be less inclined to develop the structure and supervision that insure compliance with child protection policies.

Will religious organizations become more doctrinaire and behaviorally focused in the future as a way to limit harm to children and financial liability as well? This may well be a risk of sexual crimes against children, but it would be unfortunate for theological issues to follow law enforcement needs in their evolution.

Recreational Organizations

Recreational facilities have become far more important as children's lives have grown increasingly restricted. Rather than playing in the street or the empty schoolyard, kids either stay home or sign up for after-school activities, weekend activities or field trips of one sort or another.

Most recreational organizations depend on volunteers and young people to fill out their staffs because these generally are not lucrative operations, and funds are typically limited. Summer

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camps present special problems in protecting kids because of the typically isolated nature of these communities, the overnight aspect of many camps and the spontaneous programming.

According to the American Camping Association, which accredits camps based on a series of health and safety standards, more than 11 million children attend more than 12,000 camps in the United States each year. There are a variety of camps, with 10 percent of camps aimed at campers with special needs, 60 percent solely overnight camps and 42 percent solely day camps. Almost 80 percent of camps are operated by recreational organizations like the YMCA, the YWCA, the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, Camp Fire USA and religious institutions. The remainder of camps most often are owned and operated by families.

Summer camps raise two distinctly different problems for child protection: the first is the familiar one of children exposed to adults where kids may be isolated, asleep or unclothed. The second is the exposure to a variety of youths who have control over younger children.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 67 percent of all victims of reported sexual assaults were under the age of eighteen, 34 percent were under age twelve, and one of every seven victims reported was under age six. More important, 40 percent of *perpetrators* were under eighteen. This is a statistic that receives relatively little attention, even though it is a reason for concern. Almost half of sexual crimes against children are committed by other youngsters. In recreational organizations, particularly camps, young people are frequently in control of children.

There are factors that may increase the likelihood of sexual crimes by youthful perpetrators. Drug usage among older teens and younger children appears to be increasing, with half of high school seniors reporting alcohol use within the previous thirty days, and 20 percent reporting marijuana use during the same time period. Almost half of all rape/sexual assaults are committed by an offender using drugs.

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Mixing older and younger children in recreational facilities makes child safety contingent upon the integrity of older kids, and it can be difficult to make decisions about an older youth's dependability. Juvenile violent sexual assaults are far more likely to be committed against acquaintances and family members than strangers, and half of the victims of juvenile crimes were juveniles themselves.

Juveniles Assaulting Juveniles

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that

- **67% of all victims of reported sexual assaults were under the age of 18.**
- **34% were under age 12.**
- **One of every seven victims reported was under age six.**
- **40% of the perpetrators were under age 18.**

It would be hard to find large recreational organizations that have not suffered from the effects of sexual crimes against children, because wherever there are children, there are likely to be child molesters. During the years between 1971 and 1989, the Boy Scouts banned 416 male scout employees for sexual misconduct, and they had 1,151 reported cases of sexual abuse in this period in a total of one million volunteers. The abusers were mostly scoutmasters and assistant scoutmasters, and most of the incidents occurred on camping expeditions.

According to Patrick Boyle, scoutmasters in these circumstances were encouraged to leave without bringing criminal charges against them if accusations were made, but many of them, he claims, continued to act in positions of authority. Boyle also reports that the Boy Scouts of America have paid at least fifteen million dollars in settlements in these cases. Currently, the organization requires extensive training for new leaders and makes background checks on them as part of increasingly tight child protection policies.

What would be the results for the culture if recreational and religious institutions disappeared because they could not sustain the pressure of sexual crimes? A substantial proportion of children would have little to do outside home and school, and so they would

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probably create their own activities with older children responsible for younger ones.

The loss to the broad society would be enormous because volunteer organizations are part of the network that educates children and prepares them for adulthood. These institutions reinforce family and cultural values, provide training and role models, and offer a way for children to gain social skills.

Threatened institutions may not disappear but may instead be forced to impose financial requirements on their members that will finance safer programs with better-trained personnel. If this should occur, the monetary burden on members could be very large, because financing employees with benefits would be very expensive. Girl Scout dues and religious contributions could conceivably reach the same level as country club memberships if organizations needed to create extensive professional administrative structures. As a result, these organizations would become increasingly segregated by income and would lose the capacity to provide the broad cultural exposure that benefits children.

American volunteer organizations uphold and transmit the values and mores of the society from one generation to the next. Some historians believe that the history of the nation has been shaped by the emergence of volunteer organizations that changed the cultural landscape and made it possible for citizens to provide for one another, rather than having to look to the government to do so. If volunteer organizations become more restricted, then government will be seen as a source of alternatives, much like the way Head Start has become an alternative to nursery school in poorer communities.

This is not to suggest that volunteer organizations have not addressed the problem of child abuse, or that they are oblivious or unconcerned about children's safety. These organizations typically have policies in place to protect children, and their wording is reassuring. But although their policies are generally reasonable and protective, crimes still occur because of the opportunism of sexual predators.

Part 2
The Challenge to Child Protection

**CHAPTER FOUR:
THE SEXUAL CON MAN**

For many parents, the greatest fear in raising children is that a child will be abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered by a stranger, and it is this fear that has directed most efforts at child protection. Unfortunately, this perspective has little relation to the criminal reality that children confront alone.

Most sexual crimes against kids are committed by friends or family members, and they involve sexual activity that becomes increasingly deviant as the exploitation progresses. Sex offenders are very active, and the National Institute of Mental Health reports that 453 predators indicated during interviews that they had victimized more than 67,000 children.

Child molesters can be common criminals, or they can be high-profile citizens like priests, teachers or celebrities. Pedophiles are persons who are sexually attracted to children, and child molesters are those who act on these urges. The largest group comprises career child molesters, or preferential pedophiles, who molest kids over time and choose victims that are similar in age, appearance and gender. When a child grows out of this range, the predator looks for a new target that fits his preferences.

The behavior of most sexual predators is socially integrated, which means that they can relate to other adults, but they arrange their social circumstances so that they have access to children, usually through parents. Far from being strangers to a

John Wayne Gacy was a contractor in Des Plaines, Illinois, and was named the Junior Chamber of Commerce Man of the Year, and he had his picture taken with first lady Roselyn Carter. But he had another life, like most sexual predators. He was also a serial killer who abused and tortured thirty-three young men and boys and hid their bodies in his basement.

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child, 89 percent of child abuse cases involve a person in the family's acquaintance circle.

Ninety-seven percent of all sexually assaultive crimes are committed by males against women and children. Some believe that there are more female child molesters than statistics indicate, but this would be an aberration from the larger crime statistics, and there is insufficient data to examine such a possibility.

Sexual approaches to children are generally organized and planned; they are not random. They typically originate in extensive solitary fantasizing, accompanied by sexual arousal to pornographic material. Skilled sexual predators often have a very good understanding of kids and may communicate quite well with them. Most critically, career child molesters are con men, and they are very good at deceiving others.

Sexual Predators as Con Men

What happens when an active pedophile is accused of predatory behavior with a child? He is likely to respond in predictable ways; such as *How dare you say such a thing about me!* or *It was a misunderstanding- I would never do that* or *She's being abused by somebody else, probably you.*

Child molesters are usually con men, and they are constructed in a way that is psychologically different from other people. They are not voluntarily truthful to anyone and rarely try to change their habits without being forced to do so. They are motivated by the thrill of deception, and given the choice between telling the truth and misleading others, they find it exhilarating to deceive others and escape consequences. Personality structure in con men resembles that of compulsive gamblers, who continually risk their self-worth in games of chance.

The father who had been molesting his eleven-year-old daughter says, "I want to say right now I never had intercourse with her. The only things we ever did was oral sex...what most people don't know is just how much the young girls want sex and they will hint around to get it."

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Much of a child molester's behavior is arranged to confuse the eye and the judgment of onlookers. The crime happens in the behavior, not in the perceptions, thoughts or feelings, which are often arranged to disguise the actions. In a shell game, it's hard to keep your eye on the bean, and in dealing with professional criminals who abuse children; it's hard to keep track of their behaviors because they work hard to divert attention away from their actions.

An essential element of this type of behavior involves self-deception, so that a sexual predator does not see himself as such. He may believe that his predatory behavior is caused by others, that it does no harm to a child, and that his motivation is innocent in arranging sexual activity with kids.

Con men use many devices, which are discussed later, to insure the outcomes they seek. Sometimes this involves rearranging surroundings or changing perceptions and interpretations of their acts. Their goal is to get others to believe their view of themselves.

To achieve this often requires blurring the edges of judgment, so that it becomes difficult, for example, for an onlooker to distinguish normal adult touch during play from fondling. The motivation of a con man isn't simply that of gaining sexual access to a child, however, for he also seeks the thrill of arranging the deceit.

The deception does more than protect a sexual predator from exposure and consequences. Con men deceive themselves before anybody else, so that they can masquerade as normal and believe themselves to be so. In darker moments of clarity, when a predator recognizes his behavior for what it is, he can call forth a whole array of illusions that save his self-esteem from complete collapse. Sexual predators usually assert that they love and understand children far more than parents, and that they would never do anything to hurt kids. Because there is nobody in a child molester's head to challenge his false beliefs, these become stronger with repetition. Sex offenders often believe that the child has seduced the adult, or was "asking for it," and this can seem increasingly valid when repeated in a mental monologue.

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This may look like a hastily invented excuse when a criminal is exposed, but it often is part of a well-developed internal self-justification system. This is not the smooth self-regulation of a working conscience that generates apprehension, anxiety and guilt at the idea of rule breaking; it is instead the presentation to the outside world of a justified and grandiose self, steeped in its own supportive beliefs about its inner goodness and martyrdom by cruel society.

When a child molester is apprehended and questioned, his underlying self-pity and sense of entitlement often become apparent. There is usually no concern for victims beyond that required to present an appealing case, but there is a substantial protective self-interest. It is not unusual for arrested predators to voice anxiety about the effects of an arrest on their health, peace of mind, finances and community standing.

The elements of a con man's thinking emerge with stark clarity when he is exposed and include passing the responsibility to others, asking for rescue from the victim and expressing self-pity and avoidance of the issue.

If a child molester is confronted by a child and asked to account for his behavior, there is often a transfer to others, and sometimes there is blaming of the victim:

- *You could have said no.*
- *I thought you wanted it. That's the only reason I did it.*
- *You need to analyze the fact that you led me on (to a five-year-old girl). It wasn't a one-sided street. It was two sided.*

Sometimes there is an attempt to force the victim to come to the perpetrator's aid:

- *You can't tell anyone. I would be dead.*
- *You need to tell me that you forgive me. I need you to do that before I die (from a predator in good health).*
- *Don't let me have a heart attack. Promise me.*

Often there is little more than self-pity;

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- *I'm real scared. I know you're scared (the forty-year-old says to the eight-year-old). I'm scared too.*
- *If they ever try to lock me up, I'm going to kill myself.*
- *I can't take much more. This is ruining my life.*

And then, there is the occasional explanation:

- *It's just one of those stinking, little lousy things that happens.*
- *It was one of those things. I was just trying to express my affection to you.*

A child molester's internal life involves a great deal of time spent in daydreaming, including the fantasy that sexual intimacy with children is good for them. These beliefs are formed and practiced in isolation because it is not likely that a pedophile will discuss them in public. The statements quoted above may seem absurd when examined critically, but sex offenders don't examine their thoughts or behavior critically, and so they become enmeshed in a web of self-deceit and self-stimulation that has little to do with social reality.

Why Pornography is Important in Child Sexual Crimes

Almost invariably, sexual abuse of children involves child pornography, which is the depiction of criminal sexual acts against children. Adult pornography is distinctly different because it is legal and involves consenting adults engaged in consensual sexual or erotic acts. Youngsters under eighteen cannot give informed consent to sexual activity, and so any such depiction is inherently illegal and represents evidence of a crime.

Pedophiles claim that child pornography is a healthy outlet for releasing sexual tension, and that it serves as a substitute for illegal acts. Therapeutic work with sex offenders, however, presents a very different picture. Sex offenders in treatment describe a sequence of sexually arousing acts that begin with masturbation while viewing child pornography. The visual material offers the opportunity for rehearsal of sexual acts, which can then

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be refined to suit the predator's erotic proclivities. The fantasies that are created as part of this process help to fuel the obsession with children rather than reducing it. Viewing child pornography while masturbating also serves as a conditioning exercise that strengthens sexual arousal to children.

Sometimes child pornography is used as a tactic for normalizing child-adult sex to a youngster: *See, all the kids do it.* It lowers a child's inhibitions, particularly if combined with alcohol and/or drugs, and demonstrates the behaviors that a predator wants from a child. Pornographic pictures of kids engaged in sex can also be used as a form of extortion, seeming proof that a youngster was a willing participant. These types of pictures can be used to threaten a child with exposure to his friends or parents. They are powerful tools that trap a child in criminal activity and force him to be silent about it.

Are Child Molesters Mentally Ill?

To many people, child molesters are by definition disturbed individuals. Clinically, mental illness is diagnosed by the disruption of normal life due to psychological symptoms; or as Freud defined it, disturbances in the ability to love and to work. Although there are many behaviors that may interfere with either of these, such as laziness or foolishness, these are not by themselves indicators of mental illness.

Child molesters fit the category of psychopaths, as do most criminals, but this category includes many ordinary citizens as well. Psychopathic personalities are lacking that internal mechanism termed the *superego* or *conscience*, which produces guilt and remorse when a person does wrong. For psychopaths, there is nothing to gain from participating in a society in which all abide by the rules, because psychopaths generally believe that they are entitled to far more than what the rules allow.

Psychopathic personalities are not necessarily criminals, and a law-abiding person may have psychopathic personality, which usually appears as a lack of character or concern for others. This type of personality is a continuum, with one end occupied by

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those who have limited integrity and the other end occupied by those with a criminally exploitative view of others and of society.

Most people have encountered psychopathic personalities, perhaps in the salesperson who makes promises that are not kept. Often, a person with this personality structure is skilled at reading those around him, using their perceptions and insights to his own ends. For a psychopath, it is exhilarating to be able to shape oneself to the demands of the immediate circumstances and to deceive others to reach a goal. Power and control over others are strong drives, and there is little respect for the reciprocal requirements of relationships.

An intelligent, practiced and determined psychopath is usually quite skilled at reaching his goals; the con artist who asks each commuter for money because he has lost his wallet is likely to end up with a bundle. Often the real goal is to manipulate the circumstance and the people involved so that his targets want to help him.

Most prison inmates are unsuccessful psychopaths, but they may have enough skill to deceive even experienced prison guards. Not surprisingly, it is relatively easy for a psychopathic personality to con young parents.

Are there pedophiles with social consciences? Adults who feel great remorse and regret at their drive to have sexual relations with children? Experienced psychopaths know that on arrest and through court proceedings, remorse can reduce their sentences or sometimes even the charges, making it difficult to evaluate the sincerity of these expressions when they do occur after arrest.

The FBI classifies child molesters as either preferential or situational, with preferential child molesters the larger group. Situational child molesters are usually adult men who are inadequate in other relationships including marriage, and abuse children opportunistically. The thought processes are probably the same in both types, involving a pattern of fantasy and loosening inhibitions leading to an assault, and followed by rationalization and attempts to hide the behavior.

The thought processes of preferential child molesters also have an addictive quality, which suggests some obsessive-

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compulsive functioning as well. The sequence of child molestation is repeated endlessly until it is interrupted by arrest. The behavior is ritualized, with identical acts and increasing dehumanization of children so that the infliction of suffering has little impact on the predator.

How Predators Con People Who Control Access to Kids

To get to children requires that a molester get past parents or other caretakers which requires a series of careful judgments. Perhaps the most critical choice is to determine how the targeted adult wants to see herself and then arrange one's behavior and conversation to support this view of reality. A sex offender must show a genuine interest in a parent in order to gather the information he needs to structure the relationship. Through careful observation, a preferential pedophile can make the other adult feel in control while encouraging an emotional dependency.

This chameleon-like ability to become part of the context, a supporting actor in other people's dramas, is important because it allows the criminal to proceed with his agenda, knowing that the other adults have gotten whatever they need from the social setting. By keeping the focus on others, he keeps the focus off his behavior with a child.

Predators need to distract others from the visually identifiable behaviors of grooming and to label them in a way that supports the fantasy being created. A predatory athletic coach, for example, may foster the idea that he has his hands on the kids all the time because this is his way of handling troubled kids. If he has sensed that parents and teachers are threatened by difficult kids, he may be successful at disguising his behavior.

By constructing a view of his behavior that interlocks with the way the surrounding adults want to see themselves, a sexual predator can become a trusted and necessary part of their social network. The goal here is to train others to a certain viewpoint, with the objective that when there is an accusation of sexual exploitation of a child, lots of supporters will say, *He would never do something like that. How could you even think that?*

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The widespread abuse by Catholic priests is an example of how predators can create a reassuring context for parents in order to gain access to children. Most sexual exploitation occurred while a priest was serving in a leading capacity within the parish. Most incidents happened at the priest's residence, the church or the child's home, but in 168 cases, sexual assault occurred during the sacrament of reconciliation. Often the priest had a social relationship with the victim's family and frequently was a guest in the family's home and in about a fifth of the cases, a sibling of the victim was also abused. Half of the children were assaulted numerous times.

What did these acts involve? Sexual talk; showing pornography; genitally touching the cleric (or the victim); removing clothing; taking photos; playing sexual games; hugging; kissing; masturbating; performing oral sex; manual or penile penetration; penetration with an object; or, in fifty-two cases, having group or coerced sex with many episodes involving combinations of these acts. In the cases of over a thousand children, there was penile penetration.

The way that children were made to comply was most often through bribery, verbal intimidation or other means. Since the adults would have already been conned by the priest's behavior and position, children would be much more likely to submit. In 38 incidents, threats were made to children targeting their families, and in 43 cases, the child was threatened with a weapon. In all cases, priests and parishioners shared a belief in the image of a caring clergyman ministering to the needs of the faithful.

Sexual predators develop relationships of trust and interdependence and in so doing gain access through gatekeepers to children. Molesting then proceeds in a context where all of the expectations have been present, and a child's complaint that something bad is happening to him will be at odds with the benign view of onlookers. Given the pressure of the social context, it is unlikely that a child would ever voice a complaint, and so child victims see the reality of sexual crime clearly, and they see it alone.

Are Predators Solo Criminals?

Most sex offenders don't belong to established organizations, although such groups do exist. These are essentially crime rings made up of sexual predators who help and support one another. The Wonderland Club, one such criminal enterprise, was exposed in September 1998 when law enforcement simultaneously arrested 180 men in twelve nations. The police at the same time seized 1,800 computerized videos that were records of children being abused, as well as 750,000 child pornography pictures.

Members of the Wonderland Club included an RAF engineer, a salesman, a Sea Cadets youth leader and a computer consultant. One of those arrested, a thirty-year-old unemployed man, said that it had been wonderful to find other people like himself: *"I had friends all over the world. I never had so many friends before. There was always someone who'd get in touch and say, 'trade?'"* (BBC News, on news.bbc.co.uk)

This was a highly structured club, with members required to bring in a minimum of 10,000 new pieces of child pornography for the club's database as an entrance requirement. The members used sophisticated security systems to protect their network, with files encrypted in a KGB code.

The Internet, which is discussed in detail in chapter 7, offers the opportunity for many different forms of criminal initiatives. Many of these groups are infiltrated by law enforcement

YANI, a Website for "youth-attracted adults", serves as a route for devotees to share their experiences and their feelings:
"On Halloween my 9yo niece asked to take her and a friend (9yo Alex) trick or treatin. Of course I jumped at the chance. Well Alex's mother came along as well, which was cool. While trick or treating in the beginning Alex took hold of my hand (how arousing with her baby soft skin). Then of course she had to have her hands free to collect candy, but after each hand out of candy I put out my hand for her to take. When she started to question why I kept doing this I stopped. After the candy run we went to sonic drive in and she spilled a slushy in these places, her right nipple, tummy, crotch and right leg—guess who got to clean it up. I paid special attention to her right nipple, with a napkin in my hand so as not to frighten her. Joy joy joy."

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undercover personnel, but there appear to be sufficient numbers of child molesters to keep them going.

The Pedophile Information Exchange or PIE, has as its mission the creation of a sense of community for pedophiles by providing a public forum for debate. Claiming that they are campaigning for societal acceptance of pedophilia love and the legalization of sexual relations between adults and children, PIE offers ways for pedophiles to connect and support one another.

Is There a Pedophilic Political Program?

Obscure or outrageous ideas take on legitimacy when they become political programs, because one of the mainstays of Western society is that everybody is entitled to a voice in the political arena. Defining human behavior as part of a political doctrine or program gives it a standing and an audience that it may not have otherwise. This perspective forces the American public to give a fair hearing to those with bizarre beliefs because to do otherwise would be seen as unfair and undemocratic. It also requires a kind of courtesy accorded to those who differ, the motto being: *I hate what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.* Pedophiles have exploited these political premises to reduce opposition to sexual behavior with children.

There are two types of organizations for those who advocate sex between adults and children. One type is primarily criminal, and arranges access to kids for criminal purposes. Such is the Orchid Club, which provides a venue for members to participate in live Internet transmission of sexual assaults on children, with members able to request preferred sexual activities. Stories and photographs are also available to members. The Orchid Club also provides access to Websites with chat rooms and other references for those interested in sex with youngsters. According to *uri.edu*, some of these websites average 170,000 hits per month.

Sometimes sexual predators create organized networks as needed, as in the case of George Chamberlain, who served time at a Minnesota prison facility where he managed a nonprofit computer programming firm as part of his prison work. Along with

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his online activities, he also developed a network of criminal contacts and a large collection of child pornography.

A second type of organization provides an intellectual view of child sexual abuse and is best exemplified by the North American Man Boy Love Association. Taking the position that those who love boys are unfairly targeted and prosecuted, this group has regular meetings, conventions, chapters, a newsletter and a political program. NAMBLA's Prison Program has as its goal to provide emotional support to incarcerated "boy lovers" and to help inmates develop self-respect.

The philosophy expressed in these organizations seems to have been formed backward to justify behavior, and as such hardly merits the title of political belief. But the essence of the ideas expressed is that child sexual abuse is a sexual preference like homosexuality, and should be seen as a lifestyle rather than a crime. Sexual attraction to children is claimed to be normal and experienced by both adults and kids. There is little if any respectable research that supports these assertions.

Often these organizations claim to defend the sexual rights of children and argue that kids have sexual drives and need sexual activity to release tension in the same way that adults do. They argue that damage is done to kids by a rigid, puritanical society that forbids them access to physical release, harming their emotional development and leading to a host of societal ills.

This is an extension of the free love movement of earlier times, with the theme that repressed sexuality is a bad idea for anybody of any age, and that children should be "liberated" from repressive parents. These arguments are a not very subtle projection of adult wishes onto children, for it is the adults that initiate and force sexual activity on kids.

The claim that children enjoy sex and willingly participate in it serves to legitimize the pedophile's drives. It goes further, however, by romanticizing the experience, as captured in the phrase, *the love that dare not speak its name*, which gives sexual crime a dramatic and self-aggrandizing quality. The narcissism of sex offenders is apparent, and children become little more than

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livestock to be used when they fit the age preference, and then discarded.

When pedophile organizations try to change societal beliefs about child abuse, the first approach is to change popular terminology, so that incest becomes *cross-generational love*, and child molesters become *youth-attracted adults*. There are no more perpetrators, offenders, molesters or victims; instead there are only *participants*. Oral sex is excluded as a type of sexual act because it does not involve sexual intercourse. Pedophile groups often lobby for legislative goals that include lowering or repealing age of consent laws so that consent of a child to a sexual act can be given at any age. There has been some headway in changing consent laws, as for example in South Carolina, the age of consent has been lowered to fourteen.

It is worth noting that the elimination of age of consent laws would effectively wipe out a parent's right to control and protect a child's sexual behavior, and the child would become an easy target for anyone who wants to exploit him. Age of consent laws for other behavior, such as financial commitments have never been challenged by these groups.

In their political literature, pedophiles present themselves as an oppressed group, drawing a parallel between their circumstances and those of the Jews of Nazi Germany. The argument is made that the great number of incarcerated child molesters are innocent and broke no laws because their victims consented, and that they are denied a full life because of society's persecution. They have attempted to connect with other human rights groups, but the response has not been welcoming. On the premise that society bears responsibility for the oppression of pedophiles and child molesters, they have extended the claim that when sexual predators re-offend, it is the fault of the society that has refused to help them.

A storm of controversy erupted in the American Psychological Association when a study appeared that argued that sexual exploitation does little harm to children. The result of publishing this study was that the APA was accused of trying to normalize pedophilia by recognizing consensual child-adult sex as

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harmless. In a separate article, Joan Nelson argues for this position: “The visionary adult gives the child love that is not conditional upon sex and participates in sexual contact not for his or her own gratification, but in response to a child’s attempts to acquire practical knowledge...many visionaries believe the troubles that characterize our times are rooted in childhood sexual repression that prohibits age-free expression of sexual affection.”

This controversy is not limited to academia; there are suggestions for changes in clinical practice as well. In an intake interview for psychological services, for example, instead of asking an adult if he had been abused as a child, Nelson would ask, *Who is the closest relative with whom you were sexual as a child?*

While it is not very likely that laws will be passed that legitimize sexual contact between children and adults, these pseudo-political activities introduce uncertainty about defining child-adult sexual behavior as criminal. If sexual abuse can be categorized as a political issue instead of a law enforcement problem, it changes the status of sex offenders.

What’s missing from most of these debates is an understanding of children and their development. Kids need adults to be adults, to nurture and protect them, rather than sexually using them. If adult-child relationships become peer-peer relationships, then kids have nowhere to turn for guidance and support.

In healthy adult-child relationships, the adult does most of the giving and the child most of the receiving. This is unavoidable, because kids need a great deal to grow into happy, healthy men and women. Children who are forced to behave like adults at a young age don’t have time to develop self-knowledge, judgment and a realistic understanding of personal strengths and limits. Sexual relationships involve a great deal of emotional interplay, and are complicated for adults to handle. They are not for kids, any more than driving a car is for children.

Adult-child sex is patently exploitative, because children are at a disadvantage due to the overwhelming inequalities in the relationship. Children can be seduced into sexual activity and a great deal of nonsexual activity that is bad for them, and their consent cannot be taken as a reflection of mature judgment.

Can Child Molesters Reform?

When people read about a child molester apprehended by the police, they sometimes try to imagine how it feels, but the personality profiles of sex offenders and average citizens are so different that this is nearly impossible. A typical newspaper reader may imagine an offender being ashamed, remorseful, humiliated and horrified at having sexually assaulted a child, with great fear for the damage that a youngster may have suffered.

For preferential child molesters, none of these responses is likely. Children are useful objects to a preferential pedophile, to be used as required and then discarded. Just as most people don't notice whether they harm ants when they take an evening stroll, so most child molesters take no notice of what happens to children as a result of their actions.

When forced to confront the damage done to sexual assault victims, a sexual predator's responses are usually minimization; that is, trivializing the impact on children, and rationalization, giving a reasonable interpretation to one's behavior. Both of these are forms of denial that allow the perpetrator to retain his good view of himself.

Often sex offenders claim that a child wanted the sexual activity, that it educated him and that it is only small minds that would see this as wrong. In fact, the rationalizing predator may say that he cares for the child more than the child's parents, and that he got into sexual activity because he was under stress.

The possibility that child molesters can be reprogrammed to become law-abiding citizens is not a promising one. Among criminals there is a comparatively high re-offense rate with sex offenders, and failure rates of treatment for homosexual pedophiles are particularly high. In the work of Hanson and his associates, a group of treated sex offenders were compared with a group of untreated sex offenders, with no differences in re-offense over the next twelve years. This study was controlled for length of follow-up, year of release, age and other risk factors.

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The goal of most sex offender treatment programs is to prevent a relapse and therapy usually involves the teaching of self-management strategies to help the offender avoid further criminal behavior. But often the predator's limited social skills and the stress of a prison record make this very difficult.

The problem in assessing the results of sex offender treatment programs is that most participants are there under duress, required to accept treatment as a court-imposed condition. In prison, sex offenders are safer if they are part of a treatment program because they are protected from the general prison population, so their request for treatment may reflect a wish for safety rather than a wish to reform.

There are no studies that examine voluntary sex offender treatment because predators don't usually seek treatment unless forced to. If child molesters saw it in their best interests to change their behaviors, there might be different outcomes for sex offender treatment programs.

The most informative description of a child molester's thinking comes from Alan, a sex offender who victimized more than one thousand children:

"Saying 'I love you' to a child who is totally convinced that you don't even know him, and that if you did, you could never love him, simply isn't enough. First, we need to make that child feel that he or she really is important to us and that what we love is all of them, including their bad parts, their fears, and their failures. Somehow, we need to begin to say I love you . . . who you are . . . not what you are. And we desperately need to learn that communication is only one part talking, followed by one part listening. I abused so many innocent children simply because I was willing to listen and to let them see my imperfections. I worked, continually, to give them a sense that I, for one, did not expect perfection from them. When something that they said was wrong, I tried to help them to correct their own error, rather than making a point of demonstrating their mistake.

I tried to create an environment in which they were free to speak of anything and not afraid of either not knowing or being wrong. In that simple bubble of acceptance, they felt very special.

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Tragically, I used this insight for a totally selfish and destructive end. But if I could make them feel special, why can't others learn to do the same for the betterment of these kids? And what scares me most is that if this is not learned, there will always be more people like me out there offering a costly and devastating alternative.

I targeted victims who clearly showed that their communications network was failing them. I did this because I knew that in the pain and confusion of their abuse, they would have nowhere to turn for help. I knew that because I'd been there and stayed there. If parents can provide the same sounding board that I offered, then the children would have no possible need for the magic I sell. If a child feels accepted, respected, wanted, and listened to at home . . . nothing I have to offer will prove appealing."

**CHAPTER FIVE:
BABIES AND PRESCHOOLERS: SPECIAL PROBLEMS IN
PROTECTING LITTLE KIDS**

Sexual assault in America is a crime primarily against children, and sixty-seven percent of victims are under eighteen, with preschoolers one-seventh of the victim population. According to the Bureau of Justice's National Incident-Based Reporting System, sexual exploitation of children is always an assault because kids cannot consent to sexual intercourse, sexual penetration with an object, sodomy, and forced fondling.

It's hard to believe that someone would try to hurt small children and babies for pleasure, although this is the reality. When the Netherlands Club, a crime ring that operated in five countries, was broken up by a European vigilante group, the evidence showed extraordinary sexual cruelty to babies and small children. In an ironic twist, a high official in the Dutch justice ministry who had led the investigation was arrested two weeks after the case broke for downloading child pornography for his personal use.

People commit these terrible crimes primarily because small children are relatively safe targets who can be manipulated and controlled, and who make poor witnesses for law enforcement. Sex offenders can have bizarre sexual triggers, as indicated on the YANI Web site, which offers a chat room for pedophiles, or "youth-attracted adults,," and which printed the following:

Hi, Is there a certain name for men that are attracted to toddlers and babies? I know that being a pedophile all by itself is a touchy subject, but I am a man that is attracted to toddlers as well as to older children. I just feel like I am alone in the way that I feel. I'm not out there engaged in sex with toddlers, I just find them extremely sexy and arousing, am I alone here?"

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A response from one of the readers of the site: *“Yes, the earlier the better. You can include everything in child’s games so it comes very naturally.”*

Crime statistics indicate that forty percent of sexual offenders who molested preschoolers were themselves juveniles, most often teenage boys, and half of all assaults on small children were committed by family members. In order to protect himself, a sexual predator may kill a school-aged youngster after a sexual attack so that the child cannot identify him, but babies and toddlers can’t provide reliable information to implicate a child molester. Control is easily achieved with small children, so abduction is unusual in sexual crimes against little kids.

Although it is often believed that abductions of small children involve sexual attack, this is not generally so. Kidnappings in this age group are part of a distinctly different criminal pattern, because they typically involve newborns still in the hospital. When babies are kidnapped from the home, the perpetrator may be disguised as a person offering assistance such as a hospital representative or a baby-sitter appearing for an interview.

Abducted infants and toddlers are almost always recovered unharmed. These are curious cases that are quite distinct from sexual assault cases. The perpetrators are female, often with a prior history of feigning a pregnancy, who may have made comments to friends and relatives about a pregnancy and impending childbirth. When the baby is taken, it is in a carefully planned abduction, and these crimes do not have the opportunistic feature of sexual abductions.

These cases may have strange details, such as a kidnapper going so far as to arrange a baby shower and send out birth announcements, or to display stolen sonograms to convince others that she is pregnant. Although baby abduction is terrifying to new parents, the risk to children in these circumstances is relatively small, because rarely are kids harmed or sexually attacked and they are usually returned to their parents.

Sexual assaults on small children that do not involve abduction, however, present a very different picture. Little kids as

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sexual objects can be psychologically appealing targets to an inadequate personality, because sexual involvement is not as complex or threatening to the predator as it may seem with adult partners. Some have said that rape is not so much a sexual crime as it is a need to dominate and control, and preschoolers offer immediate gratification of these needs. Among small kids, the greatest risk of sexual assault is to children aged four, and these crimes are primarily sodomy and sexual assault with an object, although forcible rape makes up four percent of victims. Sodomy is a crime in this age group that targets primarily boys, but the great majority of all victims of sexual crimes are females.

Sexual Assault Within the Family

If a young child is sexually molested in the home, the most probable perpetrators are either male family members who are teenagers or young adults outside the family who are acquainted with the child.

What is the effect of sexual victimization on small kids? Babies and toddlers have a lot of work to do to get ready to be fully functional children. The best setting for this is a secure and predictable home where there are two adults who work as a team in raising children. Toddlers are delightful human beings who usually are congenial and social. As they begin to acquire language, they enjoy showing what they know. As children learn to walk, talk, and feed themselves, they also learn to say no and to refuse adults.

Kids at this age are not always compliant with adult requests, and so parents have to find ways to insure cooperation. This may involve rearranging the circumstances, using bribery or threats, or teaching a youngster acceptable behavior. Career sexual predators are often skillful at eliciting compliance from little children in sexual victimization. But young kids are intensely physical, moving around, touching everything, and they become angry if restrained. Sexual crime generally involves forcing submission to an adult's physical gratification, which means children must be frightened or coerced into compliance.

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By the age of four, a child is a social being, enjoying games with others and using words to express feelings. Four-year-olds have learned the limits of their own bodies and ownership of objects. They are just getting out of diapers and establishing coordination in their movements. Age four is also a time of high vulnerability to sexual assault, the two most common forms being sodomy and forced penetration with an object, and these are bizarre violations of a child's expectations of the use of his body. They also are experiences that a child is forced to keep secret, so his own internalized understandings of the activity prevail and endure. Sexual assaults on young children may involve painful and grotesque

aspects, and small victims have no help in dealing with these. Faced with confusing or frightening experiences, children may seek

What Little Kids Learn from Sexual Victimization:

- *Adults keep secrets from other adults, but it's hard to keep a secret when you're four.*
- *Adults like you a lot if you touch their bodies, and they make strange noises.*
- *Grownups can kill your mom if you tell.*
- *Grownups get mad if you act silly and giggle when they touch you.*
- *Your teenaged brother is scary when you say you're going to tell.*
- *Adults have big, scary looking private parts and I hope mine don't look like that when I grow up.*

refuge in fantasy as a way to deflect what is happening to them. The creation of mental stories or magical interpretations of events can be an escape and a coping response, but it may become a foundation for later psychopathology.

Children at this age have reached a level of equilibrium in cognitive and physical development, a stage where things are temporarily in balance, so that four-year-olds are usually good natured and adventurous. They love physical activity and made-up games, as well as playacting and silly things.

Most important, four-year-olds try to learn how the world works, and what the causative contingencies are; for example, why mom gets upset if you spill things on the furniture, and how to make your baby brother laugh out loud. Kids respond well to clear

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messages about behavior that are followed by highly predictable responses. If you teach a four-year-old how to handle a knife correctly, she is likely to behave safely around knives for the rest of her life.

The effects of sodomy, object penetration, forced fondling, and rape on preschoolers can include pain with physical injury that can produce an early association between sexuality and suffering. Although young children may submit to sexual victimization, genital contact is not pleasant for them and they resist it unless coerced. Children object to having bodily openings penetrated, as when you try to brush a child's teeth or take something out of his mouth, so sexual victimization usually requires forcing a child to submit.

Preschoolers have little understanding of sexuality, with only a basic awareness of genital differences and bathroom practices. When children need medical procedures involving genitals, awareness of the potential for trauma usually leads to medical providers arranging a healthy and supportive setting during and following the procedures. In contrast, sexual crimes often involve physical trauma to kids, and this occurs in a toxic setting of fear and shame with no adult help or support.

Sexual assault of a preschooler has physical effects, but the effect on a child's ability to form and trust relationships is likely to be more serious and longer lasting. This results from the bodily consequences to a small child, but it is also the result of dealing with an adult criminal under severe emotional stress. If the abuse is by a parent or stepparent, which is most often the case in this age group, the crime requires dissociation by the adult perpetrator who is also a family member, in order to block awareness of a child's confusion and suffering.

A child molester is always aware of his crimes and their effects at some psychological level, and so a great deal of energy must go into suppressing this awareness. Self-justification becomes a dominant theme for predators, not as a way to control guilt but in anticipation of arrest and prosecution. This type of preoccupation interferes with smooth parental functioning and may make an adult

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hypersensitive to criticism and rigid in behavior in the non-criminal areas of his adult life.

Having cast himself in the role of secret predator within the family, the offender's behavior isolates him in his clandestine and criminal life. This throws him into concealed conflict with those who would protect the child and creates an irreparable fissure in the family unit because few parents can accept the fact that a partner has sexually assaulted a toddler. The situation for the predator at this point becomes increasingly hopeless, and it is clear that his future will only become dimmer.

As the sexual violation of a small child continues, the sex offender becomes more emotionally detached from the family unit, alone in a hell of his own making. His sexual arousal requires increasingly diverse types of activity to be satisfying as time goes on. After the novelty of the initial sexual encounter, the child is likely to become less compliant and more resistant, so the adult must vary the sexual encounters to keep the little one submissive and to maintain his own arousal. Whatever parenting competency might have existed in an offending adult before the abuse begins, its purpose changes, for now the goal is always to make the child submissive to sexual exploitation.

In these circumstances, the balances required for good discipline are destroyed, because child guidance requires a framework of caring, compassion, and cooperation. An effective parent must act predictably with a child in ways that are openly supported by the rest of the family. A child who always goes to bed after his bath may not like getting out of the tub, but he accepts a parent's insistence that he do so. These household rhythms make sense to a child and to parents, so there is a basis for cooperation in following them.

When there is sexual crime in the family, these balances are destroyed, because the main goal is not the healthy rhythm of nurturing the young but instead, the perpetrator's sexual gratification. A child can't understand why he must submit to physical acts that are uncomfortable or painful, and so a power struggle usually develops for no obvious reason.

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In the contest, all outcomes are bad for a child. If the youngster successfully resists control of everyday behavior by the perpetrator, he becomes too powerful and may fail to develop smooth self-control mechanisms. On the other hand, if he becomes submissive and compliant, he casts aside his own judgment and feelings in order to tolerate painful or irrational control for the benefit of an adult who behaves in confusing ways.

Kids need lots of guidance and teaching before they start school because directing one's own behavior is a giant challenge to a small person. Problems in paying attention, focusing, and avoiding distractions, the result of both neurological maturation and a predictable environment, are generally overcome as children approach kindergarten. Reliable parental guidance helps a child to internalize a parent's approaches so that he takes on these externals as forms of self-control. The two-year-old who tells himself, "No, no, no," as he pursues some forbidden activity is in the early stages of internalizing a parent's voice and values.

If a parent doesn't offer mature and consistent direction, it becomes more difficult for kids to develop those internal structures that direct and orchestrate behavior toward their goals. A parent may explain to a young child that he is putting oil in the car to make it run better, which a four-year-old can understand: but what can a parent say about why he is sodomizing a child that can possibly make sense to a youngster?

Sexual Abuse by Juveniles

Although most child molesters are adult men, a substantial proportion are adolescents or young adults. Sex crimes against children by older kids in the family disrupt the constellation of normal family relationships. The range of physical effects on a child is the same as when the perpetrator is an adult, but the relationship issues are more complex when the perpetrator is a youth.

The stress on any child molester is intense and forces all sorts of psychological dislocations, but youthful predators are less developed and less able to deal with stress, and so their behavior

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can quickly become extremely deviant. To live in a family and have a secret, illegitimate relationship with a small child would be a challenging situation for anyone, and it is usually far beyond a teenager's abilities.

The fear of discovery is likely to be greater, because a juvenile has less freedom and control than an adult. If this is a stepchild abusing the new baby of the remarried couple, it poses a threat to the marriage as well. Children with sexual behavior problems can also be victims of sexual assault.

The relationship of a preschooler to older siblings involves strong yearnings for acceptance and approval. There is a reflexive admiration and trust, so that what the older child does is automatically good in the eyes of the younger one. There is more emotional intimacy and vulnerability in relations between siblings because children in a family come to know one another quite well. Between parents and small kids, caretaking needs are dominant but this is not the case with brothers and sisters.

Trust is a problem for children who are sexually victimized during their preschool years. Kids at this age can't analyze trustworthiness, but they sense that something is wrong in abuse because it is secret and hidden and not like the other things that adults or older kids do. In addition, they can't see any obvious benefit to themselves, unless there has been a cover story such as, "*This is how older kids play.*" This is a great strain on a small child because of the secrecy demands but there may be random disclosure, as with the little girl who said, "*Bobby [her teen brother] likes to kiss me without my panties on.*"

Kids try to do what they are told to do, especially when it seems important to the older child or adult. Sometimes a child molester attempts to secure a child's silence by blaming the child: "*You made me do it. You wanted it, too.*" A sexual predator may deliberately mistake the natural emotional flirtation of a preschooler for the full-blown sexual seduction of an adult, out of his own distorted perception.

In blaming a child for the secret and apparently bad behaviors, a preschooler is given an erroneous interpretation of the world and how things work and is likely to believe it into

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adulthood because so few children disclose sex crimes. Believing himself to be the cause of sexual victimization and perhaps the cause of any consequences that follow including arrest or divorce, a child's view of himself can suffer profound damage.

In the preschool age group, abuse by an older child or teenager in the house can cause real anguish for a younger child. For a little child to be important in any way to an older one is flattering and seductive, and most little kids try hard to please an older child. If the older sibling is a sexual predator, then sexual submission becomes a way to cement a bond.

A younger child is always disappointed in this relationship, because during those hours when he is not being sexually victimized, he has no value to an exploitative sibling and may be chased away as a pest, which is confusing and enraging to a child who has been so powerful. It is highly likely that the younger child will be a disclosure risk to the predator, so that there may be threats and hostility as part of the relationship as well.

The Future for Victimized Preschoolers

This situation deprives a child of a sane and predictable family life and the chance to develop self-control. The implications for our culture of large numbers of youngsters who grow up exploited in secret and dealing with it alone are profound. It does not strengthen the emerging citizenry or contribute to anyone's mental health.

Because all this happens in a child's very early years, when many understandings are recorded nonverbally in the central nervous system, these experiences may be unavailable for revision as a youngster matures. The truths that a small child learns from sex crimes may develop an aura of dependability, because they were conceived in trauma and so they take on a sacred veracity.

If a child learns, for example, that one should never tell if an adult threatens him, that instead one should find ways to bear up and survive, endurance and silent suffering may become a template for other relationships. This type of internal pattern is not accessible to change if it develops in the preschool years, because

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it is conceived at a very early cognitive level. Encoding and memory in the preschool years are muscular and visual, with verbal memory developing after age four. Early traumatic learnings are usually inaccessible by discussion and can seem to be part of one's nature.

Preschool children who are assault victims usually deal with their experiences without emotional support. The result can be a form of childhood depression, where a youngster withdraws into meaningless activity to avoid the hopelessness of the situation. A whole population of impaired children, haunted by secret sins and terrors, grows up with no help and becomes the next generation of parents.

Tragically, sexual assault of preschoolers involves relatively little risk to the perpetrator. Among sex offenders in general, the arrest rate is only twenty-seven percent, but when there are preschool kids as targets, it drops to nineteen percent. Child molesters who prey on little children are not likely to be prosecuted or convicted for their crimes, if they are arrested at all, for these are difficult charges to substantiate in court.

If the offender is also a juvenile, the situation for a family becomes especially difficult. Most parents do not willingly have their offspring prosecuted for sexual offenses, and in any case, legal action offers the family little protection from future molesting. In those cases where the offender is known to the victim or is a family member, the victim may also refuse to cooperate in bringing such charges. Where the molester is a stranger, arrest is far more likely.

The consequence is that small children are victimized, but their perpetrators, often juveniles themselves, have little if any sanctions or required treatment. There may be no additional supervision in the home, so that crimes continue, but now without disclosure. The small child who was victimized now must live in uneasy closeness to the offender.

**CHAPTER SIX:
SILENT VICTIMS: SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, SIX TO
TWELVE**

How Sexual Crimes Occur in Middle Childhood

School-aged children emerge from infancy and toddlerhood with lots of energy and a drive to understand the world. Between six and twelve, kids encounter many different daily activities and people. Kids move from place to place during the day, changing rooms within the same school building and moving between home, school, and after-school activities as well. This makes supervision and protection more difficult, and most mothers depend on others for help in watching their children. By age thirteen or fourteen, the need for supervision lessens with a youngster's developing judgment and knowledge.

The difficulty in keeping track of kids is illustrated by the reports of missing children, which number half a million annually. Most of these are misplaced kids who turn up safe after communications between parent and child are clarified. When children are actually missing and have been abducted, the great majority of these incidents involve a noncustodial parent.

The tragedy of child abduction reports epitomizes the danger to children in the minds of many parents. But this type of crime represents a tiny proportion of sexual offenses against kids, perhaps one tenth of one percent of sexual attacks on children, but it is this crime for which parents prepare. The great majority of sex crimes against children are committed with little public drama or media attention. .

It is estimated that almost a quarter million children are significantly harmed by sex crimes each year in the United States. Sexual assaults on kids can take many different forms, with rape, sodomy, penetration with an object, and forcible fondling most common. All of these are classified as sexual assaults because children cannot legally consent to sexual participation.

The length and frequency of the forced sex determines the impact on a child, as does his relationship to the perpetrator.

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Consider the different consequences of abuse in the following sexual assaults:

- A one-time fondling by a camp counselor during swimming
- Continuous incest under threat of violence by a stepfather
- Object penetration disguised as sexual play with an older sibling
- Sodomy by a stranger in a video arcade

The circumstances of a sexual crime have emotional and social effects on a child, and kids vary in the intelligence and maturity with which they can respond. A child's family experience influences his resilience in dealing with crime victimization, so that a child who has strong relationships with supportive adults has a very different experience than a youngster who is the object of parental hostility, rejection, or abandonment.

For children assaulted in middle childhood, forced sex is usually a solitary experience, and the only other person who knows about it is the child molester. Kids rarely disclose these crimes, and if they do, it is frequently long after the events have occurred. When sexual assault happens, a child has to figure out what to do, as though the experience had never happened to anybody before.

Girls are much more often a target of sexual abuse than boys, except in the case of sodomy. Kids are not necessarily alone with an adult when sex crimes happen, and a substantial number of sexual offenses involve a second victim, usually a child of the same age. These crimes most often happen in a child's home, but episodes also take place on roadways, in fields or woods, at schools, or at hotel/motels. About five percent of assailants are strangers, and most predators are known to their victims. In forty percent of cases, the predator is also a juvenile, most often a youngster between ages eleven and fifteen.

Mastery Needs of Middle-Aged Kids

Children in the elementary and middle school years have two developmental tasks: to develop mature reasoning and to learn social skills. Kids between six and twelve like to get good at things and are delighted when they can tell the entire story of a movie or

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relate a funny joke. Perhaps the exhilaration results from the long early years of incompetence and inadequacy, when the worst insult was to be called a baby. The need for mastery is the driving force for educational systems because it motivates kids to become good at doing things.

Kids often teach themselves by experimenting with objects; an old typewriter or tool offers them opportunities for developing skills and understandings. When adults take time to teach kids, youngsters absorb knowledge quickly. Kids learn best in highly predictable settings where they can ask lots of questions and figure out how one thing can cause another. Traumatic life events, like an earthquake, cause major difficulties for kids because there is no way for children to anticipate or understand these things.

The beginning of causal connection can be seen as early as the toddler stage, when little ones gleefully anticipate the reappearance of the hidden face in a game of peek-a-boo. As children develop mastery in reading and writing and in their ability to anticipate events, self-esteem grows, along with their faith in a reasonable world. This is seen in the development of courage, where a child begins to have faith in herself and to trust her own measure of a situation, allowing her to take calculated risks, like learning to ride a bike or roller-skate.

Forced sexual participation is not an experience any child can master. It is inherently confusing and cannot be questioned openly, so that a child's confusion is not resolved. It is secret, so that a youngster has no way to listen to others and learn from their experiences. Most important, the causative links that a child learns from the experience are generally in error. He may come to believe that he is either grandiosely important, or that he is morosely to blame for the secret, shameful acts.

In trying to understand why he is the one an adult seeks out, a child may hear things that cause more confusion, such as that he was flirtatious or wanted the sexual activity. In fact, the major reasons for a predator's choice of target are access to a child, and a predator's risk of exposure. Disabled children, for example, are three times more likely to be abused than children with disabilities

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probably because they cannot easily escape the unwanted attentions of an adult.

Although children of this age may be seduced into a private relationship with a predator, as the activity becomes increasingly sexual, a youngster's misery grows. Sexual activity involves removing clothing, revealing genitals, holding still and assuming awkward body positions. There is often pain and discomfort from a child's body parts not meant to move or respond in the ways that a predator demands. There is also the embarrassment of an adult who seems to act in silly or disgusting ways, along with body parts that don't look like a child's.

A youngster's inability to hold his own in these circumstances, and the inherent power of the adult predator are the primal appeal of sex crimes against kids for a child molester. The adult holds all the control, and the child can do nothing. This is a form of human servitude not seen in other parts of our society, for although a child may be able to achieve some degree of intellectual, emotional, or physical control over his life as he matures, in these circumstances, he has none.

Social Development in Middle Childhood

As children emerge from early childhood and dependency on their parents, interest in other kids flourishes. Small children play together in side-by-side play that lasts until they learn genuine social exchange. At age seven or eight, kids begin to take a real interest in other people, and they strive to understand words and meanings.

Close relationships become appealing in elementary school, and little girls in these years usually claim somebody as a best friend. The appeal of being twins, being just alike, offers a way to understand others as like oneself. These beginning social understandings give a child a basis for comprehending others' behavior as similar to his own. *I love you*, second grader says, *because you're just like me*. Rituals of friendship appear at this age, particularly for girls, and sitting together or choosing each other as partners signifies that a relationship is special. Keeping

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secrets is an expression of loyalty, although kids find this difficult to do for long.

Close relationships change quickly in these years, much to the disappointment of a child, but new attachments form just as fast. Acceptance and popularity are important, and kids between ages six and eleven first experience the pain of rejection, as when they don't receive an invitation to a party. They also are quick to reject, however, and their judgments of others can be harsh and unforgiving.

Groups become central in social relating, with some of them formal and organized, and others created extemporaneously. Scout troops and sports teams, cliques and clubs are now worth belonging to, but young children are often so interested in the laws that govern behavior that they spend all their time drawing up elaborate sets of rules for clubs that never have a first meeting.

"That's not fair" and the concept of equality dominate relationships in the middle childhood years, particularly among siblings, and parents are often asked to make judgments that will equalize things for a brother and sister. A more flexible and compassionate justice will take years to develop.

Rules are concrete, and thought is dominated by the cognitive stage of concrete operations, which is why warnings are not useful in protecting children from sexual predators. Kids are told to never to get into a car or go somewhere with a stranger, but then a person invites them into his house when they are selling door to door, and the rule seems irrelevant. Cognitive flexibility and the capacity to generalize will not develop fully until high school.

Play among children of different ages doesn't remain harmonious for long, because the skills at each age make it hard to find compatible playmates in different age groups. Children need a level playing field in their recreational activities, and the "big kid" usually makes it hard for the younger child to use his limited skills. When ages are mixed, it is hard for a younger child to avoid manipulation and to withdraw if he feels overwhelmed.

Play offers the opportunity for kids to learn about their surroundings, other children, and themselves. But play must be

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protected from the domination of older, more powerful kids, and so it requires adult supervision for those times when immature skills become overwhelmed and an adult is needed to insure peace.

Sometimes there is sexual play among children involving regression to earlier times, when toddlers played in the toilet or tried to take off their clothing. Bathroom humor is popular in middle childhood, because it represents a forbidden and “naughty” aspect of kids’ lives. Without anybody ever saying so directly, most kids understand that bathroom functions are not conversation for polite company, which is why the subject makes kids giggle.

Interest in other people is the beginning of the drive to belong, and figuring out rules is a way to join in safely and to determine who else belongs. But belonging carries the risk of rejection, and middle-aged children learn the pain of ostracism, when a team or a club does not include them.

Originally children belonged to the family, which held their entire allegiance, and it was in this context that children defined themselves. When kids have an enduring sense that they belong to a stable and predictable family which values and protects them, the future looks very promising. At about age eleven or at the beginning of puberty, kids look outside the family and develop a yearning to belong to the larger tribe of people their age. If family life has been sane and secure, they can move out into the world confidently.

The sense of belonging is disrupted by sexual exploitation within the family, because a child then has a dirty secret that must be kept from others. To get a child to keep abuse secret, the predator may first lure the child into a web of illicit activities, including alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, or pornography. A child can then be persuaded that he has been a willing participant in forbidden acts, and will be blamed by parents they are disclosed.

Under these circumstances, a child may easily feel himself too soiled to be loved and accepted by his family, and so family bonds are weakened by the child’s guilt and shame and by his continuing relationship with the predator. In normal development, parent-child connections become much looser between ages sixteen and twenty as a young person grows out of the family and

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lays the foundation for a self-reliant adulthood. When a child is emotionally separated from his parents prematurely by sexual secrets, his alienation makes it hard for him to trust parental nurturing and teaching. Like the tree that can't take root, his psychological growth can be permanently stunted.

Children learn how to belong to groups by copying adults or talking over how to get along. They will continue to do this until adolescence, when great surges of daring cause them to disregard parental advice and instead look to other kids as models. Children between six and twelve lay down an internal set of rules that determine right from wrong in accordance with community standards. They learn to feel anxiety about the acceptance of their own behavior and to recognize when other children are behaving wrongly. They can be outraged when other kids break rules and upset adults, and they may say that they understand something just to please an adult, particularly if the adult is a favorite.

Because kids use every experience to learn about the world, what do they learn from forced sex? Perhaps the most obvious lesson is that adults are not always what they seem, and trusting others can be risky. Research tells us that abused children have more difficulty with friendships, both making friends and keeping them, and so they may avoid social situations and appear quite shy. Understanding adults is a challenge to kids under the best of circumstances, but when grownups make kids engage in sexual activities, it becomes impossible. Children know that adults kiss and hug each other in ways they don't with children. A sense of betrayal is often the result of exploitation because the child recognizes that the adult's attention to the child has a purpose and that his interest is not genuine.

Powerlessness is also a part of forced sex, because a child can't oppose an adult's psychological or physical control. Kids try to avoid future abuse, but often their efforts are based on very limited understanding. A child may conclude that a teacher is dangerous only if you go on his camping trips and assume that he's safe when he gives you a ride home from after-school activities.

Sexual victimization makes other people's behavior seem chaotic because a child cannot figure out the contingencies that

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lead to sexual assault, so she can never feel confident in her ability to protect herself. This is not true with many other aspects of a youngster's dealings with people. A young girl may learn that the baby-sitter gets mad if you interrupt her television watching, and that mom is mean when she has a headache; but these things make a kind of rudimentary sense. It makes no sense at all that the elderly neighbor repeatedly gives you money and asks you to take off your underpants so he can look at your private parts.

This random quality of the unpleasant experiences causes problems for a child during this life stage because his sense of inadequacy is very strong, and he feels intense guilt, shame, and isolation when he can't cope successfully with something new. There is very little a youngster can bring to bear which can help him understand or endure an adult who wants the child to handle his sex organs.

Healthy sexual interplay for adults involves a large component of emotional sharing and a smaller part of genital stimulation. Exploitative sexual activity usually focuses solely on physical gratification, with little interpersonal sensitivity or exchange. The essential nature of sexual abuse is very different from healthy sexual relating. Sexual victimization involves treating the other person as a prop for one's own sexual release. Dissociative sex is a mental state in which erotic stimulation is split off from human relating and involves primarily a relationship with oneself and one's fantasies.

Dissociative sex is highly addictive, because arousal becomes linked to a few triggers and does not vary with the intricacies of a human dyad. There is often a rigid or ritualistic character to genital behavior that occurs in dissociative sexual responses, and the perpetrator pays little attention to the other person. As a sex offender becomes increasingly dependent on dissociated sex instead of relationships, the ability to deal sensitively with another human being diminishes. Relating to a real person and meshing needs and communications becomes increasingly difficult, with the result that the predator becomes more lonely and isolated.

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This pattern of sexual behavior originates in emotional isolation, which is different from solitude because it can occur within established relationships or a supportive social network. Social isolation stems from the inability of a person to recognize and communicate intimate thoughts and feelings to others and to recognize similar experiences in them. In this context, sexual needs are acted out in ways that may provide gratification but increase feelings of alienation.

Sexual arousal in these circumstances may occur in response to fantasy, erotic material, or pornography and lead to sexual release. This sequence is repeated and serves to condition the person's sexual arousal so that it occurs only in this sequence, making social relating more disconnected. Children become involved in this sequence by chance or by the adult's choice, but because of their very limited emotional and intellectual development, they are easier partners than healthy adults. Often in abusing a child, a molester is acting out a favorite fantasy with the child as a prop, much like a dildo or other mechanical aid.

Sex without an interpersonal connection isolates rather than connects a person to others, and this is what children experience as part of forced sex. The other person has no interest in the child's experience and offers little in the way of relating, so the child often feels used up and discarded when the sexual episode ends. The person who initially seemed so charming and attentive has little use for a youngster after sexual gratification is achieved.

Because a youngster cannot understand this experience, she blames herself and feels guilt and shame for the unpleasant outcome. The stigma of sexual abuse also adds greatly to a child's sense of being beyond the pale. Kids know that something about sex with adults is wrong, although they don't often understand who is wrong, and it is easy for them to feel it is their wrong because it happens to them in secret.

Children are influenced by the adults they spend time with, and episodes of sex with an adult give the predator a special and powerful place in a child's mind. No matter how many years after the abuse, a child remembers who exploited her. This is illustrated

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by the surveys of adults who invariably recall if they were victims of sex crimes and who the perpetrators were.

The communications a child receives from a child molester during sexual activity are often confusing and disturbing. They are also likely to be untrue, because there is no convincing argument to be made for a child to submit to forced sex and keep it secret. So when a perpetrator says, "*If you loved me, you would do this,*" a loving grandchild may feel deeply confused because she doesn't do this with her other grandparents. "*God wants you to do this,*" a youngster hears, and she thinks, *So how come they don't teach me this in Sunday school?* Kids have ways of coping with an adult's deception that may not serve as a good foundation for later growth. As a result, youngsters may doubt their ability to make sense of the world and limit their trust of adults.

Fear leads to calculations of risk and probability. When a priest says, "*If you tell, your parents won't believe you,*" a child must evaluate whether this is true, and what happens if it is. Similarly, if an older cousin says, "*If you tell, I'll kill you,*" a child will try to figure out if this can actually happen. These are adult calculations that must be made by a very young mind.

Sexual abuse is a complicated issue for children during middle childhood, sometimes resulting in distractible, inattentive behavior. It is an overload on a young psyche that has not had the time to develop the interpersonal skills to make a competent response. Sexual predators claim they are attracted by a child's innocence, but it is usually the child's inadequacy that draws them, for it gives the predator enormous and disproportionate power.

Families are the launch pad for human beings, and it is in this setting that we learn all of the practical skills required for life as well as learning behavior and character. There are many theories about how character develops, but most would agree that it is the warm security of a stable family that makes it possible for a child to absorb parental values. These standards are communicated repeatedly in behavior instructions like *Don't hit people. Use words. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Tell the truth.* Through repeated reminders, explanations, corrections and elaborations, a child absorbs the family's principles, and they

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become part of his working rules for arranging behavior and choosing responses. Sex crimes against kids disrupt this process in a number of ways. They shatter the organized direction of behavior, introduce unhealthy strategies for child control, and produce disordered psychological responses.

Learning Behavioral Control

The family is a teaching ground, a working organization that develops a stable set of ways to deal with life and one another. Teaching children how to behave appropriately is a part of productive discipline, which is primarily educational and only occasionally corrective. Discipline works best when it springs from clear goals and healthy objectives. Young children learn that they must adhere to a prescribed bedtime because it is important to rest so that they feel good in the morning. The sensibility of the rule rather than the authority figure eventually determines their behavior.

When there is forced sex in the household, the organized direction of behavior becomes unbalanced because now there are other unspoken priorities that have come to intrude. A sexual predator will strive to have time alone with a child with the result that bedtime may be changed, or the abusive adult presses a child to deceive parents about the sexual activity. In disrupting the overall structure, the caring and rationality that had driven the system break up into a fragmented set of directions for child behavior. The priority motivating the adults is no longer a child's welfare but now includes the objectives of isolating and controlling the child for criminal purposes.

When there is forced sex outside the household, it replaces a child's natural loyalty to his parents with fear of the child molester. By requiring the youngster to keep secrets, to deceive, and to engage in physical behavior that parents would not permit, the child molester estranges a youngster from his family and replaces his parents as his primary emotional connection. But this is a shallow caretaking because the molester has no interest in the child's overall development and will abandon him when he no

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longer fits into the preferred age category. By conning parents into making their offspring available, the child molester further traps a youngster because it appears that the parents are allied with him, and the youngster no longer has primary standing with them.

Psychological Control Mechanisms

Control of the child becomes imperative for a sexual predator, so that instead of explaining and teaching appropriate behavior, a child has to be driven into compliance and submission. Open communication is a danger in a home where there is child sexual abuse. Personal attacks, threats, withdrawal of love, guilt, shame, and any other means are used to make sure that a child does as directed. There may be an urgency attached to these situations because of the limited time frame in which the abuse must be arranged and because of its essential pathology.

The tactics for manipulating a child victim are never healthy ones because the goal is to harm the youngster while deceiving others. Even without the physical consequences of sex crimes, the distorted interpersonal framework necessary to manipulate a child is independently damaging. Children hear things in these circumstances that are untrue, such as:

If you tell, your mother will send you to a home for bad kids.

You made me do this.

Doesn't this feel good? Don't you love doing this?

If you loved me, you'd rub me the way I like.

I would never do anything to hurt you.

Young children, no matter how sturdy, deal poorly with these types of conditions, and the result is often psychological symptoms. The excessive control required for forced sex to continue interferes with a developing sense of autonomy, and children substitute other forms of coping for realistic self-reliance.

Sometimes abuse shows itself in seemingly unrelated behavior. Boys experience more delays in development and more

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aggressive behavior in the preschool years than girls do when abused, and this probably shows up as problem behavior in middle childhood with the beginning of school.

Sometimes it is the general demeanor of a child that registers the change in his circumstances, so that a youngster may seem unconnected to others, and may evidence trancelike behavior, forgetfulness mood shifts, and flights into fantasy. This type of behavior may resemble aspects of ADHD, and it takes skillful exploration to distinguish them.

Sexually abused children show more dissociative responses, and denial and dissociation are the major psychological defenses of early incest. These two are among the most primitive of psychological defenses, and they indicate the inability of the conscious mind to absorb the trauma of the unavoidable. The mind, in effect, draws a curtain over the experience, so that the child is not connected to it. These are internalizing responses, where a child adjusts himself inside to be able to stay afloat emotionally.

As a youngster grows up and has varied life experiences, these difficulties may resolve themselves. More often, they form the basis for later problems, such as substance abuse, anxiety disorders, depression, or behavioral disorders. Of critical importance is the length of the abuse, its duration, and the predator's relation to the child.

There also may be chronic problems that persist throughout life in the form of an impaired spirit. For example, the altar boy victimized by the parish priest, who then suffers shame, guilt, secrecy, and religious confusion may experience severe chronic problems. In childhood, a youngster forms a moral picture of himself, and the conclusions he draws from being violated by a representative of his faith can be profound. Because children experience sexual exploitation alone and don't talk it over with anyone, the experience becomes intensified.

The shock of a sexual assault can be strong enough to produce signs of a stress disorder following trauma. These signs include repeated experiences of the event in memories, dreams, flashbacks, or reactions to associated cues or places. Avoidance and numbing, which block off recollections, are also indicators.

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Problems in concentration, sleeping, anger, or repeated complaints of illness may also be indicators of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) generated by sexual attack. These are problems surrounding the impact of an experience and integration of the related feelings and meaning. In effect, in PTSD the events are being vomited back up out of the psyche.

The more serious of adult psychological disorders, including borderline personality and multiple personality disorder, generally include a

Traumatic Sexualization:

- **First experiences with sex are assaultive**
- **Significant physical and/or emotional pain**
- **Lack of information and understanding of events**
- **No social support**

history of sexual victimization because these dysfunctions are profound injuries to a healthy and integrated sense of oneself. Somatization disorder and eating disorders, which involve delusional beliefs about one's body, and substance abuse are also seen in adults with a history of child sexual abuse.

When youngsters are also sexual predators, the psychological picture becomes very complex. In these cases, children externalize inner conflicts and act them out on other kids. In these circumstances, children show marked disturbances in dealing with sexual stimuli, which may involve touching of the genitals of children, adults, or animals, or seeking complex sexual activity with children or adults.

This type of behavior indicates the traumatic sexualization of a child, instead of the gradual and long-term, healthy sexual development that normally occurs through adolescence and early adulthood. Traumatic sexualization distorts the development of oneself as a healthy sexual being. Sexual associations become conditioned to stimuli first encountered in childhood. A child's sexual associations may be linked to fear and dread, or to getting special favors or control over others, rather than to loving, intimate bonds with peers. A youngster may touch an animal's sex parts, ask others to have sex, or insert objects into the rectum or vagina.

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It may be that when children become sexual predators, their behavior is a psychological attempt to master trauma by repeating and perpetrating the crimes on others, with the victim now in control. In psychoanalytic terms, this is identification with the aggressor, a way of preserving a fragile ego under siege.

Children with sexual behavior problems do many of these things with great frequency, and other things as well, such as attempting to undress other children. Their behavior indicates a profound disruption of the parent-child relationship and very serious family dysfunction. The possibility of sexual abuse, neglect, hostility, and violence is high in families where children act out sexually, and there are additional risks from aggression.

Depending on the duration and type of abuse, sexual assaults on children can have a very powerful effect on the development of character; both in the immediate production of psychological symptoms and in the long-term impact of the toxic context that gave rise to the abuse.

**CHAPTER SEVEN:
PROTECTING KIDS IN CYBERSPACE**

On 10-23-02, the FBI's Exploited Child Unit received a report from concerned parents in Miami that a man was harassing their daughter by email and by phone after she had befriended him. Investigators seized the suspect's computer and found that he was a sex offender who had been communicating with 150 potential victims online and had assaulted eight of them. The seventy-one-year-old suspect was charged with thirteen felony counts of child molestation, attempted child molestation and attempted manufacturing of child pornography.

Internet crime is a growth industry, and it is amazing that there are so many crooks who can learn its complex technology, sometimes far in advance of law enforcement. Online crimes of all types have increased as criminals find new and creative ways to use PCs and peripherals to perform illegal activities.

Online criminal activity occurs in virtually every area of law enforcement, including online attacks on corporations, through theft of data, files, patented information, customer lists, and online extortion, where criminals demand money to prevent destruction of computer capabilities. These crimes are not geographically limited, which makes the problem much more complicated for law enforcement. It may be the Russian mob or a South American hacker who is launching the assault, or it may be somebody just next door.

A child at home may seem safe from sexual predators because parents can keep the door locked and prevent anybody from reaching him. But simultaneously he may be developing a relationship with an online criminal who can figure out when he is alone by using information gained from the Internet. High-tech pedophiles are creative in using the emerging capabilities of

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electronics to serve their criminal goals. Child molesters can now operate in a larger realm because the Internet puts millions of children within reach. Fascination with technology, combined with immaturity, makes kids easy targets. Sexual predators reduce their exposure risk when they hunt for victims online, since their activities cross international borders and legal jurisdictions, making apprehension more complicated.

The Internet also reduces the individual isolation of child molesters because they can connect with one another, offering support and information. They can also learn from others' mistakes by sharing stories about arrests and prosecutions. This type of contact used to be available only when sexual predators were housed together as inmates. Now, online contact offers communication routes which law enforcement cannot monitor.

The FBI's Most Wanted list is the ultimate in criminal notoriety, and it has come to include online predators. Michael Scott Bliss is wanted for multiple sexual assaults against a nine-year-old female victim in Vermont that were filmed on videotape and then converted to video files for Internet transmission. Bliss has a violent criminal history toward children and has been incarcerated for aggravated assault with a baseball bat against kids. As with most Internet predators, his crimes include acts against children and then electronic transmission of those acts as child pornography.

When kids go online, they are joining a community that includes Bliss and people like him. Sometimes it becomes obvious that a person is trying to make illicit contact with a child through the questions that are asked or other indicators. More often, a child becomes a target without his awareness so that when he visits a website information about him is collected and stored. Although the estimates are that one child in five receives an online sexual solicitation each year, it is not known how much information is covertly collected on kids.

The Internet is also a way to build databases of children to be put to use as the opportunity arises. One grim enterprise involved the gathering of information about children from local newspapers, including achievements in sports or music,

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nicknames, home addresses, and other data, which was then combined in a catalogue and sold online to predators. The information was used to gain entry to children's homes and to assault them.

Although kids are told not to give out personal information on the Internet, this is scant protection against a skilled criminal tracing keystrokes as a child logs on to a seemingly safe website. There are other means as well to gain information about kids, many of them designed to circumvent parental cautions. Children are warned not to give out their home phone numbers in dealings on the Internet, but offenders may ask a child to call collect, or they may provide a toll-free 800 number for the child to use. When a child calls, caller ID gives the predator the child's phone number, and by using a cross-indexed phone directory, the predator can ascertain where the child lives and get directions using online services. Sexual crimes on the Internet are a growth industry, with new marketing approaches, pyramid schemes, and other attempts to tap into a very lucrative worldwide market.

While children and teenagers explore the Internet and delight in the newfound freedom of the experience, at the same time sexual predators search for victims. Technological advances bring many changes in the culture and in the transition to a new form of civilization there are unavoidable dislocations and disruptions.

Humans protect themselves by visually scanning their surroundings and looking for danger signals, so that a suspicious-looking person may be a sign of risk. Auditory scanning also helps people to stay safe as they listen for sounds in the night or the unfamiliar voice on the phone. The Internet offers no such signals, and scanning must be based on semantic sensitivities that are far more complex and are learned later in development.

An email message that reads, "*Hi, did you go to my elementary school?*" may have a number of possible meanings, including: *Were we students together as young children?* or *Would you like to buy something I want to sell you?* or *How can I make contact with you to commit a crime?*

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All of these meanings have to be deduced by the reader of the email, and there is no context to provide cues. The interpretation of the message *Hi, did you go to my elementary school?* would be different if it were offered in person at a school reunion or at a bar late at night.

On the Internet, there is no facial expression or body language, so that the interpretation of a message depends on the reader's sophistication. Young children are very literal and usually take messages at face value, so that teaching them to interpret semantically without an adult's wide experience is virtually impossible.

Although children are often fascinated by the possibilities of the Internet, adults rarely have the same interests and may leave children alone to deal with this new realm. There isn't much space for two people to look at a computer monitor anyway, so this seems meant to be a solo activity.

Kids themselves invent new activities with the new technology. In fact, it was young people who invented the Internet as a social force, using it on college campuses to connect with one another so that even Bill Gates had to take notice and begin to develop it. Kids' behavior on the Internet is often a copy of offline behavior so that comments scrawled in the school restrooms may be put on chatrooms. But graffiti like, "*Call Katie for a good time,*" circulates worldwide and reaches many people beyond the schoolyard when posted on an Internet chat room.

The Separate Worlds of Children and Parents

Because of differences in maturity and experience, children and adults have always had difficulty understanding one another. Adults usually bridge the gap by referring to their own experiences growing up and in the best cases, trying to empathize and help young people. In those conversations that begin with, "*When I was your age,*" parents assume that childhood is always the same, no matter the era.

The current world that surrounds kids bears little relation to the childhood world of their parents, or to their parents' adult

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world either. The generations-in-conflict theme of earlier times has disappeared because their parents are often completely irrelevant to the experiences of young people.

For many kids, life centers on electronic media and related social contacts. This framework changes the way that youngsters see the world, and Internet usage itself changes a child's communication patterns and daily habits. Because kids are not good observers of themselves, they cannot separate the causal links between their daily habits and their emotions. Parents may be largely unaware of these influences, because even if they limit online time at home (a rare occurrence), kids have access to the Internet at school, at friend's homes, at libraries, and through portable devices, so it is difficult for parents to monitor the actual time spent.

Perhaps the most powerful assumption in Internet usage is that it is private and there can be connections with others that are controllable and secret. Young people have good reason to believe that they can keep their Internet activities concealed from their parents, because even when the computer is in the family room, kids have online codes and ways of communicating that adults usually can't decipher, such as AML (all my love) and LYL (love you lots). By the time parents become familiar with the hardware, software, or language, usually the technology has changed once again.

The belief that online conversations are private leads kids to reveal details of their lives and to venture into areas where they may not venture offline. In earlier times, a young person might have taken personal questions to an older sibling or a family doctor. Now, if a youngster wants to ask, "*Am I gay?*" he can ask online and get information, but at the same time he may unwittingly invite a sexual solicitation.

A cell phone call with a picture or text message, an instant message, or an email exchange may all seem private between two correspondents but these can be accessed by outsiders much like a conversation on a public telephone can be overheard. Worse, a sophisticated snoop can trace information provided in the message's code to learn details of the sender and his life.

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Kids find it easier to raise sensitive topics with anonymous sources, for example, whether one might have a sexually transmitted disease, because if this is discussed with a parent there may be consequences. The Internet gives young people far more control over their lives than has ever been possible before, and so they seem willing to incur some risks to preserve the hegemony that reduces their dependence on parents. No one envisaged the power that kids would acquire through technological advances. Not only do new technologies give youngsters far more independence, but also the kids learn to use them faster than adults do, so parents don't often grasp the potential uses of new hardware and software. The generation gap was never quite so wide before.

This divide is likely to stretch even wider as technology evolves to a point where communication operates at the speed of thought. This will occur in the near future, with software under development that responds to eye movements instead of keyboarding. With the proliferation of devices that extend the power of computers, soon everyone will have instant visual and auditory access to people everywhere, including children.

Along with these highly publicized advances, however, come backroom opportunities for those clever enough to see the illicit uses that can be made of technological innovation. Although many users believe that deleting a file or an email message erases its existence, in fact, it merely stores it out of view. Any Word, Excel or PowerPoint document in Windows, for example, carries with it a list of everyone who ever worked on the document, as well as personal information about those individuals and any comments they might have made.

Placing telephone calls over the Internet, a cheap new form of communication, also allows a great deal of information to become available. A capable investigator or hacker can access messages of this type with little trouble. This means that as a corporation develops its technological resources, it may forget about its early files but a skilled hacker can reach these and use the information they store such as credit card numbers.

When the skills of criminal hackers target children who are essentially orphaned by their parent's technological ignorance, the

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results can be disastrous. Kids may learn to use email, video mail, online voice mail and instant messaging, but predators learn how to use kids' habits to their advantage. These devices are open to eavesdroppers, and sex offenders can listen in on conversations that kids believe are private. Sniffer programs allow a predator to listen to online traffic and pick up leads for his activities.

When kids illegally download software through a file-sharing program, hackers can gain access to their computer through the download. Youngsters often like to create their own websites and place personal information and photos on them. Websites like myspace.com seem to offer kids a way to join in with other young people. When youngsters are involved in any of these activities, they venture into a community of strangers with no parental protection.

The use of blogs to give personal and daily information about one's life has become increasingly popular as a creative or journalistic enterprise. Kids seem to like these but when published on the Internet, as they always are, they invite responses from strangers.

For every new online capability that emerges, techie bad guys figure out how to use it to exploit children. The night mode setting on a digital camera for example allows picture taking in the dark so that sleeping children can be photographed nude. Kids themselves can use Windows Explorer to encrypt their files and so prevent anyone from seeing what they've downloaded and stored.

File sharing programs like *FolderShare* allows free and secure user-to-user folder transmissions, which essentially puts them below the radar of security checkers that monitor email. *HJSplit*, a free utility, facilitates transfer of large files to CDs or other media. The effect of these is that a youngster can wipe a hard drive clean and store files elsewhere, returning them at his leisure and shielding them from parental notice. Sexually curious behaviors by youngsters are not unknown to parents, but parents are accustomed to looking for them visually. When boys hide girlie magazines, parents know to look under the bed, but where does one look online or inside a youngster's computer?

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Even with all of the sophisticated electronic technology currently available, the most potent device for sexual exploitation of young people is still grooming by predators. After making contact, a child molester can present himself as a kind person interested in kids. Expanding the contact, a predator can move to emailing a personal picture (probably not of himself) or providing personal information like a telephone number. The pattern is similar to offline predators and usually involves gradually desensitizing the victim to sexual exchanges and providing pornography as a way to reduce inhibitions.

A predator who has personal information about a child can use it to build rapport or ask for help. For example, child of divorce might be more compassionate to a stranger on the Internet who claims to be a child suffering through his parents' divorce.

The Internet can do lots of nifty things from a kid's point of view, like tracking a dollar bill by its serial numbers (wheresgeorge.com) or chartering a private jet for the trip of your life (charterauction.com), so it's not surprising that kids find the Internet a great place to play. Adults, too find the Internet offers boundless entertainment and enlightenment, like the parenting coach [not free] that will answer all your questions about raising kids [aboutmykids.com] or even give you a way to figure out whether the website you're looking at is what it claims to be (corestree.com/spoofstick).

For predators who want to use the Internet to buy, sell, or trade child pornography, the opportunities are endless. The ability to record auditory and visual data, add special effects, encrypt it, and transfer it is limited only by the skill level of the sex offender. Clever pedophiles can disguise pornographic images so that they are not recognizable and sometimes not human, which may make them legal.

Although most computer users worry about viruses and worms that may interrupt or crash their computer's operations, online predators can bypass the protective programs that PC users typically employ. *Spyware* programs deliver viruses and worms that users sometimes unwittingly agree to have installed on their PC as well as those that install themselves beyond the user's

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awareness. Even devices that seem quite safe have a dark side when under the control of criminals. Cell phones contain an *E911 chip*, which provides lifesaving GPS technology to help emergency services locate callers in trouble, but they also make it possible for adults to locate kids making cell phone calls. *Phishing* attacks are fake email messages that send users to fake websites in order to steal passwords and personal information. *Pharming* involves placing bad code into a PC so that when the user tries to access a certain website, the bad code instead sends him to a site that will install spyware on his PC. Both of these attacks come from opening attachments from an unknown sender; and for a youngster, an attachment may seem like a free gift (for example, “*Click here to get math homework done in less than a minute...*”).

How Kids Use the Internet at Different Ages

In thinking about the Internet, it's easy to fall into two types of oversimplifications. The first is to assume that the Internet screen is just a device in a room, and the second is to confuse children with adults. Teenagers often look like adults, and it is easy to assume that they have an adult's maturity.

Children are constantly performing scientific experiments on their surroundings, such as producing an interesting spectacle like making the dog bark or the baby laugh, and it is causal links that they seek to understand or what leads to what. Adults, in contrast, work mainly on assumptions formed in childhood and applied throughout adulthood. A large part of understanding causation is narcissistic, because it involves figuring out how the self can make something happen and what part the self plays in causation.

Video games capture this interest for children, who try to figure out how to use their skills against those of the game's software. And when a human can master these skills, there is generally a rush of good feeling. People like to be competent and will work hard for mastery, but if a situation seems to require too much risk or skill, they may avoid it entirely. The most potent

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learning experiences are those where the challenge is just beyond the limits of the learner but within his reach.

How do human beings deal with the challenges of electronic media? Those born before 1970 are more inclined to avoid using computer programs and peripheral devices, largely because they grew up without them. Technological challenges may seem overwhelming particularly if the person first encountered software in the days before it was user-friendly. For those born after 1970, electronic media have become increasingly familiar and friendly, so that even very small children learn to manipulate electronic devices with some level of success. Because of their exposure, it's easier to learn to use these devices effectively and creatively.

The drive from birth is to experiment and to fool with things. This is why most parents have a difficult time with young children in stores, where they touch everything. The way that kids understand what happens in their experiments is different from their parents' understanding. A parent may hope that a child "learns a lesson" when an experiment goes wrong, but kids learn many things and often not what parents hope they will.

Preschool children try to advance their understanding of the world by physically touching objects and seeing what happens. Clay is fascinating because it can turn into so many things, but so can a bowl of dog food. Small children use their senses and their motor abilities to figure out the world, asking questions such as, "*What happens if you poke it?*" "*What happens if you throw it?*" And from this the world becomes familiar and predictable.

When objects are not visible to small kids they cease to exist, which is why separation from a parent can be so painful. As kids get closer to kindergarten, they become skilled at pretending. Language develops, and with it the ability to think about things in the abstract. Past and future are integrated into a child's thinking, so that he can have memories and expectations.

Thinking at this stage is limited because kids center on their own thought and find it impossible to see things from another person's viewpoint. They also see themselves as the center of most things either when good things happen or when bad things happen.

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Elementary school kids develop the capacity for abstract reasoning, for doing experiments in their head on things that aren't present. Appearances are not so often deceiving for this age because children can hold onto an idea even when the present circumstances seem to belie it. This is more of an achievement than it may seem and is illustrated by the problem of determining which is heavier, a pound of iron or a pound of feathers.

True adult thinking emerges after puberty, as the central nervous system refines and develops itself into structures that will last a lifetime. In adult life, there will be plenty of tasks requiring logical abilities to deal with abstractions, such as completing a standard tax return. These involve the ability to think hypothetically, to reason beyond the particulars of a situation, and arrange classifications and combinations that are novel. This level of thinking also includes lots of experiments, but they are more likely done in a careful and systematic fashion, so that the conclusions are more often accurate. Differences in maturity, culture, education, and experience may enhance or limit these intellectual developments.

Kids' Internet Habits

Youngsters see the Internet as a field for learning and communicating, with the goal of doing something new, much the same way they would view an old typewriter or a barn full of old stuff; that is, an interesting place to poke around.

Preschoolers like to see what happens on the monitor in order to see if they can change things. Thinking at this stage involves a good deal of magic, and what appears online can seem like magic to a small child. Toddlers fluctuate between seeing a monitor as a television screen or as a computer game because without reading skills, there isn't an awful lot that makes sense on a PC. Few kids at this age have independent access to a computer, and their time online is typically supervised by adults who are concerned about hardware or software damage.

Parents may try to teach safe practices to children of this age, but preschoolers absorb these as safety facts rather than as

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safety rules. When a child is taught not to talk to strangers, he may be able to repeat this rule, and he may not talk to the stranger immediately present; but young children lack the ability to generalize what they learn. When preschoolers are online, their limited reading skills may actually protect them.

It is when they reach elementary school that children become more viable targets for online exploitation, for they are better able to read what is presented and to understand its content. At this age children can play games, participate in contests, give out information about themselves, and be taken in by online scams.

This is a period when the wish to control things becomes a primary drive. Being able to manipulate email and instant messaging can seem like a very great achievement to an elementary school youngster, and receiving an email in return is thrilling. It is very hard for children in these years to conceptualize in the abstract and to imagine, for example, that a person who claims to be another fourth-grade girl is, in fact a fifty-year-old man.

Explaining that this is a risk to a youngster will probably frighten her, but it will not make her wiser because she has not yet developed the fluid conceptual framework necessary for good judgment. She is more likely to conclude that the specific activity of this day is dangerous. What's more, an elementary school child may gain great gratification from pleasing adults, and so she may agree with all of an adult's safety directions. When asked if she understands, she may be able to parrot the words but she is unlikely to apply the lessons to a fresh situation.

The computer has the same appearance as a television set, and so many of the assumptions about television are often transferred to a computer monitor. Kids learn that TV is not real, and that what is seen there cannot touch them or hurt them. Although a television movie can have scary images, these can't really threaten anybody.

Transferring this information to the use of email and instant messaging is dangerous because with these communication devices, it becomes possible for a predator to make direct contact with a child. Television shows like "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood"

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and “Sesame Street,” where the major characters speak directly to children, can be imitated by online predators in a manner that easily deceives kids and gets them to reveal information that puts them at risk.

A sexual predator can exploit elementary school children by making contact that begins as a seemingly friendly relationship and one that can be developed further over time. To kids of this age, the familiar becomes the trusted, because children reason from concrete to concrete. An adult knows that Jimmie on the Internet has sent numerous instant messages, but this is no guarantee that he is a safe character. In contrast, a young child reasons instead that Jimmie was safe last time he sent a message, so he is probably safe with this contact, whether it be on the Internet, by telephone, by mail, or at the front door.

Sometimes the person making the contact is someone the child knows from an offline connection. This could be a camp counselor, church youth leader, neighbor or coach. Under the guise of distributing information about recreational activities, a predator can send messages that have as their purpose the development of a sexual relationship with a child, gradually introducing sexual topics as a way to desensitize him to the subject.

Puberty is a period of cognitive transition from concrete operations to formal operations in thought. The reasoning of middle school kids, who operate in both these ways, is complicated by physical changes that make them far more sensitive to interpersonal issues. Natural curiosity about sexual matters leads to more exploration on the Internet, in part because kids can’t believe that adults do the weird sexual things that they’ve heard about.

Sexual predators may target young adolescents by tapping into the proclivities of middle school kids and giving them access to cigarettes, drugs, or alcohol, creating a framework in which both the youngster and the adult seem to be having adolescent adventures. In fact, what is happening is that an adult criminal is grooming a child.

A middle-schooler hasn’t yet developed the abilities to think in terms of *what-if*: *What if other kids saw us? What if my parents found out?* Because of their dependence on concrete

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concepts, the reality manipulation by the predator can coincide with concrete perceptions and seem like the truth. *If the coach says that athletes need to masturbate and need to be instructed on how to do so, then that must be true*, thinks an-eleven-year-old.

By the high school years, thinking has developed to a point where formal logic helps to interpret others' behavior. Exploring all the action alternatives before deciding what to do is now possible. This is offset by the powerful emotional changes that coincide with intellectual growth. Although a girl may be intellectually aware that the school janitor could be a child molester, it may be more emotionally appealing to believe that he has fallen in love with her.

The latter interpretation of the behavior fits much better with an adolescent girl's mental framework because she may fall in love with the person, and it is appealing to think of herself in an adult relationship, and more so if it is a forbidden one. The ability to reason and use logic has emerged at the same time that puberty has brought the hormonal surges and emotional tides that make it less likely that logic will be fully employed.

Growing Up on the Internet

In a survey by the Kaiser Foundation, kids in school were asked about their experiences with electronic media, including broadcast, cable and satellite TV; VCR players; DVD players; audiotapes; CDs; digital recordings; PCs; email; games; instant messaging; music and video streaming; video cams; and cell phones. It was found that kids frequently multitask, using several media devices at once, so that a youngster may be researching a project for homework on the Internet, at the same

Kids have access to many media devices, and according to a survey by Kaiser, a typical youngster lives in a home containing:

- **Three TV sets,**
- **Three CD/tape players,**
- **Three VCR/DVD players,**
- **Two video game consoles and**
- **A computer**

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time that the television is on, music is playing on her Ipod, and she is instant messaging while talking on her cell phone.

Media saturates American households. More than half of the kids in the Kaiser study said that a television plays most of the time in their homes, and two-thirds said that it is on during meals. This extends to younger children as well, with half of kids from ages four to six having a TV in their bedroom.

Media usage is different for males and females, as girls are more likely to use audio media, and boys are more likely to be involved with video games. Girls are also more likely to use email and instant messaging than boys. Not surprisingly, as the use of electronic media increases, the hours spent reading decrease. Kids read more when there is no television in their bedroom and when parents limit television watching. Where a television is on in the background and during meals, reading is less frequent.

Reading is important because it has an effect on schoolwork and influences grades. There is a direct correlation between use of video games and grades and as time spent gaming increases school grades drop. As grades drop, a child's self-esteem often drops as well.

Kids Don't Disclose Exposure to Internet Crime

When parents think of internet usage, they generally focus on what kids do at home, but electronic media are everywhere in the culture, so kids can log on outside the home on their own wireless peripherals, or through terminals at schools, libraries, and other places. Availability will probably continue to spread as hardware becomes less expensive. Online access is also available in homes where a youngster may visit and where it is impossible to monitor a youngster's access.

Most of what happens online is informative, enriching, or amusing, but unfortunately, twenty percent of kids each year will encounter online solicitations for sexual activity. Some of this exposure will be powerful enough to cause a youngster serious emotional upset. In the great majority of cases, kids won't tell their parents about any of these experiences, upsetting or not.

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Online solicitations are different from exposure to obscene or pornographic material. They usually involve a proposition for cybersex, in which participants verbally share sexual thoughts and descriptions of sexual acts, and may masturbate at the same time. There are often invitations to meet and have sexual activity as well.

These solicitations happen in chat room conversations (65%), but a substantial number occur in instant messenger exchanges (24%). These experiences may happen in a child's home or in a friend's home. Most often, kids don't tell anybody about this, but if they do, it is most likely to be a friend or sibling who he confides. These experiences are reported to law enforcement only three percent of the time.

Kids Give out Personal Information

There may be a paradoxical effect of public warnings about common dangers, because as people become familiar with a threat, they may feel safe in ignoring it. In the same way that a neighbor with a criminal record may fail to arouse concern after he becomes a familiar part of the neighborhood, people may become desensitized to some warnings. This could explain why it is that kids often give out personal information online. Perhaps they have heard the warning far too often for it to seem urgent.

Risk-taking behavior increases dramatically before and during puberty as part of a drive for independence in adolescence. Sharing private information online is high-risk behavior, and parents are usually not aware of it.

Kids also arrange to meet people who have become their friends through online contact. When these situations involve sexual victimization, they are termed "traveler cases." Traveler cases more often involve teenagers than younger children, because teens are more mobile and sexually curious.

Sometimes kids make friends online and the friendship is genuine on both sides. Sixteen percent of youths in the Kaiser study reported that they had formed a close friendship with somebody they met online, and that this was usually based on a common interest in areas like sports, music, and computers.

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Online relationships also offer opportunities for daring sexual behavior and seven percent of the youngsters surveyed said that they willingly talked about sex with a stranger online. Eight percent of the youngsters said that they choose to go to X-rated sites sometimes.

There are gender differences in the information that is shared over the Internet, with girls more likely to send a personal picture, and boys more often giving out information that makes them personally identifiable.

Although the NCMEC Online Victimization Survey indicates that the majority of parents have talked about Internet safety with their kids and have looked at the screen to see what kids are doing, the youngsters report something different. According to the kids, parents know little of what they do on the Internet, and offer very little discussion about Internet safety.

The obvious conclusion is either parents are not as active as they believe, or that kids are very good at evading parental supervision. There may also be bias in online surveys, because kids may be reluctant to reveal information that could limit their freedom.

Using the Internet Changes the Way Kids Relate to Others

Early research on Internet usage suggests that there may be a relationship between online activity and forms of social relating. Even when the main purpose for using the Internet is to develop friendships, people may become more withdrawn offline and more lonesome and depressed as Internet usage increases. Perhaps this is because online relationships are one-dimensional and eliminate most of the components of live relationships, such as visual images, auditory responses, tactile sensations, and body language.

Although the Internet gives the appearance of social connection, online relating is far more limited than face-to-face relationships. Interaction between humans and machines is a growing area of research focus, as people deal with voice mail and telephone menus, emails, instant messaging, and other forms of

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electronic communication in which a human may not respond from the other side.

Some researchers suggest that people may be substituting weak social ties for strong ones. Family communication and social contacts may decline with increased computer usage, and there may also be increases in depression and loneliness. But which comes first, loneliness or Internet usage?

Some research finds that depressed teenagers are more likely to talk to strangers online and to disclose personal information. Others have found that kids who had lots of conflict with their parents or were generally unhappy were more likely to have close online relationships. And even though these relationships could have been the source of tension between parents and teens, the data suggest that parents rarely know the details of their kids' Internet usage.

To say that unhappy kids seek solace in online relationships doesn't mean they are in sexually exploitative relationships. It may be that Internet conversations are a source of support and help for troubled teens. Some research finds that online communication works generally well for kids who are socially active and confident, but it works poorly for those who feel isolated. Maybe unhappy kids with limited social support turn to online contacts for help, but as their Internet usage increases they become more socially withdrawn offline.

Are kids who are sexually victimized offline more likely to be sexually exploited online? They may be more vulnerable because of the loss of self-esteem that results from sexual abuse. But the offline exploitation may function as inadvertent grooming as well, so that kids become desensitized to sexual subjects and are more vulnerable both offline and online.

Excessive Internet socializing may develop into an addiction because of a decline in overall well being. Kids and adults are more receptive to sexual solicitation when self-esteem is low. One way to define excessive Internet usage is to examine how much a youngster's social life centers on online contacts. If Internet connections merely supplement relationships with friends and family, it probably serves a useful purpose. But when the

Internet crowds out other relationships, and a youngster is spending most of his free time in front of a computer monitor, it may put him at risk.

Kids' Sexual Practices

Many young people live a substantial part of their lives in cyberspace, seeking information and relating to others through this medium. The sexual attitudes and behaviors developed offline affect Internet behavior. According to the Center for Disease Control, half of all high school students have had sexual intercourse, and more than a third had not used a condom during their last sexual intercourse experience. Nine percent of all high school students report that they had been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to and 7.4 percent had sexual intercourse for the first time before age thirteen.

Teen culture involves exchanges of sexual information, and young people seek out their peers' opinions in this realm. Websites like hotornot.com and facethejury.com have been enormously

<p>Kids' Sexual Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 50% of high schoolers have had sexual intercourse.▪ One-third used no condom during the last occurrence.▪ 9% said they were forced into sex.▪ 7.4% had sex before age thirteen.

popular because they present the opinions of other kids, often on sexual subjects.

The Internet is a useful way for kids to make friends and to find a boyfriend or girlfriend. Although most youngsters have been told not to give out personal information on the Internet, this is a common practice. Many youngsters would agree to meet an Internet connection in person as well.

Why do youngsters do these things when the dangers have been made clear to them? Adolescence is a time of risk taking and powerfully fluctuating emotions. Recent survey data indicates that in the preceding year, a third of teens had been in a fight, six percent had carried a gun on school property, and 8.5 percent had

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attempted suicide. The risks of sexual activity are obvious in the 870,000 pregnancies among teens and the three million cases of STDs that occur yearly among American teens.

Young people live with the belief that they are the primary proprietors of the Internet, and that they know it best. Kids are the innovators in cyberspace, and they are far more skilled than their parents' generation. Combined with the general naiveté of youngsters, it is easy to see why they share information about themselves which makes them vulnerable.

Substance use and abuse are common among today's young, and 28.3 percent of students nationwide report that they have had five or more drinks

in a row during the preceding thirty days; and a smaller proportion, twenty-two percent, had used marijuana. Four percent had used cocaine during the prior thirty days. If substance abuse is frequent, it probably influences decisions online as well as offline.

Adolescent sexual activity appears to be quite different from their parents' experience. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than half of teenagers aged fifteen to nineteen have engaged in oral sex, including twenty-five percent of those who have never had sexual intercourse. Earning money through sexual activity is also an option for kids, and some youngsters get involved in commercial sex while living in stable, middle-class homes. Sex is sold to classmates and sometimes to strangers in order to get money and consumer goods.

Perhaps young people have grown desensitized to risk and vulnerability because Internet risks don't immediately lead to observable public consequences for kids. Few youngsters hear of others who have been sexually victimized, for just as abuse victims don't usually tell parents, they generally don't tell other kids. Because kids can't actually see whom they are connecting with on the Internet, projection of personal expectations is likely, and it's easy to believe they are connecting with other kids their age. Going

Kids' Risky Behavior in One Year

- **One-third of teens got into fights.**
- **6 % carried a gun on school property.**
- **8.5% attempted suicide.**

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on the Internet is like going to a shopping mall full of people, and because kids ignore the adults at the mall, it's difficult to accept that adults may be watching them.

Acknowledging the invisible requires a level of abstract thinking not often available to kids. If a youngster is engaged in an Internet conversation, perhaps in a chat room or while instant messaging, it's hard to conceptualize an unseen adult stranger listening in.

Information decoded from kids' online activity can be recorded, traded, sold, or stored. Kids unskilled in coding and systems'

operations have little understanding of how easy it to geographically locate them by tracking their online activity.

Adult predators are a real danger on the Internet, but so are youthful sex offenders who may hold beliefs that influence their decisions about sexual contact with minors. Recent research on adolescent males indicates that twenty percent of eighteen-, and nineteen-year-old male teens would consider having sex with girls who are thirteen and fourteen, which is statutory rape in all states. In this study, these young men were more likely to drink alcohol, have alcohol-related problems, and have conduct disorders and poorer psychological adjustment.

Online sexual predators are often young themselves, with one survey finding that forty-eight percent were under age twenty-five. Online sex offenders are different from their offline counterparts because they have more limited social skills and more sexually deviant fantasies. Offline predators are likely to be familiar figures in a child's life, but online predators can be strangers.

When mixing ages in social settings happens offline, people sort themselves out according to age. Young adults don't normally spend time with preadolescent kids, because the maturity contrast is too obvious to onlookers. On the Internet, this visual sorting can't occur. There is no distinction by age, and people may be untruthful, so predators may portray themselves as youngsters

Kids' Substance Usage in a One-Month Period: 28.3% had five or more drinks in a row 22% used marijuana 4% used cocaine

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and youngsters may portray themselves as older than they really are.

TEENS LIVE IN A SEXUALLY SATURATED ENVIRONMENT.
According to the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood:
Eighty-three percent of the episodes of the most watched teen television shows had sexual content, and twenty percent of them referenced sexual intercourse.
Forty-two percent of the most popular songs had sexual content, and nineteen percent had descriptions of sexual intercourse.
Music videos contain an average of ninety-three sexual situations for each hour, including eleven that describe behaviors such as sexual intercourse and oral sex.

Sexual practices among kids have changed in the new millennium, with kids now having “*friends with benefits*,” meaning sexual partners without romance. “*Hooking up*” refers to sexual activity without friendship. But the ultimate in pared-down relating is to have sex on the Internet, which is called *cybersex*.

Adolescents sometimes develop relationships which are exclusively for sexual purposes. Hooking up or having friends with benefits offline may seem like a model that can be copied online. Offline relationships usually begin with information from casual encounters, and parents may have some awareness that a relationship exists. When this happens online, parents are less likely to know.

This is illustrated by the difference between the home telephone and the cell phone. When there was only one plugged-in telephone in each household, a parent could notice how much time a youngster spent on the phone, his or her tone and perhaps the subject of the conversations, and often who the callers were. All of this is impossible when kids have cell phones, because these conversations can occur anywhere and are under parental radar.

This means that the casual sexual relationships which occur offline among teens can have an online parallel, but without any of the normal supports which may help kids when these experiments

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work poorly. A willingness to engage in these types of relationships opens opportunities to sexual predators.

For kids growing up in a sexually saturated culture, the line between normal sexual behavior and illegal acts is often blurred. Kids are often unaware that sexual behavior that is voluntary and private can

appear legitimate, but that sexual activity with a minor is always a crime. This gets complicated when minors have sex with others who may or may not be minors themselves.

The results of early sexual experiences complicate a child's development. When teens are sexually exploited they are more likely to become sexually active at an earlier age. Among high school students, research indicates that seven percent of kids have been forced to do something sexual with an adult.

Youthful sexual offenders are part of the predator population and are often adolescents who target younger children. Their offenses are not often reported to police, because they are sometimes seen as kids' social conflicts rather than criminal acts. Sometimes these crimes involve more than two perpetrators, which is then termed gang rape and is more likely to be reported to law enforcement.

The Internet offers continuous sexual exposure, providing opportunities to gain information and participate in sexual activity for youngsters. Many forms of sexual activity that are illegal in the United States are available across international boundaries on the Internet, where they may be given the appearance of normalcy. Fantasies can be shared freely, with the only control resulting from the maturity and judgment of participants.

The balance between parental supervision and child independence is the core of child rearing, but on the Internet parents may have only the illusion of control. According to NCMEC's study of Internet usage, the overwhelming majority of parents have given their kids extensive guidance on safe Internet

New Language in the Technological Age

Friends with Benefits: Sexual partners without a romance

Hooking Up: Sexual partners without any relationship

Cybersex: Sexual partners online with no relationship

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practices. This included talking with kids about the risks in chatting with strangers online, giving out personal information online, connecting with sexually explicit Websites, and seeing people they met on the Internet. This appears to have little impact on young people, who do all these things anyway.

Kids use technological advances in novel ways and for purposes that may not have been envisioned by their creators, such as downloading music files. When comparing their parents' tentative and sometimes clumsy Internet usage, kids may have more faith in their own skills and ignore their parents' advice. Software that limits Internet access from a home computer can be protective, although it requires parents to be least as competent as their kids in making sure that it works properly.

Some protective software programs prevent kids from sending a name, address, phone number, or an email address to recipients. Particularly useful are programs that can be programmed for kids of different ages. Although this type of software seem to offer security, a young person (or a visiting friend) who is skilled in computer usage can circumvent these programs. As youngsters discover the workings of computer code and experiment with ways to override it, they can defuse these devices without parental awareness.

Software tagging systems that assign labels to Websites having offensive content encounter the same difficulties as movies and television shows classified in these ways. Kids find X-rated movies and they watch them. Monitoring the Internet is more difficult because of the constant changes, so that offensive language and graphic content can appear and disappear.

Search engine filters, like those used on Google, Excite, and Yahoo, use robot software, bots, spiders, and crawlers to search words on Web sites. Online sexual predators can connect kids with bad content by producing sites that list phrases like *Donald Duck* in their metatags to drive traffic to their site. They can also mix endings, substituting *.net* for *.com* to get kids to the site. In this way, kids who access a site they believe to be appropriate for children find that they are exposed to pornographic material.

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Kids' search sites, such as *Yahooligans!*, *Ask Jeeves for Kids*, or *DIG* offer safe havens for kids, but because these sites draw so many children, they also draw sexual predators, some of whom are likely to be skilled at rearranging software code. Closed systems that limit Internet access, like those in schools, seem to provide protection, but as with any technology, those who have the skills to manipulate them may also have the skills to misuse them and most schools have had experience with clever student techies who contact illicit Websites in school.

Pornography

Child pornography is more than just unpleasant images because it is the recording of the brutal treatment of children, akin to photographs of child beatings and torture. Child porn is legal

Anthony Guy Davis, 43, of Stayton, Oregon, was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for downloading child pornography after being found guilty of six counts of encouraging child sexual abuse. Images included one of an adult male having sexual intercourse with a six-year-old girl [AP 1/9/01].

evidence of criminal behavior, and it has increased dramatically with the development of the Internet and other technical advances.

Skilled criminals can use television networks, pay-per-view movies, videos of children's programs with porn clips inserted, DVDs, video games, and even library and school computers to transmit images of children under sexual assault. This

may be for commercial purposes, to sell the images, or it may be a fishing expedition to lure kids to Websites where they can be sexually victimized.

Following advances in technology, child pornography has become widely available on P2P, peer-to-peer file sharing networks like KaZaA, Morpheus, LiveWire, and Gnutella. Even though genuine efforts have been made to shield youngsters, there is no foolproof way to protect these networks from infiltration by criminals.

As the public becomes more knowledgeable about sexual crimes against children, the opportunities for child predators are

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likely to shrink. In contrast, the Internet offers new ways to access and exploit kids. The Internet is a far safer and more effective way for predators to reach children. Online activity is anonymous and sophisticated techies can access personal information from children using the Internet without anyone's awareness. For a child molester, it is far safer to have sexually explicit conversations online than it is to have them in person where one can be readily identified.

Child Pornography Victims: 62% female 59% between 12 and 17 28% between 6 and 11 13% were children under 6

The Internet can be updated immediately, so that pictures of children engaged in sexual activity can be uploaded as they are being created and then moved to another Website, CD, flash drive or email if the criminal fears discovery.

The Internet's global audience allows sexual predators to operate under the radar of American laws and to send materials from locations that cannot be found easily. Pornographic images transmitted or sold from an ocean vessel in international waters, for example, are almost impossible to intercept and shut down.

The digital quality of current child pornography is better and lasts longer than the older paper photographic materials, so that unlike magazines or photographs, these images can be preserved indefinitely and can be recombined in all sorts of ways. A particularly grim development in child pornography has been the emergence of live video streaming, which allows the instantaneous transmission of live images. This has been used by crime rings like the Orchid Club to produce live feeds of children being sexually assaulted while club members watched, gave comments, and made requests.

Another way that child pornographers escape standard controls is to create virtual or simulated images, perhaps by pasting adult faces on children's bodies or using cartoon images, which are referred to as *morphed child porn*. Recent court decisions have ruled that material that doesn't harm children in its creation is not illegal.

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The children who are used as models in pornographic material are more often female {62%} and more often adolescent, with fifty-nine percent between the ages of twelve and seventeen. A significant proportion are elementary school kids {28%}, and even preschoolers are exploited {13%}.

The major pipeline for reporting child pornography, Cybertipline {Cybertipline.com}, has grown since it was created in 1996, so that by the end of 2003 it was receiving 1,500 reports of child pornography each week. Although it may seem that child porn targets any child, twenty-five percent of victims are members of the offender's family. Sexual predators sometimes use

pictures of children engaged in sexual activity as a way to pressure kids into submission: "*See, all the cool kids do it.*"

Often kids come upon sexually explicit material by accident while surfing the net. When they do, they are most likely to see naked people, or less often, people having sex. Doing searches, typing in trustworthy addresses, or following Website links may seem like protected activities, but they can connect a youngster to these types of materials.

When kids find pornographic pictures or videos, they are most often at home, but they may be at school, in public libraries, at friends' homes, or at religious facilities. Most often, kids tell no one about these experiences, perhaps out of fear that their online roaming will be restricted.

Photographing children in graphic poses or engaged in sexual activity requires posing subjects so that they appear to be happily participating in sexual acts. This is intended to convince a viewer that this is harmless play and typical childhood activity,

***Who gets involved in child porn?
Thomas and Janice Reedy lived in an upscale Fort Worth neighborhood where neighbors say they threw all-night pool parties and where luxury cars would pull into their half-moon driveway at all hours of the night. They told neighbors they were in the computer business, which was partly true: they sold access to child pornography on Internet sites with names like "Child Rape" and "CyberLolita." Authorities say it was an international operation with 250,000 subscribers that grossed as much as \$1.4 million a month [AP 8/9/01].***

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portraying sex between a child and a dog as silly mischief, for example. Pornographic pictures can be used as a form of blackmail and photos of children naked or engaged in sexual activity, sometimes under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, can be used to intimidate and embarrass a youngster.

Because of the Internet's global nature, other nations' policies and practices become part of the American audience's experience. In Sri Lanka, for example, "Beach Boys," boy prostitutes aged eight to fifteen who are driven by poverty, offer sexual activity of all kinds, including picture taking.

Imprisoned kids used in prostitution and pornography and controlled by international crime rings constitute some of the images in child pornography available to American viewers. The level of suffering and desperation represented by these children is seldom shown in the photos and videos, where they are forced to look happy and willing.

Just as online child pornography taps into an international network of victims, so it also taps into a network of predators. Child molesters can use child pornography as a signal to locate and contact others. Online encrypted communications offer convenience and anonymity to sexual predators, who can share and improve techniques for luring children. Child molesters can seek out erotica and victims who fit their preferences, so the predator, in effect, orders up his images and sometimes actual victims according to a set of criteria, including gender, age, ethnicity, behaviors preferred, number of perpetrators, use of force, and number of children.

Porn users come in many forms, with some viewing and some creating pornographic materials. Passive users are the more numerous, and hit rates at a well-known site, "Girl Lovers," suggest that many thousands of people regularly review that page for information on girl sex-related sites. Voyeurs are different from commercial dealers who are generally entrepreneurs focused on financial gain. Dealers create, collect, and distribute child pornography and can arrange for commercial sex with live children as well.

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Pornography can be used to force children into sexual activity. Even when the pictures are innocent photographs, a skilled cyberpredator can change them so that individual characteristics are retained, and sexual activity is added to the picture. This then becomes a means of intimidating a youngster into compliance by threatening to share the pictures with parents or peers.

In the past, a distinction was made between those who fantasize about sexual activity by looking at child porn and those who act out criminal behavior, but some data indicates that sex crimes and porn may be causally linked.

In a federal prison in North Carolina, Internet sex offenders who had been convicted of child porn crimes, but not contact sex crimes with kids, were surveyed under anonymous conditions to determine if there were any additional sexual contact crimes such as rape, sodomy, fondling or forced penetration.

Results showed an extraordinary number of undocumented contact sex crimes, more than thirty times the number that were disclosed during sentencing. The data indicated that based on this sample, inmates convicted of child pornography crimes are highly likely to be involved in sexual contact crimes as well. When pornography is used in the commission of crimes, it is primarily those crimes involving child victims.

Law enforcement efforts on the Internet involve continuing attempts to identify and block sexual predators. When police pose

What if somebody uses your computer to access child pornography?

James Cox, 51, was indicted for purchasing child pornography online under his wife's name. Law enforcement officers found at least 50 sexually explicit images of children on a computer disc owned by Cox [AP 11/1/01].

John Imm, 36, of Wendell, NC, a self-employed Internet service provider, was arrested in connection with the use of a computer to download hundreds of pornographic pictures of young boys. The photos and video clips showed boys fifteen and younger having oral and anal sex with grown men and other children. Authorities began their investigation after being contacted by a private investigator whom had been hired by Debra Imm, who told police that she searched her husband's computer and found the files [The News and Observer, Raleigh, NC, 12/14/01].

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as juveniles, the goal is to lure criminals into exposing their exploitative behavior. These techniques are usually effective, and they represent twenty-five percent of arrests in Internet sex crimes against kids. These arrests produce high rates of guilty pleas, with relatively few cases dismissed.

Sometimes kids become perpetrators as well as victims of online pornography. According to a survey by University of Pennsylvania researchers, 325,000 U.S. children age seventeen or younger are models in commercial pornography. Most of these kids are runaways or throwaways, and they work to support themselves or their drug habits. But many of them are children who live at home and earn money for things they want or need.

Cyberdiscipline and Cyberguidance

Protecting kids in cyberspace requires adult involvement to help in developing mature judgment. Parents may feel that their limited Internet skill hinders their ability to teach safety on the Internet, but the technology doesn't change the basics of safety.

Teaching and discipline are the two parts of child guidance, with the goal of mature behavior control. All discipline involves teaching that must be geared to the learner's knowledge level. One approach to developing safe Internet behavior is to ask kids to help to develop an Internet safety plan. This puts them in the position of trying to anticipate and imagine safety challenges and generate responses.

Sometimes it helps to focus on protecting the household from criminal assault, so that kids can depersonalize the threat. This steers youngsters away from defensiveness and denial, since they are working to safeguard others besides themselves. Sharing personal information, for example, exposes younger children and even pets to unknown outsiders. At times it is necessary for parents to directly control Internet activity. Indications of risky Internet usage like changing screens when Mom enters the room, late-night Internet use or phone calls from strangers indicate a need for parental intervention.

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Adults should accompany young children on their Internet forays and sit with them while they surf the net. This allows a parent to both guide and give a youngster some freedom to experiment. Parents should check out a youngster's screen names to insure that they don't give information about a child's age or gender, and to imagine with a child the kinds of names that a criminal would and would not use.

In the same ways that parents keep track of their youngster's activities and monitor them for safety offline, so they need to guide kids online. To do so, parents need to acquire versatility when using the Internet. Teaching kids through explanation, direct instruction, and instructive stories all require parents to know what they are teaching. Household safety instruction is an area where most parents are most effective, even when they are not successful at teaching other things, like courtesy. Usually this is because parents are very clear about dangers and instruct their kids accurately: "*Don't ever run when you're holding a knife—You could fall and get hurt.*"

The traditional warnings that parents offer kids can't prepare them for the vast array of lures that are available online:

You ever see any bad stuff on the Internet?

Nah.

I mean, like dirty pictures?

Nah.

You stay away from that stuff, you hear?

Yeah.

Older kids will be motivated to create a safer Internet if the alternative is parental restrictions. If kids are taught to report child pornography, online lures, and other illegal activity, it gives them a proprietary interest in the Internet. It will also help them to anticipate pornography so that they are not traumatized when they encounter it, as many kids are.

Planning for errors and omissions is wise, so that when kids make mistakes, they can ask for help without humiliation or fear of scolding. Asking kids, for example, "*What if a friend has plans to*

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go to meet a stranger he met online, what would you do?" helps kids anticipate problem situations.

Online chat rooms and instant messaging seem like harmless ways of connecting anonymously with strangers, but kids often need help in developing an awareness of risks. Parents and kids might take turns appearing on these forums in disguise to test stranger recognition.

Using Google to search for pictures of a child that may appear on school Websites also helps children develop safety awareness. Kids are endlessly creative, and will likely find ways to use the Internet that would be unimaginable to adults and any of these introduce more risks. If youngsters know their parents will help them out if they should get into trouble on the Internet, they are more likely to focus on safety.

Parents and kids can engage in sending each other disguised email messages that mimic those found online, like the ones that offer prize money, a lucrative business deal, or a heart-wrenching charity appeal in order to practice identifying dangerous requests, for example, the message:

A little old lady in my neighborhood has lost her dog and it's a real problem because the dog is just about to have puppies and the lady is worried that if the puppies are born in the cold, they may freeze to death. So we're trying to start a watch campaign. Would you be willing to report if you see a small white dog with a very big tummy, so the lady can find her. Just reply with your email address and your home phone number...

A parent can show kids how to report online solicitation by contacting the appropriate agencies and websites. When kids become familiar with CyberTipline, they can independently access information that will help them become better informed and protected.

Parents can request that online educational programs be taught at school that are structured in the same way as driver education programs. High school students can be recruited to help develop programs for younger kids and continually update the instruction. Adults can show kids how contacting a Website or

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chatting in a chat room makes personal information available to people who are skilled in technology.

Contracts between kids and parents have been suggested as a way to get youngsters to observe safe practices on the Internet. These are only as effective as any agreements made with kids, and because children are limited in their ability to follow through, this may not be a promising solution. Making unenforceable rules is a dangerous business and encourages grandiosity in kids and false confidence in parents. Better to let kids know that a parent will always help them with no questions asked if they get into trouble on the Internet.

There are no ways that kids can learn to use the Internet other than by experimenting because it changes too fast to be captured in an educational syllabus. Because almost all kids are online, they often learn from each other, and parental contracts can seldom hold against peer pressure.

**CHAPTER EIGHT:
HOW ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAMS INCREASE
CRIME RISK**

Efforts to prevent sexual crimes against children have usually taken the form of educational programs for children, law enforcement initiatives like sex offender registries, and a few coordinated whole-community efforts. These have developed along with increased media focus on crimes against children. On another level, financial liability for damages against institutions where crimes have occurred has served to increase prevention efforts. These replace the early never-talk-to-strangers initiatives that developed in response to widely publicized abductions.

It was not until federal funding required reporting of all sexual abuse that the approach to sexual victimization changed. The great number of reported incidents created pressure to protect kids, and it was reasoned that children could be safe if they were prepared. Since the solution to the problem of sexual crimes against kids seemed to lie in children resisting and reporting these crimes, schools were the logical choice for teaching kids how to do so.

Prevention programs flourished and taught mostly the same curriculum, although there were variations in content and methods. They were usually adopted by school districts and offered in grades K through six on the premise that the earlier kids learned to protect themselves, the safer they would be. By the 1980s, most elementary schools had sexual abuse prevention programs.

The underlying concepts were based on the idea that kids could be responsible for their own safety and included good touch/bad touch and the idea of body ownership; rights of children and assertiveness; disclosing to adults to get help. Teaching techniques were based on standardized, scripted curricula that often included illustrative material, role playing, discussion, activities like games or projects, modeling, rehearsal, and training for teachers presenting the material if it is not presented by outside experts. These programs focus on abuse that takes place outside the home, committed by people other than family members.

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Given the Department of Justice's estimate of 269,000 sex crimes against juveniles taking place in one year (2000), this seems like a rather paltry effort. It also seems like a remarkably ineffective effort, because there has been relatively little change in crime statistics, given the widespread availability of these programs.

Do Abuse Prevention Programs Prevent Abuse?

Sex crime prevention programs are based on premises that are mistaken and contradictory so the structure of protection that rests on them falls short of its goal. The most important assumption underlying these programs is that children can be trained to resist and report sex crimes. This reflects the self-help trend that has produced countless numbers of books and other materials aimed at helping people to live better lives through their own efforts.

Although information may help to solve problems, under some circumstances, self-help programs can worsen, rather than reduce a problem. Programs on suicide prevention and eating disorders for college freshmen, for example, have been linked to increased incident rates following their presentation. These types of findings should have led to a reevaluation of self-help programs aimed at kids, but it did not do so.

Program effectiveness assessment is difficult to carry out, however, because prevention programs are successful if the problem behavior does not happen. If the behavior is easily observable, such as suicide or anorexia, then it may be possible to structure surveys to determine if there has been a decrease or an increase after a prevention program.

But sexual exploitation is a hidden problem and it rarely comes to light until years after it has happened. To try to measure the effectiveness of abuse prevention programs requires an accurate measurement of abuse occurrence, which is impossible. The estimates that do exist represent only sexual assaults reported to police and other enforcement agencies, an estimated seven percent of actual crimes.

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Evaluating prevention programs also requires accurate data on the children who completed such programs to see if they have been protected by their newly learned skills. If new habits protected kids from sexual assaults, and kids who missed the program were more likely to be victimized, it would make a convincing case for the utility of these programs. Careful assessments are rarely attempted, however, because abuse prevention programs are widely believed to be good protection for children when they actually are probably as effective as paper seatbelts.

Kids rarely report sexual assault to anyone, so it is impossible to figure out whether the programs protect them. The optimistic perspective would be that kids listen and learn, and they can then practice what they are taught to avoid sexual advances or entrapments. The pessimistic view is that kids learn little, but parents are reassured by the existence of such programs and assume that kids have learned to be safe.

It's likely that children listen and learn, recite what is required, and then forget most of what they've been taught. If only seven percent of all sex crimes against children are reported to police, how can a determination be made that educational programs have prevented any crimes at all?

Mistaken Premises

Child sexual abuse prevention programs are very similar, and most make the same assumptions and employ the same techniques. All of the programs teach that it's up to children to prevent and expose sex crimes because if they don't, adults are powerless to protect kids. This effectively absolves adults from responsibility for child sexual abuse prevention.

This may seem like a misinterpretation, but it is the core premise embodied in all of prevention teaching. This is illustrated by the advice that if a child discloses abuse, and adults don't believe him, he should keep telling until he finds an adult who will believe him. When kids repeatedly report crime and adults don't react, it's not because the adults don't understand; it is more likely

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a result of an adult's dependence on the perpetrator for various kinds of support, including employment, help with children, social status, financial support, or public approval.

In fact, things get worse if a child's disclosure threatens an adult's lifestyle, finances, or living arrangements. For if the offender is a necessary adult in the household or a valued older sibling, the child may well be ignored and marginalized, leaving him to deal with the now angry predator alone. Prevention programs teach kids that they will be protected if they disclose. However, this doesn't necessarily happen because the law is not efficient, and adults may refuse to act if the perpetrator is a person of significance. These possibilities are not lost on older children, who experience these programs with some level of skepticism.

Kids May Not Have Caused the Problem, but the Solution Is Up to Them

Children's intellectual functioning is not sophisticated enough for them to identify and respond maturely to sex crimes. The distinctions among seduction, harassment, and statutory rape, for example, is not one most adults could make without training, and it is not realistic to expect kids to do so.

The reassuring aura of prevention programs suggests that what is being asked of children is simple, easy and straightforward but this is misleading to kids. Children usually assume that they are stupid when they encounter situations involving cognitively difficult learning tasks they cannot master. Because adults find it distasteful to identify the details of sex crimes, children are instructed to refer to "uncomfortable feelings" and "bad touch" to distinguish criminal activity. But sexual predators are skilled at duping victims, and it is not difficult to make an experience pleasant or at least physically tolerable for a child at the beginning of a sexual entrapment, so the terms kids learn will not seem to apply.

Adults avoid sordid details in teaching kids about sexual crime, but this leaves it to children to infer what is unsaid. This is like telling an adult who visits a foreign culture, "*Somebody may*

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do something bad to you, something you don't like, that will feel funny, but is criminal, and you should say no to it." Children are left with vague references, confusing suggestions, and innuendos about the criminal activity. The expectation is that youngsters will somehow translate and apply these in future situations where they may be relevant.

Even if graphic detail of sexual offenses were provided, children are not likely to report sexual behavior by an adult. Kids don't like to discuss sexual matters, and they are reluctant to speak about their own sexual responses or genital parts even when legal and healthy experiences are involved. In one study five- and seven-year-old girls were given a medical exam that included an internal examination. They were then asked whether a doctor had touched their genitals. Many of them denied that this had occurred, and most could not recall accurately whether it had happened.

In attempts to get kids to report sexual crime, much depends on how adults depict the behaviors in question and whether they are seen in a negative light. When preschoolers in one study were told that a behavior is bad, such as their parents kissing them in the bathtub, they became anxious and reluctant to answer questions about whether this had actually happened. Extrapolating from this study, children would be inclined to deny that any bad touch had happened to them. Paradoxically, when kids recognize that the behavior is bad, they are likely to hide it, not to report it.

In contrast to children, adult women usually have built-in radar that allows them to distinguish good touch from bad touch, so that a co-worker who has his hand on her arm more often than necessary causes concern. This sixth sense functions well and adult women don't often get lured into sexual traps. But this intuition takes years of experience to develop and cannot be implanted in a young child.

Sexual Exploitation Terms

Taught to Kids:

- *Good touch*
- *Bad touch*
- *Touching safety*
- *Unwanted touch*
- *Unsafe touch*
- *Feeling Yes*
- *Feeling No*

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In its place, adults often employ euphemisms and veiled references that have no corresponding internal databank for kids to access. “*Touching safety*” for example, makes good sense for women dealing with unfamiliar men, so that a woman in another culture can understand that a handshake is probably acceptable, but a full-body embrace may imply more than friendship. But how can a child fruitfully apply this concept? How does it fit with the Scout leader who wants to check to see if a boy has a tick embedded in his skin? Or when a coach wants to help ease a muscle cramp?

The distinction between good touch and bad touch is meant to alert kids that a sexual approach is underway. As it became apparent that these terms were confusing, the references changed to body parts covered by a bathing suit. But because it was childish minds trying to grasp the meaning of these terms, confusion continued. Young children sometimes assumed that swimming was dangerous, and that they shouldn’t wear swim suits.

Parents were then encouraged to teach children the names of body parts: *penis, vulva, vagina, nipple*, etc. Concern arose that teaching children that sexual touch is “bad” could interfere with later adult functioning. A newer distinction then emerged, that of the *feeling yes, feeling no* approach that targeted the feelings physical touch produces in children. This was based on the assumption that sexual touching would produce bad feelings and that nongenital touching would produce good feelings. Sexual predators find these terms useful in manipulating children, because they can adapt their activities to conform to the terms. In a further useless refinement, education programs now use *unwanted touch* and *unsafe touch*, which will probably morph into *touch-that-your-parents-think-is-a-really-bad-idea*. An illustration of the effectiveness of these programs in protecting children is one little girl’s explanation that “Unsafe touch is when you try to pat a dog you don’t know.”

Expecting children to identify sexually abusive behavior would require that they be familiar with sodomy, intercourse, fondling, voyeurism, pornography, and all of the other variations of sexual deviance. To do so would shock and horrify kids and introduce information that they are not equipped to handle. Vague

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references to sexual assault only confuse kids, and the belief that these euphemisms can protect them is foolhardy.

The more profound difficulty with teaching kids to identify sexual crime is that children would have to be taught that those they love may commit sex crimes against them and that a beloved grandfather, stepfather, older brother or cousin might exploit and hurt them. Nobody wants to do this, and it would be very bad for kids as well. Child abuse education programs continue to base child safety on vague and confusing references to criminal behavior and promote the idea that this occurs outside the family.

Kids Can't Say No

A platitude of sexual abuse prevention programs is that children have the right to say no, which is an interesting perspective that implies that children also have the right to say yes. In fact, children have neither of these rights because their power to make decisions is limited to a very narrow range of behaviors. If a child says no to participating in a sexual abuse prevention program, for example, he quickly learns how limited this right is.

Kids know how to say no, and they do so frequently with parents and siblings in one form or another. It is rare to find a parent who would claim that his child is always agreeable. Teaching kids this skill is basically a ruse for convincing kids to resist and block participation in sexual behavior, where kids seem to have a choice, as opposed to where it is forced on them. But sex with children is always forced sex because an adult can outwit and intimidate a youngster and overpower his immature judgment. The implication in the programs that kids are responsible for sexual victimization is not lost on them, and so they avoid admitting to it

A Child Doesn't Have the Right to His Own Body

Children are generally instructed in abuse prevention programs that they own their bodies and that sexual abuse is a violation of their personal rights. But in reality, a child does not have a right to his own body, no matter how charming this concept

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might seem. Kids can touch their genitals only under restricted conditions, and parents usually decide when and where (if at all) anybody will touch them. Parents can forbid public masturbation and undressing, child sexual play, and other genital activities; and a child has no way to refuse a parent's directives. If he does refuse, nobody will defend him because the law doesn't recognize a child's standing.

It would be more realistic to teach kids that parents control children's bodies and that they, not other adults, decide who is allowed to touch them. Children don't own their own bodies, which is very clear to anyone who has ever sat in the waiting room of a pediatrician or orthodontist. If they did, kids would pick up their bodies and leave the premises.

Youngsters figure out that they don't have body ownership because a parent makes the decisions about his body, and a child doesn't have a say in the way that things go. It becomes easier to submit to braces and inoculations, a child may reason, because adults will have their way anyhow. Even though a youngster may really dislike having his abdomen pressed down hard and his teeth pushed and scraped, he knows that it is his place to submit. To teach a child that he has a right to his body under some circumstances forces him to make distinctions that are far beyond the reasoning power of most children. When the team coach wants to check to see if the crotch on a uniform is too tight, how can a child determine if he has a right to say no?

Adult-Child Power Differences

Sometimes children resist an adult's demands, but this is usually because they sense some give in the adult so that they can get more of what they want. When a parent is clearly unmovable, a child will submit. In the case of a sexual predator, however, the situation becomes considerably more complicated. A predator is usually a familiar adult acting in unusual ways, and a child will be uneasy about the consequences of resisting.

When a child molester shows pornography to a youngster, for example, there is likely to be emotional pressure, deception,

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and perhaps intimidation. The idea that an elementary school child may think that his rights are being violated and defend them by being verbally assertive is farfetched. These are abstract notions, and a youngster is confronted with a real situation of an adult wanting the child to look at strange pictures.

Kids dealing with sex offenders experience a vast power difference that predators find arousing. Children don't have the words to argue effectively against someone as lofty as a priest or a teacher. Faced with a confusing situation and a pressuring adult, kids resort submission, followed by the pretense that the episode never happened. Afterward, confusion, guilt, and shame are likely to color a child's memory because he cannot recognize that he has been manipulated by a criminal.

Sex abuse prevention programs assume that victimization is unpleasant for kids, but career child molesters work hard to camouflage their seduction so that youngsters won't initially experience it that way. Practiced criminals avoid detection by limiting their sexual predations to acts that cannot be described easily by a child. For a predator to repeat criminal acts, a child must see himself as a willing participant, because then the fear of consequences will compel his silence and thus protect the child molester. To this end, a child molester may say to a child, "*You didn't say no. You didn't try to stop me.*" This sounds convincing to a youngster who doesn't want to believe a familiar adult would harm him.

This all becomes far more complicated where sexual abuse is physically tolerable for a child. To make it so, predators often give kids drugs or alcohol or both in order to dull a child's sensations as well as his perception. It takes very little alcohol or marijuana to affect the physical sensitivities of an elementary school child and to cloud his recollection of events. Sexual predators become skilled at identifying substances that work best and leave the fewest traces.

A child molester also learns to soften up a target by using bribes, gifts, treats, and special favors; all of which incline a child to comply with other requests. Pornographic materials, perhaps videos involving children of the same age, may be used to break

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down resistance to unfamiliar behaviors. The target child is told these are normal and enjoyable types of play that he needs to learn in order to be like other kids.

Kenneth Wooden's list of child lures outlines the many ways that sexual predators groom children to cooperate with their demands. The approach that promises a child stardom if she will cooperate in photographing her, or the request for help in finding another lost child all appeal to a youngster's secret wishes and fears. Wooden's material on child lures is likely to be very powerful in helping parents to identify unhealthy circumstances that children encounter, and allows them the opportunity to act protectively.

Most children in American schools are exposed to standard abuse prevention instruction. But things become confused when a child tries to apply prevention program teachings in dangerous circumstances. A child may have learned that when an adult tries to "bad touch" him, he should just say no and tell somebody. But in real life, sexual overtures are arranged in such a way that situational influences pressure a child to submit. It would be difficult for a homesick camper to refuse and report bad touch when a counselor lies down for naps with him, talks about his own youth and then gives him a body massage.

Seductive behaviors used by pedophiles mimic sincere interest in a child's feelings. This is clearly a transient, self-serving interest, much like that of the telemarketer who wants to know about the state of your aluminum siding, but to a needy child it can seem sincere. When a child molester treats a child like a person of value, respects his feelings, listens to his opinions and tries to fulfill his wishes, this is a profound experience for many children.

Adult women usually recognize the signs of seduction when they encounter them: the attentive listening, hanging on each word, the special gestures or touches, laughing at the jokes, making eye contact and the constant empathy. Sensing a hidden agenda in these circumstances, women usually respond with withdrawal or other protective reactions. Children are not able to differentiate appropriate attention from risky attention and so they are likely to respond positively to any sort of attention.

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Child molesters usually seduce kids gradually. Engaging in the activities a child likes such as sharing preferences for music, food, and movies, strengthens a child's attachment to a sex offender, particularly if the child is lonesome. A practiced predator knows how to slowly introduce forbidden subjects, perhaps making references to toilet paper and suntans and then gradually bringing in sexual content as a prelude to an assault.

Just as with adults, the love-starved and lonely are far more vulnerable to the sexual advances of the exploitative. When this is the case, the distinctions between good touch and bad touch recede in significance in a child's mind. Even if a youngster has listened attentively and learned well in a sexual abuse prevention program, the initial seduction experience may not seem abusive but rather, fulfilling to him.

A child has no choice where sexual assault is forceful, but his lack of conceptual understanding may lead him to conclude that he is somehow responsible. This is similar to a woman's experience of rape, where there may be self-doubt that leads her to blame herself.

The belief that information and skills can prevent child sexual victimization overlooks all of the other forces that drive criminal activity, and it places the locus of control in the victim rather than the perpetrator. This may seem like a promising approach for reducing crime, but it has brought about little change in crime rates.

Although the vast majority of sexual crimes against children are perpetrated by familiar or related adults, kids are not taught that those they love and admire may victimize them, and this is only alluded to in vague terms. The greater emphasis is on *stranger danger*, the basis of the original prevention programs. In teaching kids to be on guard for the unlikely event, they are at increased risk for the more common danger.

When a child molester is a familiar person, perhaps a friend's parent, this doesn't fit a child's conceptualization of a criminal, so he may not perceive the behavior as abusive. The adult acts take on the same character as the adult person for a child, so that if the adult is acceptable, then so is his behavior to a

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youngster. The same is true of a parent's conceptualization of abuse, because if the parent likes and respects the friend's parent, it will be difficult to accept any disclosures a child makes about sexual abuse. Abuse prevention programs do nothing to prepare parents for sex abuse reports, such as:

Your new boyfriend comes into the bathroom when I'm on the toilet.

Grandpa kisses me and puts his tongue in my mouth.

My teen stepbrother wants to play strip poker with me.

A parent may not welcome these disclosures, because they will provoke serious disruptions in the peace and harmony of the family circle. Kids learn in abuse prevention programs that it's okay to say no to bad touch, but they are taught nothing about what to do when their disclosures make adults seriously uncomfortable.

Most Children Deal with Sexual Threats Alone

The consequences for children of sexual prevention programs that are largely irrelevant, and for adults who live in a fantasy world of child safety, is that most children don't disclose sex crimes when they occur. When kids encounter predatory adults, they are not likely to think about what they have learned in abuse prevention programs until they are trapped in an exploitative relationship.

Abuse prevention programs reflect an adult perspective and have little relation to a child's developing conceptual framework. They offer only vague references to sexual crimes or who the criminals may be, and they have a "wink-wink," you-know-what-we-mean tone that confuses kids. Children have no framework for integrating sexual information, and although adults may look into their memories and relationships to reference what is said, kids can't do so.

Over the first two decades of development, human beings gather a database of information about intimate relationships that enables them to determine what is sexually normal. Kids have only

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isolated facts without the maturity to evaluate sexual information and make decisions.

Sexual abuse prevention programs give kids veiled references to deviant behavior. Some researchers have suggested that appropriate conceptual information about sexuality should first be provided to children so that they can develop a healthy understanding of normal sexual behavior in order to prevent sex crimes. Without this, children have little understanding of how aberrant behavior fits into a full picture of human functioning. But providing sufficient information about adult sexuality to enable kids to understand sex crimes presents a developmental overload, akin to teaching preschoolers driver education.

Locus of Control

Adult behavior is hard for kids to understand. What they want is to figure out what makes grownups behave the way they do. One mental habit that develops early involves distinguishing between what is randomly caused and what is the result of an individual. A big snowstorm, for example, is caused by outside forces, while spilled milk is the result of a child's carelessness.

Causation in the arena of sex crimes is publicly acknowledged to be the offender's fault, although what made him that way is unknown. In protection programs, children are told that bad touching is not their fault, and they are left to assign responsibility. For a target child who has been made to feel very special in an exploitative relationship, it's hard to accept that he is no more than the latest victim. Since the prevention courses are being taught to children and not to child molesters, it's easy for kids to figure that they have a lot to do with the problem, and that they should somehow stop it from happening.

Children old enough to recognize that they have been tricked into forbidden activity are apt to feel even more culpable, which is strengthened when a shocked parent asks, *Why did you go along with it? Why didn't you say something?* Although a child understands that he should say no when something doesn't feel right, it is confusing when things feel not just right, but instead an

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adult makes you feel good by giving you gifts, allowing you to steer his car, and acting nicer to you than anybody in your family. Saying no to somebody in these circumstances, or worse yet, telling on him, feels like betrayal. It is easy to for a child to conclude instead that there must be something wrong with himself, which is the basis for the chronic low self-esteem that sex crime victims often suffer. Seductive sexual abuse initially makes a child feel like a very positive object, much like a woman who is the focus of a famous man's seduction. Sometimes the impact of this seduction shows up when a youngster deliberately provokes anger from comparatively neglectful parents.

Participation in forbidden behaviors such as smoking marijuana, shoplifting or watching pornographic movies, is a heady experience for a youngster, and it may make him feel as if he has been elevated in power and status. Kids know that these things are wrong, so that there are guilty feelings attached. But the companionship a predator offers as a fellow sinner offsets a child's guilty conscience. Sometimes a youngster's behavior involves forbidden online activities, like agreeing to meet a chat room friend even though parents would be opposed. The thrill of the adventure and the apparent maturity (in a child's eyes) may make a young person feel powerful beyond his years.

A child victim learns a distorted view of his own development, because it initially makes him feel as if he has skipped several years and has been catapulted into early adulthood. Because his behavior is kept secret, and his best friend is a predatory adult, he has no way of learning an accurate view of himself and his own power, one less exalted but considerably safer. Sexual abuse prevention programs strengthen this idea of the child as central in the prevention of sex crimes, although in reality, the child is nothing more than a convenient criminal target.

Transfer of Training

No educational system can teach kids how to handle all of the challenges of adulthood. Education depends on transfer of training which is the ability to apply one set of skills to a new but

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similar set of circumstances. This applies to a wide variety of training situations as for example, when young people are taught driving skills using simulations on computers.

There are many factors that determine whether transfer of training occurs. When an entry-level food worker is taught how to respond to a customer, the situation is usually a close parallel to the real situation, so transfer is likely. “*May I take your order?*” is practiced both with the trainer and then in a real setting.

Repetition of key behaviors is critical for transfer so the learner can become familiar with the cues and the responses required. Children learning baseball, for example, have to learn to swing as the ball approaches, so when the big game is on and the pitcher lets it fly, the response will be automatic.

Sexual abuse prevention programs are practice opportunities for children, but they are full of learning paradoxes. They are far removed from actual incidents because children may not encounter sexual crimes for years after the program has ended. The incredible variety of criminal approaches to children makes it very difficult to teach skills that will be applicable beyond a set of narrow circumstances.

Prevention programs also exclude crime specifics and the likely identity of offenders, making transfer to real circumstances unlikely. If the same approach were used with young baseball players, they would be taught only one position, say catching, and told to watch for something (a ball, bird, grenade, water balloon) that might come at them.

Teaching Facts and Teaching Judgment

The way children learn is different from the way adults learn because the central nervous system develops through stages over the first eighteen years of life. Before language develops, information and understanding are acquired primarily through muscular and visual sources. An infant learns to recognize a mother by her touch and later by her appearance. As children learn to speak and become familiar with the complexities of language, their learning becomes primarily verbal.

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Children also conceptualize the world differently than adults do. Prevention programs may be well suited to adult learning but less so for children. This is because the ability to form categories and to reason logically doesn't develop until the beginning of high school. The easiest way to understand this is to examine a child's response to a typical reasoning problem that involves red circles and squares spread on a desk.

When a preschooler is asked whether there are more red ones or more round ones, he answers that there are more round ones, because they outnumber the squares, while a child older than eight can see the more inclusive and larger category of red things. The high schooler, able to conceptualize both a class based on color and a class based on shape, is able to hold these two things in his mind as abstract understandings and to reason with them, so he replies that there are more red things than either shape. Younger kids don't have the mental agility to reason beyond what is concretely in front of them.

This applies to sex abuse prevention because sexual abuse is a poorly defined abstraction, and most kids could not define or illustrate concepts like bad touch. If the programs operated with full realism, they would provide examples of sexual crime perpetrated by a loved relative or trusted friend, which nobody wants to imagine. If kids can't deal with the cognitive complexities of prevention programs, they can very effectively respond with the pat answers provided by the program, even though they have little understanding of the actual use of this information.

Many abuse prevention programs assume that early learning is best under the belief that if children are protected early on, they are safer longer. From a learning perspective, the exact opposite is true. Young children, especially preschoolers, are poor learners of abstract concepts, and they learn best by actual exposure to a challenging situation. If they are to learn to make pizza, they must knead the dough, spread it out, grate the cheese and so forth, because abstract principles rarely produce a good pizza.

Similarly, when children are taught that they should never get into a car with a stranger, they probably can transfer the

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behavior to an actual situation, if the situation occurs soon after the training. But a child operating in the concrete operations stage intellectually does not absorb the more abstract concept of avoiding isolation with an unfamiliar adult. If a child molester asks a child to join him on a subway or a motorcycle or even to go for a ride on his garbage truck, a child will see little relation of these scenarios to sex abuse prevention training.

Good judgment is made up of abstract cognitive processes, including the ability to imagine and evaluate alternative behavioral choices. Most adults become adept at this process that results in the ability to consider the consequences of one's choices. When an adult woman is offered help by a stranger in carrying her groceries upstairs, she factors in many separate bits of information and then calculates a safety projection. If the helper is a male, she is less safe but if he is very old, she is safer. If there are other people around, she is safer, but if they are boisterous teens, she is less safe. If numerous pedestrians passing by can see her front door, she is safer but if it is an isolated setting, she is less safe. Putting these and many other calculations together in nanoseconds, she arrives at a judgment about whether to accept the help.

The ability to perform this type of calculation depends primarily on the maturation of myriad neural connections that form the brain and the nervous system. These don't develop until well into adolescence, and they are the hardwiring that allows for the emergence of the software for making these sophisticated judgments.

When an adult woman must determine whether her suitor is sincere, and whether she chooses to be in a relationship, this is a complex judgment with many separate elements. Even with the best judgment, it is a process prone to error. For children to prevent sex crimes requires the same type of complex judgment in a young mind that is years away from the competence to perform such a task.

If children cannot conceptually grasp prevention concepts, then their recourse is to mimic what is being taught, much like an adult might do in a foreign language course where he has no comprehension. As a result, kids may learn that in confusing

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situations, the best response is to do whatever it is the adult seems to want. Rather than learning to protect himself from sexual attack, the child has, in effect, learned to be a compliant victim.

What children probably learn from sex abuse prevention programs is that if you're a child, something bad can happen to you, it will probably involve strangers, you'll feel bad if it happens, and you're responsible for stopping it, but you're not to blame if it happens. As a framework for protecting himself, this doesn't offer much to a child, but it may mislead parents into believing that kids are safer from sexual victimization

Parents and children are not the only ones who learn from sex abuse prevention programs. Career child molesters pay attention to what is taught to children, much like a hunter studies the habits of his prey. As kids are taught methods to protect themselves, predators use knowledge of what is being taught to anticipate and manipulate children's reactions. An offender may explain to a child that he isn't touching him, he is giving him a backrub, and that this is different. In the most audacious of approaches, a sexual predator may seek to "instruct" a child about sexual abuse, and to "help him be safe."

Going one step further, a predator may become an instructor in sexual abuse prevention programs as a way to groom parents and develop their trust. Predators have their own educational programs for children, and they involve private information and directions, shared in an isolated setting where an offender can victimize a child.

Prevention programs may well increase the risk of sexual exploitation because they provide false reassurance to parents when there is no evidence that they make kids more secure. These programs generally ask nothing of parents, and instead, pressure kids to be responsible for preventing sexual crimes. They portray child sexual abuse as primarily a crime against children by strangers and people outside the home, so that kids don't learn to recognize the more likely forms of crime against them.

Other Types of Child Protection Initiatives

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Technological advances have made possible a number of other approaches to child safety that seek to extend the arena of safety for children and to increase parental security.

Abduction Alerts

Are early warning programs that notify the public if a child has been abducted. They are a technologically sophisticated form of the neighborhood watch programs that provided children “safe homes” in their neighborhood if they felt endangered. These types of initiatives foundered because there was no way to check whether good guys or bad guys were putting the Safe Home sign in the window to invite kids in.

The AMBER alert system is a way of apprehending criminals and rescuing victims. As such, it does not prevent crime but interrupts it. It is aimed at persons under seventeen who are in immediate danger of harm. Law enforcement information about an abduction goes to a state police communications section, which connects with a statewide emergency alert system that includes electronic message boards along major highways, announcements on the radio and crawl messages on television to alert the public. Toll collectors, lottery ticket terminals and rest stops are all alerted to the details.

The system began in 1996 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. AMBER stands for America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. It is dedicated to the memory of nine-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bike and subsequently murdered. The system has so far identified and found 200 abducted children. Similar in structure, the Code Adam program is a system used by retail stores to locate lost children and to prevent children from being taken from the facility by abductors.

These systems are rarely used because they apply to the unusual circumstance in which a stranger abducts a child. Compared to the half-million missing child reports each year, the probability of this terrible crime is low. And while any child’s abduction and murder is a horrible event, it is also an extremely unlikely event. These crimes are also very difficult to prevent

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because perpetrators generally have little fear of consequences and are willing to use force to achieve their ends. As such, these crimes, although rare, are difficult to prevent with education programs.

Child murders involve predictable event sequences, and geography seems to be the determining factor in the choice of the target. The victim is most often a girl, and the initial contact between the predator and the child is within half a mile of the victim's residence and occurs by chance. If the child is murdered, this usually occurs within three hours of the abduction and, most often, close to the point of abduction. Police usually knows the perpetrator's identity within the first week of the investigation, although they may not be prepared to arrest and indict him within that time frame. The profile of the perpetrator is that he is most often young (average age twenty-seven), unmarried, unemployed, or working in an unskilled job, with prior arrests for violent crimes and/or crimes against children.

A parent may feel more secure if his child is playing close to home, but this reflects the *stranger danger* view of crimes, when in fact, familiar people within the neighborhood are as much a threat as strangers. Abductions usually happen when a child is near his home, so that the illusion of safety is dangerous. Sending a child on errands within a neighborhood may feel safer than other activities, but in fact, it is not.

Sex Offender Registries

Sex offender registries are now available in all states and nationally as well. These are lists of convicted sex offenders who have been rated as likely to reoffend. Level-three and level-two sex offenders are subject to community notification, and local police and community agencies have the option of publicizing their names to populations at risk. The goal is to alert the public under the assumption that if people are aware of sexual predators in the neighborhood, this will reduce the risk of sexual crimes against children.

Perhaps people can use the information provided on registries to prevent their children from coming into contact with

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criminals. Whether this works after the initial interest has abated is not clear, and there are no statistics on the effectiveness of sex offender registries in preventing crime. They are however useful to law enforcement because they provide a way to monitor the movements and activities of convicted offenders. Sometimes data from the registries is used to ban child molesters from certain places. But the much greater number of unidentified predators, based on incidence statistics, suggests that there are many more offenders who threaten children.

It's hard to keep updated records on the transient and resistant offender population. Registered sexual predators are required to inform law enforcement agencies when they change residences, but they can disappear from view, and law enforcement often loses track of them.

Sex offender registries can encourage an unrealistically secure view of child safety, giving the appearance that offenders are under control when they have merely been identified. The lists are far from comprehensive, and although it may be reassuring if a neighbor's name is not listed, this doesn't guarantee that children are safe with that person. It means only that he is not a convicted, labeled, high-risk sex offender. If he pled guilty to a lesser crime of sexual abuse, then he may not be on the registry at all. If there was not enough evidence to bring charges or if witnesses refused to testify or if the statute of limitations on a particular charge has run out, he will not be on the registry.

Operation SAFE CHILD

Operation SAFE CHILD is a New York State initiative that offers parents the opportunity to encode information about their children, like photographs and fingerprints, gender, hair and eye color, and date of birth on a card that parents can give to police should their child be missing. Similar to this are programs that provide records of children's DNA. These approaches allow police to conclusively identify the remains of a child who has been abducted, enslaved or murdered, even after some time has passed.

Are There More Fruitful Approaches to the Protection of Children?

Child protection is best if done by adults, not by children. There are no new proposals here for sex abuse prevention programs aimed at children. What is needed is for parents to become more effective in shielding their children from sex crimes. In chapter 12, we describe a set of approaches designed to empower parents and change the outlook for children.

Parents are most effective when they combine resources to change the climate so that sex crimes against kids can no longer flourish. Communities might create groups or task forces to oversee and coordinate child protection efforts like public information and education campaigns. These could include all who have an interest in children's welfare: parents; grandparents; schools; churches; recreational facilities; athletic programs; rape crisis centers; medical and mental health centers; law enforcement agencies; and representatives of the legal community, businesses and government agencies.

Because this would be a grassroots initiative, task force members would be familiar with the unique problems of the community and the risks to children. The mission of such a group would be to systematically develop educational programs on child safety for the community, provide a forum for the expression of concern, and plan for abuse disclosures so that the community would be enabled to react productively and protectively.

Protection efforts will work best where all have a stake in keeping kids safe. Those close to the community are better equipped to recognize problems and take steps to be proactive so that children are not hurt before progress is made. The Safe Kids/Safe Streets Program, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice, offers a great deal of experience that can guide other communities. Projects in the SKSSP have been able to strengthen their response in protecting children by using multidisciplinary teams to look at cases of child abuse and neglect and then to create children's advocacy centers, which use a multidisciplinary

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approach to child abuse in child-friendly settings with resources for families,

Although they are focused on both prevention and treatment, these projects have created new prosecution units, improved training procedures and evaluation services. Developing new pediatric sexual assault guidelines, for example, makes it more likely that sex crimes will be identified and confronted early. It was important to maintain a balance between direct services and system reform, both of which take time and funds. Of particular importance were the prevention education efforts that were developed and that included resource material development (brochures, service directories, newsletters, community calendars) as well as community events to develop awareness along with multimedia campaigns.

A community task force can offer informational programs and use a workshop format to consider specific situations and develop programmatic solutions. Research indicates that adults are far more comfortable dealing with abuse problems and decisions if they have a supportive group experience to draw on, so this could be an appropriate way to offer information to adults in the community.

Such initiatives would require a change in attitude on the part of adults, however. Research shows that parents want to be the primary educators of their children in the area of sexual abuse prevention, but they generally lack the knowledge to do so. Most of their information comes from the media and often reflects common misconceptions. What is needed is a long-range view of child safety and what a community can do to promote it.

A workshop format might involve parents and community leaders in problem solving exercise that may help to develop thinking and solutions in a community task force:

- *An eighth-grade boy learns that the cool kids in his class know about a parking lot behind some buildings where they can go after school and turn tricks to make money. "You just do what the guy wants you to do, and he gives you a bunch of twenties. So what's the big deal?" his friend says.*

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- *A Little League coach takes a special interest in a fifth-grader and spends a great deal of time showing him how to swing and catch. They become close friends, and the boy's single mother is grateful that her son has a male model and concerned adult in his life. Some of the other fathers are uncomfortable with what seems to be excessive physical contact between the coach and the boy.*
- *A ten-year-old girl makes friends on the Internet by using a Webcam to take pictures of her genitalia.*
- *When the mother of a preschooler discovers pornographic comic videotapes among her stepson's things, she becomes concerned because the older child often baby-sits for the younger child.*

A community task force can serve as an adult sexual abuse prevention program that depends on adults to develop prevention initiatives, rather than relying on kids. Adults could look ahead to the changes in child safety needs as sexual predators take advantage of technology advances and changes in lifestyle to gain access to children.

In trying to identify risks to children, a task force could consider whether there is a hostile growth place for children where a child can't set limits, maintain privacy and where sexual violations can't be discussed. The assumption that there are pockets of danger in any community and a plan to intervene to change these are important in protecting children. Because secrecy is a pivotal component of abuse, those opportunities for forthright expression of concern will be most valuable.

Gavin deBecker has been a powerful force in developing security systems based on an understanding of human behavior. He has advised media figures, celebrities, public figures and business leaders on how to assess and manage situations that might lead to violence. He has also produced a significant book for parents, *Fear Is A Gift*, which can change the outlook for

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children's risk. One of his suggestions for changing the way that child abuse is reported involved making heroes of those who stop sexual crimes against children rather than giving celebrity status to the criminals themselves.

One of the most potent ways for people to learn something is to teach somebody else. It would be useful to develop programs that teach older kids to help and protect younger kids. As part of such an effort, kids could be taught how to recognize unsafe situations and to take action to protect the helpless. This has an inherent appeal to middle age and adolescent kids, who often enjoy the higher status that comes with increased responsibility.

If older kids learn secrecy, isolation, and contact as danger signals, it may help to establish a child culture where all kids recognize situations that put them at risk. Teaching older kids to be powerful and to understand the law also protects them because they become safer as they understand the conditions where crime flourishes.

Part 3
Face to Face with Sex Crimes Against Kids

CHAPTER NINE:
HOW TO DEAL WITH CRIMES AGAINST KIDS

The thing that she remembered years later was how dark it seemed for the afternoon, even though it was late, and school and the Brownie meeting were now over. She had left the old church with the other kids, but they had headed for the bus stop and she had to walk. The traffic was busy during this rush hour, and there was a sidewalk but no curb, and so she had to keep an eye out. On the other side of the sidewalk, away from traffic, the ground dropped down to a solid city block of dirt and ditches where the construction people would eventually build something. It would be an easy place to leave a dead body, she thought, and she shivered.

A car pulled up to her left—a black Oldsmobile—and a man leaned over from the driver’s seat. He had big round eyes and reddish hair, and he said, “Can you tell me where Merrick Boulevard is?” She kept walking, but he asked again, pulling his car up alongside her. She pointed back behind her, hoping that he would go away; but he said, “Can you come with me and help me find it? She said no, and then he said, “Where did you say it is?” She said, “It’s that way,” and she was relieved when he drove off and she could see his taillights ahead. She hurried along thinking that home seemed far away way past the little block of stores and then the apartments and then the two blocks to her house.

Out of nowhere the car pulled up again next to her. She jumped back but not too far off the sidewalk. “I’m lost,” he said, “I can’t find it. Can’t you help me?” She shook her head and kept walking, not looking at him. “Please help me,” he said, “I have candy; I’ll give you candy if you help me.”

She was scared now; she knew that those words meant something really bad. But she was so far from home; there was nowhere to run to that he couldn’t follow her in that car. She walked faster, but

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his car was following her, keeping right behind her as she walked, staying just off the road to allow the traffic to go by.

“Hey,” he said, “Little girl. Listen. I really need help here.” She wouldn’t look at him.

“Please,” he said. “Just look at me.” She turned, still walking, and looked into the car, hoping that he would see that she just wanted him to leave her alone.

His hands were off the steering wheel now, and holding something.

“Did you ever see this before?” he said.

Straightforward criminal attacks on children are rare, but most child protection programs prepare parents and kids for incidents in which a stranger tries to lure a child into a car from a playground or street. This is the type of crime that terrifies parents and makes headlines with its lurid details.

When a child is approached by a stranger during an attempted abduction, parents usually respond immediately by calling the police. Law enforcement systems then go into action to protect the child and find the perpetrator. This happens quickly, because kids usually make an immediate report to somebody and there is little doubt that a crime has been attempted or committed. Most crimes against children are far less dramatic.

On a global level, the most common crimes are those committed for financial purposes by those who sell the services of children for occasional encounters. This can happen within a family or neighborhood, but more often children are provided by brokers in places beyond the reach of American laws, where trafficking in persons is uncontrolled. These types of crimes have been a focus of law enforcement efforts, with the result that within U.S. borders, their occurrence is rare.

In the United States, the vast majority of crimes against children involve enticing a child into sexual activity, which is difficult to detect and hard to prove in court. In these cases the criminal usually has involved himself with people in the community in order to make a connection with the child.

When parents begin to suspect that sexual advances toward their child are underway, they may not think of it as *criminal*

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activity, so their reaction is different than it would be to other crimes. Because most adults have no training in determining the veracity of a reported felony, there can be substantial confusion about the significance of what a child says. When there is family turmoil as a result of ongoing divorce or sibling behavior problems, this becomes even more confusing. A parent's first response may be a tentative one: that of trying to straighten out what seems like a misunderstanding.

Talking It Over with the Accused

Often when a child reports that another adult "did something bad," a parent will ask questions to clarify the situation, such as, "Are you sure?" Children don't describe sexual activity graphically to adults the way they might another crime; for example, saying, "That man stole our car!" Children don't have words for sodomy or fondling, and so their words are usually vague.

For a parent who assumes that other adults are trustworthy people, the claim that someone could be a sexual predator is difficult to believe. This is an illustration of denial, because most parents don't accept crime against children as a part of the landscape, in spite of the FBI's prediction that twenty-five percent of kids will be molested. If criminal activity were expected, people would be more likely to react appropriately rather than questioning the report.

Disclosure, when it happens, is often followed by a talk with the accused adult to determine what happened. Implicit in this is a parental request for reassurance and refutation. A skilled child predator usually gives a parent exactly what is requested so that a parent feels better. A child in these circumstances is then left abandoned and alone with his victimization.

People are often reluctant to contact the police in these circumstances because it seems to bring down very strong consequences for a seemingly small act. This is a reflection of widespread ignorance about sex crimes against kids and reflects the belief that these crimes involve only touching or only one

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incident. Child molesters very rarely limit themselves to one offense, and they often victimize several children at once, preparing their targets to accept increasingly bizarre behavior. Children don't have the vocabulary to describe all of the acts involved in these crimes, and they probably wouldn't voice them if they could.

To approach a person suspected of a crime and ask him about it is asking to be deceived. It offers the predator the opportunity to persuade others to avoid taking action. In doing this, a parent joins the offender against the child, because by tacitly supporting his position, the parent has sanctioned his activity with the child. What's more, the central issue may then become the accused person's integrity so that in future issues regarding child safety, a parent will feel compelled to give him the benefit of the doubt unless abuse has been proved.

In a case of forced sex with a child, there is rarely solid evidence to convince the layperson. Trained law enforcement professionals know how to unearth relevant information to make a determination if charges should be brought, but the lay public does not. Sexual abuse is more often identified by the constellation of conditions and behaviors that point to sexual exploitation.

Where there is doubt about contacting the police, the better choice is to contact a mandated reporter, a licensed professional required by law to report child abuse. Mandated reporting is required in most states by those who hold state licenses to practice their professions, such as licensed school teachers, medical personnel, psychologists, social workers and others in related fields.

When a parent takes no action after a report of sexual exploitation, she is in effect, recycling the predator, setting him loose to find other kids to assault. The offender learns from the errors that put him at risk of arrest and avoids repeating them in the future.

False Accusations

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Sometimes a child's comments don't reach a convincing level, so that a parent can't act. A child who doesn't like the baby-sitter or the neighbor may not be reacting out of fear of a criminal. With sensitive listening, a parent can gain an understanding of a child's feelings about the person in question and the reasons for the negative feelings. Children don't like being confused or disappointed, so the baby-sitter who promises cookies and then doesn't provide them or the neighbor who scowls each may lead a child to voice complaints.

When a parent senses that a child is ashamed or frightened of an adult, sensitive listening occasionally reveals sexual overtures to a youngster. In such circumstances parents are often uncertain about how to interpret the experience, because the behavior may seem unintentional. To make a federal case out of such a situation may seem hysterical and destructive. It hardly rates the same response as rape, in a parent's thinking.

More troublesome are those situations where a parent doubts that a child's complaints are true. Imagine that an elementary school-aged child has just been through a safety education program at school that has taught her about good touch and bad touch, and she complains that her grandfather has touched her and then refuses to discuss it. Even more troubling is the situation in which parents are going through separation and divorce and a child refuses to visit one parent, claiming sexual abuse.

The parent who hears these claims faces a very difficult situation in the choice between unfairly accusing someone or failing to protect a child. If there is existing turmoil in the family, this becomes doubly complicated. There are several assumptions that help in decision-making.

The first assumption is that most children hate to discuss sex or anything having to do with sex. During the sixties, when everybody spoke freely about sex, children did not do so because kids see sex very differently than adults. Stripped of emotional connection, physical arousal, and self-esteem needs, sex to children is typically one more icky thing that adults like to do. Sex education programs in schools generally cause embarrassment,

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avoidance, giggling, and silly comments. Until puberty, kids find sex less interesting than bathroom issues.

The second rule of thumb is that fraud takes an advanced level of cognitive development. To deceive through any serious intent requires planning and an ability to distinguish reality, which both take time to develop. This means that young children at a preschool level usually don't have the capability to make false reports of sexual abuse. Sexual exploitation at this age is usually reported spontaneously, without a clear motivation to disclose. A young child may mention that the baby-sitter gave her a bath and took his clothes off, too, and that he touched her all over. This may be done without any awareness of the consequences of sharing this information. Children at this age are not good at keeping secrets because they cannot easily inhibit the continuous flow of free associations that is part of their language.

Preschool children find it hard to imagine things with which they have had no experience. If a child at this age reports that an uncle kissed her and put his tongue in her mouth, this is most probably true. Preschoolers can't imagine such an experience and would not normally be exposed to material that would describe it. Sometimes young kids see pornographic material that depicts graphic sex, but they don't usually have the ability to copy what they've seen. Although they may have seen someone kissing open mouthed on television, this seems too weird to try and a more common reaction from a youngster is likely to be *I don't want your cooties!*

By elementary school, children are more mature and have a wider range of intellectual capabilities. The distinction between reality and fantasy is clearer, and so kids are better at reporting events. Although children have many fears during this period, such as fears of burglars, animals and insects, fear of sexual assault is not usually one of these.

People wonder whether kids make up false claims to get an adult into trouble. In fact, when there is sexual victimization, kids worry that *they* will get into trouble themselves, and that the abuse is *their* fault. A predator may have threatened a child with dire consequences for telling, and the child may worry that the police

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will arrest *him* if the abuse is revealed. The situation is different for children who are victimized by numerous adults over a period of time. In those unfortunate situations, kids become prematurely conversant in the complexities of sexual activity, and they may make false charges. For these kids, sex has replaced normal play and has become the currency for relating to others.

Elementary school children have a growing sense of socially acceptable behavior and a need for competence, and these two drives press kids to avoid disclosing sexual abuse. Frightful strangers are reported more often than abuse by someone known to parents because kids guess that parents will not welcome complaints about the behavior of a familiar person.

Teenagers' reactions to sexual abuse are more complicated because they don't get tricked into sexual activity and their involvement seems voluntary. Adolescents don't easily understand that compliant behavior can still involve sexual exploitation because minors can't give consent. Sexual predators can convince young adolescents that they are equal partners in sexual episodes, which are exhilarating to kids initially but later become a heavy emotional burden.

A thirteen-year-old involved in a sexual relationship with a school administrator may believe that it will be her fault if he loses his job as a result. More damaging is a teen's belief that the two are in love, and that sex is a natural expression of their feelings. If the police can demonstrate that a teen is just one of many such "loves," a youngster may see the criminal activity more clearly. Without such evidence, a loyal teenager may refuse to expose or help prosecute the offender. When a boy is targeted by a male perpetrator, painful sexual identity issues can block him from recognizing the relationship as criminal.

Even though it is theoretically possible that an angry, vindictive teen can make fraudulent claims, such events are extremely rare. Although most teenagers would not make false charges because this is unjust and wrong, less ethical teens are probably deterred by a healthy fear of law enforcement and an awareness that such claims are illegal.

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Perhaps more important to adolescents, reports of sexual victimization are embarrassing, because they require sharing detailed physical information. Answering sexual questions about one's own and some adult's body is not tolerable for most teens. Teenagers often don't report sex crimes because they don't want a public examination of their sexual behavior. At an age where sexual feelings and thoughts become important, it is humiliating to think they may be exposed to others.

Abuse Reports During Custody Conflicts

Reports of child sexual abuse that are part of divorce and custody proceedings increase the confusion and hostility of this process, and force the courts to sort out what is in the best interests of a child. These reports are handled by law enforcement in the same manner as those that come through the school or pediatrician's office, but they can be more complicated because they seem to influence the financial outcomes of a marital termination. Claims of abuse in the divorce process are sometimes interpreted as one partner's attempt to injure the other out of rage and a need for revenge. Although this may be the case, a determination of their veracity must still be made.

There are other reasons why sexual abuse reports are more common during divorce proceedings. The reporting rate for sexual crimes against children is typically low, but it increases during marital discord. A parent's willingness to listen sympathetically to a child's report of abuse is often stronger during a marital split. Children rarely report sexual abuse to their parents, often because they fear that parents will not believe or support them even when there is physical proof, but this may change when parents are estranged from each other.

In a divorce process, adults are often more willing to entertain negative information regarding a partner, and children may sense that a parent is more receptive. Kids can also feel driven to tell about abuse in order to avoid visitation and spending time alone with a threatening parent.

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For a youngster who fears the reaction of the perpetrator if he tells, it's safer to describe what happened once the person is out of the house. To an elementary school child not conversant with the mechanics of divorce, it may seem that the separation will protect her from reactions to the disclosure. Sometimes the abuse occurs for the first time when a marriage or relationship is disintegrating, so that in the chaos of a disrupted household, a sexual predator has opportunities not otherwise present. When parents begin to have solo-visiting time without the presence of the other adult, inhibition of sexual impulses may be more difficult, leading to molesting.

A parent may feel the burden of deciding whether there has been criminal activity, but this is a matter for law enforcement because it involves criminal behavior and legal consequences. In some cases, it may be necessary to call 911 immediately, particularly if a youngster is physically injured, but in other cases, it may be more useful to speak with a mandated reporter to make a determination of how to proceed.

An accused parent may want to speak with the child to dispute the report, but if there is to be a confrontation, it should be between the accused adult and the mandated reporter. For those trained as mandated reporters of child abuse, claims of molesting are not difficult to evaluate and rarely hinge on isolated or ambiguous incidents. A trained reporter can examine not only the incident that has been reported but also the context and related incidents to determine the probability of sexual victimization.

Training is important, however, because claims of sexual abuse have sometimes been contaminated by the bias of other concerned adults, who may ask leading or suggestive questions. Clinicians generally notice that kids who have been sexually molested are uncomfortable during discussion of the incidents, and that after the initial disclosure, they avoid the entire subject. Abused kids are likely to show guilt, shame and embarrassment, and they may ask the listener to keep the abuse secret: *Promise you won't tell anyone*. They are usually horrified that the police will be notified and upset that they have caused trouble.

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In a police investigation, kids give physical details that would not otherwise be known to them, such as descriptions of sexual sights, sounds, and smells that children don't normally encounter. Young kids may give confused or inappropriate responses to the abuse, because they cannot understand what is actually occurring: *Then he got upset and then he peed on me and it smelled bad.* The whole experience of discussing sexual abuse is a miserable one for children and often is accompanied by tears, refusals and attempts to withdraw.

Youthful Predators

A child's report of sexual abuse sometimes identifies a young adult or teenager in the family as the perpetrator, or sometimes an adult comes upon sexual activity among children. When kids are small, sexual play with peers indicates a need for limits and rules about acceptable play. The situation is quite different when there is a large age and power discrepancy and one youngster is exploiting another, most commonly a teenager with a much younger child.

These are behavioral signs that indicate that a child or adolescent has serious trouble in healthy social relating. A youngster who cannot respect other's physical boundaries and needs to constantly touch, wrestle, and poke other kids needs guidance. Talking about sex is unusual among children, so when sexual comments are made, it suggests a degree of exposure. A need to control a younger child and to dominate his activity is also a concern because it is not part of balanced play between equals. When the need to control takes the form of bribes or threats, adults need to intervene. If the youngster appears to be ingratiating to adults and is quick to agree or cooperate with them to avoid the rules that apply to other youngsters, this suggests that he may have conned the adults into ignoring problematic behavior.

When one youngster sexually exploits a younger child, the consequences are more complicated than with adult predators. Although for an adult offender, legal consequences may be appropriate, they may not seem so for a youngster. This leaves the

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problem to parental discretion, but research suggests that a molesting adolescent may have had serious gaps in his parenting guidance. When ineffective parents take no action to help a youthful predator, it recycles the young person into further sexually predatory activities. In fact, most career predators begin in their early years. Early guidance and treatment may offer an alternative to an unhealthy adulthood.

In the case of youthful sexual predators, mandated reporters can determine whether abuse has occurred and then act on the legal requirements in the situation. If the reporter takes the legally required course, a youngster and his parents are protected from the temptation to ignore the problem. The courts may impose punishment, particularly if this is one of many offenses, but the major concern will be with restraint and protection. Research indicates that the most promising approaches are those that involve both the perpetrator and his family in treatment.

In treatment, a youngster and his family will learn what triggers the abuse cycle, how it relates to family life, and how parents can help to break these patterns and help a child develop into a healthy adult. Without intervention, a young person has little chance for healthy growth, and his criminal behavior is likely to become chronic.

Typically, youngsters and their families refuse to recognize the problem and instead interpret it in ways that insulate both the youngster and his family:

We were just playing; it wasn't that bad.

I'm not out of control; I'm just a wild man.

I didn't set the kid up for the sex, it just happened.

It wasn't sexual—kids don't turn me on.

I've never done anything like this before.

It didn't really hurt him— this is a big deal over nothing.

Sometimes these refusals by a youngster and his parents make it impossible for there to be any serious treatment, and the situation after disclosure reverts to the original status.

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If it is revealed that a youth in a family has been sexually exploiting the younger children, parents may be inclined to separate the kids and leave it at that. From the point of view of the victims, this isolates a child with the problem, since he then has to be very careful to avoid the older child at all times. This is virtually impossible in a family and can make a child live a hidden, cornered life.

**CHAPTER TEN:
RECOGNIZING THE PREDATOR'S CON**

Sex crimes against children are different from other types of criminal activity. They usually involve advance preparation in the form of grooming both a child and the people who control access to him. Career sexual predators are adept at disguising their intentions and seducing unsuspecting adults into cooperating with their criminal activities.

Social control involves invisible forces that can be seen in the way that traffic usually moves. With very few signals, drivers at a busy intersection usually take turns, stop to let others pass and avoid crashes. Some of the same influences cause drivers to stop at a stop sign when nobody is around or to go the right way on a one-way street even when there is no other traffic.

Social control relies on cues that trigger behavior based on a network of cultural expectations and habits. Belonging to a human community simplifies decision-making and allows people to function automatically with one another most of the time. Although the forces that drive conformity are impossible to see, the cues that trigger compliant behavior can be identified. Minor cues influence the way we think and feel, such as pleasant music playing at low volume, which produces favorable attitudes about the setting and makes people more agreeable.

Humans are affiliative creatures and following group rules gives them a sense of belonging. Parents usually want their kids to have a sense of belonging as well and it is here that sexual predators plug in. By manipulating interpersonal signals to allow them access to their victims, predators can join in the social flow of a group and seamlessly achieve their goals.

How does this happen? In an interesting experiment researchers told subjects that they were testing headphones and how they functioned when the head was moving. Subjects were asked to either nod their heads (indicating yes) or shake their heads (indicating no) as they listened to strong opinions through the headphones. When the results were tabulated, the people who

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nodded their heads were more likely to agree with the opinions they had heard, as though the physical indicator of agreement caused the internal feelings to fall into line.

This doesn't mean that you can control people by getting them to move their heads, but it does suggest that if you're going to sell somebody something, you have a better chance of closing the deal if you say things that cause him to nod in agreement. A child molester has a better chance of persuading a parent to let him take her child camping by saying agreeable things while he is trying to persuade her.

To lower the crime statistics requires a change in thinking about sex crimes. The current approach is to instruct kids to watch out for child molesters and tell parents if someone behaves inappropriately. The result is that a large proportion of American children are victimized, they suffer through it alone and they tell no one. The approach is like the old lawn-care approaches: mow and weed, which means you get lots of weeds. More successful approaches to lawn care involve the scheduled application of pre-emergent weed killers, which change the soil balances and increase the likelihood of healthy grass.

Our efforts at blocking child molesters are largely ineffective because we've waited until they flourish, and then we depend on young children to be astute, accurate observers so that we can step in. What we need is a system that will prevent acts of sexual assault on children rather than try to handle them after they occur.

To do this, we must recognize and change the conditions under which sex crimes occur, and this has more to do with adults than it does with children. Adults control one another continuously in an integrated society, whether in traffic patterns or child protection. When people walk on the sidewalks of a busy city, they use complex, subconscious signals so that they don't bump into one another or block each other's progress. People obtain permission from one another, so that they can pass, overtake, violate air space, and even speak without anybody getting alarmed. Pedestrians obtain one another's permission in sidewalk traffic

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using body posture and limb movement in a complicated dance of a highly coordinated nature.

The precision of this ballet is best observed when genders mix and meet. All aspects of their exchanges are dictated by social rules, so that a man and woman, having just met, know how close to stand, how much eye contact to make, and what posture to assume to transmit a message of sexual availability or avoidance. For reasons of safety, women are extremely skilled at reading male signals in order to predict the likelihood of a sexual invitation, overture, or assault.

Preferential child molesters who persuade parents and adults to believe they have a healthy interest in kids use the same social control mechanisms, but their goal is disguised and their signals hidden. The payoff is far more than merely the sexual exploitation of children because it is also the exploitation of parents.

Sexually exploiting children is criminal behavior—not misinterpreted behavior or socially clumsy behavior, but *criminal* behavior. This needs to be recognized because the predator creates an illusion that it is not. It is more useful to a sex offender if his behavior is seen as “off color” or “inappropriate” rather than criminal. Sometimes a person’s behavior causes a sudden reorganization of the perceptive field—what we refer to as seeing someone *in a different light*. A friend once described how she was stunned one day, when her sister and her boyfriend were visiting, to notice that the boyfriend had come quietly into the kitchen and was taking money from her purse on the counter.

This leads to the first requirement of sexual predators, and that is to define themselves as members of the group, indistinguishable from anybody else. This is why Megan’s Law is so threatening, because it publicly defines a predator as belonging to a separate criminal category and interferes with the manipulation of reality.

For sexual predators, controlling the way others see things is more than making an excuse. A con is not simply a deception, as when somebody says something untrue. A con is a way of living acted out each day and pursued with great energy, with the con

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man deriving enormous satisfaction in the outcome. There is no guilt associated with deception for a sexual predator, any more than there would be for a good undercover agent, for in both cases, there is perceived dedication to a much higher good, national security for the undercover agent and in the case of the predator, himself.

The inner monologue of one who sexually assaults and seduces children involves a complex set of instructions and directions. Many people, including salesmen, clergy, and physicians, try to influence others for their own benefit, but their forms of influence are openly acknowledged and are part of the role a person plays in his workplace. The person himself is separate, so that a salesman may change careers and become a clergyman, or a physician may change his clinical treatment.

Child molesters are different because they have an inflexible personality structure that dictates their behavior, so that regardless of their social and occupational experiences and relationships, they remain focused on children as sexual targets. Although they can refrain from assaulting children when they might be exposed, this is always temporary and self-serving.

Making sexual contact with kids is the driving force in a child molester's behavior, and all of his life choices fall in line behind this need. When the superintendent of schools is arrested for molesting young boys, and the school system, the boys' families, the superintendent's family, and not the least, the victims themselves have their lives disrupted and permanently altered, it becomes clear what a sexual predator is willing to sacrifice to meet his goals.

Risks are only incidentally considered by a child molester, although avoiding exposure is a goal. The probability of arrest and imprisonment are low for child molesters and their behavior reflects this. The gratification in seducing children and conning parents to prevent recognition of their crimes requires a set of social patterns that work well for a career predator.

What are the principles that make sexual con men successful? There are six sets of behaviors criminals use to target children and their parents.

1. A sexual con man arranges the context and sets the stage for his exploitation. He develops a publicity campaign that casts him in the best light.

Child molesters learn from an early age that how people see them affects what they can get from them. A youngster who learns to please and reassure adults gains power and influence, although the way he acts isn't a genuine expression of a developing personality, but rather a disguise. For a young psychopath, there is no guilt over his dishonesty and disregard of others, but instead a determination to use others to further his own interest. Loyalty and betrayal are not issues for a youngster here, because his only priority is self-aggrandizement.

To present a reassuring cover, an adult pedophile may disguise himself by finding a girlfriend or flirting with older women and mothers. He may marry somebody with children and be a good stepfather, inching ever closer to the kids' bedrooms. A career child molester presents himself as a *nice* person, meaning someone who is a lot like the other people in his surroundings. He shows interest in the same things, adopts the same political positions, and takes up the same hobbies or activities. He is the one who creates harmony in social settings, who says supportive things, and doesn't challenge or argue or criticize.

A career predator embeds himself in the social context and becomes part of the community. He may refer to social contacts elsewhere to serve as character references, and he copies the habits of the community pillars. If he's very skilled, he interprets people's reactions and answers the unspoken; for example, if he has no girlfriend, he may refer to a girlfriend who lives far away.

He may allay parental fears about child abuse by acting a bit impatient with children, as though he doesn't really like them all that much. If people ask him to baby-sit, he will probably say no at first and let them persuade him to do it. Like a politician setting up the next election, he plans his moves so that confidence in him grows.

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Whatever his employment, a skilled con man usually does his job. If he gives music lessons, he is likely to give good ones. If he's an investigator for child abuse services, he investigates thoroughly so that he establishes a track record and people have a positive picture of him. People like their cognitions to be congruent and a person who is a competent professional, an established expert, and a trusted community figure is unlikely to fit their picture of a child molester.

He creates a reassuring picture of somebody "*who is good with kids*," who sacrifices for children, and behaves in ways that allow people to draw the conclusion that kids matter to him. He may even talk up the need to protect kids from sexual abuse. One of the best disguises for a sexual predator who targets children is that of an expert who has access to children and is seen as trustworthy. If a teacher recommends that a child stay after school alone for special help, a parent will probably agree, even though this leaves the child in a vulnerable position. Kids notice when parents defer to an outside adult, and they follow suit because the person in authority seems like an extension of a parent. In autocratic families, the likelihood of abuse is higher, probably because children are more compliant.

Circumstances can temporarily elevate someone to a position of authority, where there is no basis in expertise or rank. If you have ever been in an airport and had a flight canceled, you know how much power the ticket agent suddenly has when besieged with scores of frustrated customers. If the agent has no apparent logic to follow in rebooking, his or her authority in the situation becomes whimsical and absolute. In these circumstances, whatever is asked of people, they are likely to do because of the urgency of the situation. If a ticket clerk asked for a cash fee for rebooking, and the flight were leaving shortly, probably many passengers would comply. In the same way, a leader for a group of children traveling outside the country has no lasting authority or standing in their lives, but his instructions are likely to prevail because the circumstances provide no other alternatives.

There are many ways to arrange contexts to facilitate sexual assault, and often a serial sex offender uses a variety of

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approaches simultaneously and works on a number of targets at the same time. He may have a work setting where he grooms targets, and he may have recreational activities where he does the same, keeping his public persona integrated across these situations. He may also take kids on trips or arrange special settings that give him additional power.

2. A sexual con man heightens peer pressure to get people invested in his good reputation, and he prepares for exposure by developing parental dependence on him.

In the movie *Wag the Dog*, a skilled political arranger is able to divert attention from a president's sexual exploitation of a youngster by creating the appearance of a war. The movie's premise is a good summary of the way that predators divert attention away from their activities so that parents and others fail to notice what is happening to kids. Ironically, when people who have viewed the movie are asked to describe the plot, they focus on the war fabrication and forget the initial incident of a sex crime against a child. In a stroke of brilliance, the movie has replicated the strategy of a career child molester in changing the focus of watchers' attention.

Social influence management is a never-ending process, and for the psychopath, the real payoff is being able to direct traffic without anybody realizing what's happening. Molesting kids is part but not all of the process, for in deceiving parents and community members, the predator is able to construct a social reality that is reassuring to him. Constructing the social reality takes a great deal of arranging, and like a good sales pitch, begins with selling oneself. The picture in the predator's mind is one of a person who loves children, seeks what is best for them, and unselfishly sacrifices for them. A hero in his community, the praise of others rings true to him.

A critical starting point is to determine the demographics of the group he is dealing with. In a neighborhood where everybody lives in trailers, a predator's self-presentation will be different from one in which everybody drives a Mercedes.

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A skilled manipulator takes stock of the group early on to figure out who are the opinion molders and who are the followers. Defining reality begins by saying words that express a perspective that others like to have, perhaps referring to world peace, apple pie and protecting children. To begin guiding social thinking, it helps to put into words the highest values and aspirations of the group, like, *“There’s nothing more important than our kids.”* This may not be true for the target adults, but if they want to think of themselves in this way, they will be influenced by the speaker.

Novelty is helpful in this regard, as when the speaker suggests something that helps kids, preferably something that others (not their parents) can do. This establishes the energy trajectory and puts the perpetrator at the front of it. It also begins the process of getting others to follow the person, so that, *“I wish the school would offer more appealing lunches for the kids”* later becomes, *“I’m gonna have the kids at my house and cook them a real good lunch,”* and eventually, *“He’s at my house every day for lunch.”*

The probability of human behavior is changed by the events that have preceded it, so that a person is more likely to comply with a request when he has complied with previous requests. In the massive Jonestown suicide, it is astonishing that parents gave their children poisoned Kool-Aid, but is easier to understand given that they first *practiced* giving their children poisoned Kool-Aid; and that prior to that, they planned this verbally; and that prior to that, they considered going to jail and being separated from their children. With each of these events, the probability of the next event changed because it became more familiar. If they had been asked to poison their kids without any of this preparation, they probably would have refused.

The adult targets of the sexual con man are usually needy adults whose lives fail to provide what they need to feel comfortable and secure. This is the core group that defends a sexual predator when suspicions and accusations begin. These are the people who will endure the most damage because their children are likely to be a predator’s targets, and in the end they will blame themselves.

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When adults are needy, this usually predates parenthood and their needs may span several domains. There may be financial need as well as emotional vulnerability because raising children is expensive, and there is rarely enough to meet all of the requirements and wishes of a family. Marriage itself is sometimes a burden and may offer limited social support.

Choosing adult targets who need praise, interest, help and who will then become dependent on the predator is a primary goal. Creating and reinforcing dependency becomes more likely with unhappily married adults or with divorced parents. Raising children can be a strain on marriages and partnerships, and some research finds that marital quality declines with parenting, particularly for mothers. The best way to predict marital satisfaction appears to be the personalities of the partners, with those who have warm and outgoing personalities more likely to ride out the tough spots.

For the child molester, identifying mothers who are unhappy, deprived, and perhaps angry offers a fertile field for cultivating a dependent relationship. This need not be an extensive seduction, for occasional eye contact, reassuring words or helpful favors may be enough to create an ally who will interpret a predator's behavior with a positive bias.

This is not as overt as asking for permission to molest kids, but instead makes it increasingly difficult to acknowledge the signs of sexual victimization and provides good alternative explanations. If it is inconvenient and embarrassing for a parent to acknowledge that there may be sexual exploitation occurring, a predator gains a great deal of social control. The chances of success increase with parents who have limited resources; in particular, time, energy, serenity and self-esteem.

In his excellent social analysis, Malcolm Gladwell reports research that contempt in a relationship is the best predictor of divorce, and if this is so, it provides a rapid identification of vulnerable parents. For a parent who is held in contempt or is contemptuous of a mate is likely to be uncomfortable and probably needy, since the relationship is not working to serve each partner's needs. By asking casual questions that get at the contempt issue

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(I'll bet Johnny's father is very proud of you), a child molester can get an immediate measure of the status of the relationship without being intrusive.

Although single mothers are highly vulnerable to predatory males, married mothers are not immune. If a mother and father function effectively as a team, they can protect kids well, although females are generally more sensitive to danger than males are. Many factors can damage marital teamwork and financial difficulty is the most destructive. When financial pressure grows, mutual support lessens, and the resulting alienation and hostility can distract a parent from a child's needs. In a more sinister vein, deliberately increasing pressure on a mother can make her more pliable and more distracted from the activities of a predator partner. For women, a partner's support is more important than that of friends and relatives, and if other friendships are discouraged, a partner's influence increases. If a woman is socially isolated, it is difficult to resist the demands of a powerful boyfriend or husband.

A mother can inadvertently enable a mate to molest her children because of erroneous beliefs about sexual victimization. If the predator has a sexual relationship with the mother, it may seem like proof that the partner can't be a child molester. If a child is difficult to manage, a partner who is concerned and helpful will be seen as a great resource; and even where his behavior is suspect, this will be ignored because a child is seen to benefit from his attention. If the partner is a sexual predator, a mother may unwittingly train her children to submit to him, since she endorses his involvement. In questions of discipline, it is easy for kids to see his decisions as hers.

3. A sexual con man tries to get people to act automatically, without thought.

When one person in a group yawns, usually others do as well. Nonverbal behaviors are highly contagious, particularly when others are not prepared for them. Registered at a subconscious level, these behaviors produce a response outside of awareness. A whole layer of brain function operates outside of awareness,

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picking up signals and making decisions about how to respond based on survival needs. All primates mimic the behavior of others, which is apparent in the monkey section of the zoo.

To influence people's behavior, it works to get people to act first without analyzing their decisions. This is the principle in getting shoppers to try new foods by giving out samples in the supermarket. If customers went home first, did research, considered their dietary goals and plans, and then returned to the store, they might not buy the proposed item. When the food is presented and the social pressures of the moment are operating, they pop the conveniently bite-sized chunks into their mouths quite spontaneously, and this increases the probability of a sale.

This inclination toward spontaneity is the salesman's best friend, because an important rule of social influence is that beliefs are often formed retrospectively. A person may say, *I guess I am a responsible person* if he notices that he always returns library books on time. The act of performing a behavior also makes that behavior more likely in the future, so that a spontaneous choice increases the likelihood of a same or similar choice at the next opportunity. This allows people to perceive themselves as consistent over time.

If the coach takes the kids on a camping trip, and a parent assents, the parent will draw conclusions about himself and the coach based on that decision. Those conclusions might be, "*The coach really cares about kids*" and "*The coach and I have a good relationship.*" To the internal question, *Do I trust the coach?* the parent will answer, *I guess I must because I let him take my kid.*

Getting people to act spontaneously is a powerful form of social leverage, because the conclusions that a person then draws about himself structure his behavior in the future. This is easier than it seems. Most sales are based on spontaneous customer behavior, and if you examine the piles of discarded items in people's basements, it becomes clear that many purchases are not the result of carefully planned decisions.

Spontaneous behavior can lead to established patterns in groups, so that once the coach takes the kids on a camping trip, this becomes accepted as routine. Group patterns and practices are

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regulated by subtle communication, which operates in any gathering. At a meeting, dinner party, or religious ritual, people gathered together exchange nonverbal signals that transmit their feelings and shape the group's reactions. In a book club discussion, people regulate who speaks and how long each person gets. Eye contact, body posture, and extraneous sounds such as coughing or throat clearing indicate when somebody's time is up. In casual parent groupings, such as those that occur in the soccer bleachers or at the supermarket, a skilled predator can assume the position of the kids' defender and create a role for himself among parents.

Social contagion influences us to go along with the social tide because it seems wise. If everybody cuts his lawn on Sunday afternoons instead of Thursday nights, it will feel right and normal to do so. This is because we sometimes see others as providing experimental data on a given issue, and we want to avoid reinventing the wheel.

A career pedophile works on kids and their parents at the same time, manipulating social forces to achieve his goals. If the scout leader provides alcohol and shows pornographic cartoons on a DVD at campouts, it will begin to seem normal to kids. It can even become ritualized so that kids teach the routine to new kids. It will feel much easier for a new youngster to conform to the group practice than to object. We watch others to gauge their reactions to new circumstances, and a predator can gradually arrange contexts so that the group habit supports the behavior he wishes to elicit.

Peer pressure works to maintain patterns that the group has initiated so that they become routine. When people think of peer pressure, they think of teenagers, but adults also want approval from their peers. Peer pressure operates as a risk and an opportunity, because it can cause positive behaviors like exercising as well as negative habits like smoking. Emotional reactions affect our cognitive judgments, and when something feels right, it is likely to be judged so, particularly if it involves risk. If some parents seem content with a decision, such as letting the coach take the kids camping, other parents will make decisions in the same direction and share the same feelings.

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This is particularly true where decisions are complex and involve many elements, for here emotional reactions are more likely to swing the choice, so that a person says, *What the heck, why not do it?* Emotion dominates when the mental tabulation of all the elements becomes too burdensome, and the risks seem low. The decision about whether to let a kid go on a camping trip may seem trivial compared to whether to follow a doctor's recommendation for surgery.

Conformity is the requirement of belonging, and individual viewpoints are the sacrifice to membership. By structuring parental groups to accommodate his needs, a sexual predator can use conformity to produce compliance with his wishes, which are usually to get kids alone and unclothed.

Groups can be loosely organized, like the mothers chatting at the bus stop in the morning, or tightly structured, like the local PTA. A career sexual predator often develops a fan club: people who offer time alone with their children; people who will protect the fabricated good reputation of the predator.

Child protection efforts get diffused when parents belong to groups, because the group expectations about child safety may often override the fears of an individual parent. If all the other parents think that the voice teacher is great—if a little unorthodox, an individual parent can feel safe in the group's assessment. It takes a great deal of emotional self-reliance for a parent to say, *A voice teacher who does muscle relaxing exercises and massages with children may be fine for everybody else's children, but not for mine.*

When parents endorse someone as good with kids, it reflects well on the parent. In effect, a skilled child molester makes a parent look good, because a parent makes him look good. If a predator pays attention to parents with flattened egos, they will begin to inflate and see themselves in a whole new light. A good indicator that a symbiotic parent-predator relationship may be operating is a parent's protestation: *He would NEVER do anything like that!* in response to concerns about potentially criminal behavior.

3. Sexual con men work to develop dependency in parents that clouds their judgment and offers access to their children.

A sexual predator who molests many children in a community usually builds an adult following, a group of people who will defend and justify his behavior once it becomes suspicious. This is also the group of parents that is likely to be targeted for child sex crimes, since they are the most gullible. By spending lots of time with this group, a predator gains access to kids, where he can offer help and become more involved. His goal is to have kids confuse him with parents, so that he has the same control over them that they do. All of the help and support he offers will likely make parents feel obligated and indebted, giving the predator considerable influence over them as well.

To avoid exposure, a child molester must continually develop new and novel means of exploiting kids so that he can't be caught by different children reporting the same misdeeds. Varying his sexual behavior also helps to keep the predator's sexual arousal alive, and part of the exhilaration comes from the deception and control he creates. This is the underlying rationale for sexually molesting children in front of their parents, usually by fondling them or inserting objects genitally while parents fail to recognize what is occurring.

Child sexual abuse is a hostile act toward both parents and children that is recognized only once the behavior is identified. Even though an adult may be concerned about upsetting someone with accusations of abuse, this is minor consequence compared to the damage done to children and families by sexual predators.

Sexual predators look for ways to be close to children; for example, a predatory priest develops the habit of visiting parishioners at home and staying for dinner. Parents are often flattered by the interest and attentions of a community figure, particularly if the children are difficult or the parent's circumstances are problematic.

If a child molester often does good deeds for others, the favors pile up on one side, and obligations pile up on the other so that there may be a strong sense that one must "do something" to

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reciprocate. The return can be in the form of a like-value item such as loaning a lawnmower after one has borrowed another garden tool; or it may take a different form, so that the borrower spends time with the lender or agrees with his opinions. A skilled sexual predator can create imbalances that give him an advantage in manipulating social influence.

If he were discovered *in flagrante delicto* with a child, these techniques would offer little help to a child molester. But in most situations where suspicions are aroused, details are ambiguous, and listeners are likely to give the predator “the benefit of the doubt” because of social pressure to repay an obligation. The multitude of small favors keeps things moving in the predator’s direction and protects him from exposure. If he were a scary fellow in a dark raincoat, he would not enjoy these advantages.

The social accounting in repaying favors requires that we reciprocate within three exchanges. If John borrows Tom’s lawnmower, John can refuse a request to use his rake, or one to use his shovel, but he will be under heavy pressure to agree to the third request, even if this is to let his son help clean out the neighbor’s basement. This is most effective if a predator has a lot of social accounts operating at the same time, so that he has steady access to kids.

Sometimes sex offenders become partners with the parent of target children, either by marrying or by moving in. Most people prefer to believe that parents try to take care of their children, and so a molesting father or stepfather already has biases operating in his favor. Acting as a parent or stepparent provides constant access to kids, and is the motivation behind marriage for sexual predators.

This may seem like a radical life choice, but a person who arranges his life to have access to kids is driven by this priority. Living in the household with children offers convenience and safety as well, for exposure is less likely, particularly if the children are small. A child molester in these circumstances has much more access to kids, and the opportunity to be alone and unclothed with kids arises naturally in a family. Social control happens in a marriage through attitude alignment, where partners change their attitudes to move closer to the opinion of the other.

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This helps to avoid discord and simplifies everyday decisions, allowing people to avoid antagonizing each other.

A skilled predator in an intimate relationship can use this process to get access to kids. To introduce nudity as a household practice with children for example, he can criticize prudishness in a partner. Usually in a relationship, deference is given to the partner with the strongest emotional investment in an issue. Remarriages may be particularly fertile fields for inducing social compliance because of the vulnerability that results from the spouses' history of marital failure.

People who molest children seek to replace parents as the first emotional tie. Often this is begun by bonding with a parent and taking on his legitimacy and power in the eyes of a child, so that it is difficult for a youngster to separate the predator from the parent and the wishes of one from the wishes of the other.

This can go even further when the predator is an authority figure. In those cases where priests molested children, not only had the priest often ingratiated himself with parents, so that the children saw the priest's wishes as somehow legitimized by the connection with parents, but children also saw the priest's wishes as sanctified by the church and by the Almighty. In effect, the priest had become a representative of both in the eyes of the child victims.

When a sexual predator seduces a child, he may say that a parent wouldn't believe any accusations or that the predator will harm a parent if the child tells. A parent who doesn't know this is happening can't counter these threats, and so they stand undisputed in a child's eyes; and kids rarely risk the consequences by telling.

In effect, the predator becomes the final word and the pivotal person in the child's reality, and a parent cannot intervene or protect a youngster. A child may well feel this as a separation from a parent and a loss, and as with all profound losses, children blame themselves. A child molester may tell a child that the situation is his fault, and this will support his suspicion that he brought on the consequences himself, and now it is the predator who is alone with the child emotionally.

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This is a very subtle process, and it is keyed to the development of a child's personality and character. According to some research with preschoolers, there are two forms of obedience with young children. Situational compliance is that behavior which is required in a particular context, and which children may offer without genuine agreement. It is opportunistic cooperation done because the situation seems to require it and it may be the practical way to deal with things.

Committed compliance, on the other hand, involves a corresponding internalization of the values inherent in the behavior, so that the behavior "gets inside" and changes the developing personality. When a sexual predator victimizes a child over time by seducing, persuading, and threatening, he in effect replaces the parent as the primary source of values. Much of what is learned is not primarily sexual but is damaging nonetheless. The practices of secrecy, deception, conning parents about the illicit relationship, all separate a child from a parent and teach that intimacy can be fraudulent.

Children also learn that the primary responsibility for protecting themselves lies with them, not with a caring adult. Because all of current child protection is predicated upon children reporting sex crimes, they learn that because of their failure to tell, they are not entitled to protection. This easily slides into a belief that because one was compliant, one is responsible for the abuse as well.

4. A sexual con man continuously cons people and never relaxes.

If you're a swindler whose aim is to defraud elderly people of their savings by selling them phony investments, it helps to get people in the community to endorse you, because this puts social pressure on others to buy your services. It's hard to separate a personal endorsement from the person making it.

This pays off in situations where a sexual predator needs people to put a good spin on his behavior. If an uncle is getting out of line with a niece, he can be described as a Don Juan with the girls or as somebody who loses his head when he's been drinking

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or as a terrible joker, all of which reassure anxious parents. If a stepfather wants to show raunchy movies or tell dirty jokes to the kids, he must be a holdover from the hippie era or the free love movement. In helping to create and maintain this reality, the predator constructs an insulated social setting for himself.

Most parents would prefer to avoid a family conflict that would result from openly challenging inappropriate adult behavior. When a predator is finally accused and arrested, parents may be persuaded that kids will be better off if legal action is avoided.

5. A sexual con man learns to get between kids and their parents.

This is the predator's major goal: to get control of kids and get them alone. An adult who displays independent expertise on children can persuade a parent to relinquish control for a while. This may be because the predator is an actual expert, such as a pediatrician or childcare worker, or it may be because the adult has exchanges with the child that allow him to claim special knowledge. A baby-sitter for example, who says that a child was upset when a parent scolded the sitter, may be convincing.

If there is a lot of leisure time with a child, a predator can slowly and inexorably move him toward sexual activity through a detailed, sadly predictable sequence of activities designed to wear down a child's resistance. If he allows the child to do things the parent wouldn't allow, the youngster will feel complicit and beholden. Some activities themselves hold value for the predator, because often they work to lower or change a child's inhibitions. A child will always find forgiveness and acceptance with the predator, who has seen a child do shameful things and still cares about him in the child's eyes. Confessing sins to other adults seems far more intimidating to a child.

Even children understand the idea of loyalty and don't want to be a tattletale. If a teacher-predator gives a child an unearned passing grade, the child may feel he must submit because he is obligated by the illegal favor done for him. Children who are given alcohol or drugs are more compliant with directions and requests,

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and viewing pornography also changes a child's beliefs about what is normal.

Children are subject to social control forces, and they are influenced by social context. A young boy may follow along with older boys who take their clothes off at a party. What's more, if kids took their clothes off last week, they will be likely to do so again in order to be consistent, because it's harder to refuse to do something after you've once agreed and done it before.

If a predator can get a child to perform sexual acts and then define the context in such a way that a child is seen in a positive light, the context instead of the act becomes definitive to the child. Winning a prize or joining a team or secret club, if achieved by performing sexual acts, will seem to give a child a new definition that he will work to keep. When sex crimes are exposed, parents are often horrified that their children participated in the sexual activity even though they knew it was wrong. A skilled criminal knows how to disguise the early stages of victimization and then describe the child's involvement as voluntary. Exposed only to the predator's point of view, a youngster has little alternative but to believe him.

A predator's initial time alone with a child increases the probability of further time alone, because a parent is changed by the act of granting permission. Since it appears that nothing bad happened to a child left with an adult, further permissions will seem less risky. If the predator can add some typical child behavior to the description, mentioning that the child had to be scolded for doing something bad, this will further normalize the situation.

Predators need to control the secret and make sure kids don't tell. Less skilled predators may use threats, which work best when they threaten someone the child loves. Threatening that the information will kill the child's mother is often effective, or threatening that disclosure will give the predator a heart attack, can also be useful. Threatening that a child will go to hell may be effective if done so in a religious context.

The most effective way to get a child to keep a secret is to make it a shameful secret, so that disclosure equals confession. Arranging the context so that the abuse is the child's fault is

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central. A child molester may frequently tell a child that he will stop the abuse if the child wants him to and later point out that the child never asked him to stop. It's likely that this will include claims that the child seduced the adult, and the predator may use language that the child cannot counter, as in *You knew what you were doing* and *You flashed those big eyes at me and you knew what would happen*. Kids can't debate causality in an arena where they have no experience, so confusion and inadequacy silence a child. What's more, kids don't usually remember the beginning of the abuse, particularly if substances and pornography were involved.

Sexual activity is sometimes described to kids as a game or a special test, or perhaps as a physical examination or a massage. An adult would recognize the deception and seduction in this, but young children cannot do so, and when there is discomfort, kids figure it's their fault.

6. A sexual con man always defends himself and never admits to criminal activity.

When suspicions develop, which may take decades to occur, they will probably result from a child who complains to an adult, not infrequently if a younger child is at risk. A predator who stays unruffled and calmly explains the behavior will probably avoid exposure because children are not usually believed. As accusations accumulate over time, his risk will increase.

When people gather information, three separate sources seem to be the number required for something to seem true. One report is of interest, and two will raise concern, but the third report makes a convincing case to the subconscious that something is true. This also works well in creating a public persona, because if three separate sources serve as character references, this seems to insure integrity.

A child molester can depend on habitual reactions, the automatic thinking patterns that have been built up in parents. If parents are in the habit of having a baby-sitter watch the kids, and if everybody describes the sitter as a guy who loves kids, these

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patterns will take on a verity of their own over time. A parent will put these together with the new data that one child's parents said he touched the child inappropriately, and the weight will fall on the side of believing that a child molester is innocent and perhaps badly used. The strongest defenders are likely to be those who have gone out on a limb before and taken a position that required a leap of faith. After a first risk, the speaker's ego integrity is at issue, so that the defense will be very strong. The more often people defend something or someone, the more committed they become.

An important part of this manipulation is for a predator to make sure that there are no physically detailed descriptions of the questionable behavior. If others believe that there was "inappropriate touch," this muddies the waters enough so that others will still feel connected to the predator. If the behavior is described as a neighbor putting his fingers in the child's rectum and then licking them, others will be alienated and far less likely to defend the accused.

A defense based on principle is also a powerful strategy, the most convincing being the welfare of the children: *It's not just my honor and reputation and yes, my whole life that is being questioned— it is the children's right to have somebody around who cares about them, when so many people do not.*

Resorting to principle is a powerful tactic because it transforms accusations of child exploitation to a struggle between the Force and the Dark Side of the Force. It has implications far beyond the current issue (which allows the predator to sidestep the current issue) and so changes the subject. It forces a comparison of who is more righteous, which dilutes the immediate issue and turns attention to the overall character of those in conflict. In an overly moralistic audience, it forces people to seek the higher, albeit murkier ground. It also invokes the concepts of self-sacrifice and martyrdom, which the predator is likely to claim. In so doing, he burdens his accusers with proving that he has done no good, which can successfully divert attention away from his crimes.

The claim that accusers are engaged in a witch-hunt, trying to tear down a good person, usually has some success, because

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witch-hunts are seen as bad. More important, by using this term, the parallel is drawn with public upset over a nonexistent problem, implying that there are no child molesters, only frightened, irrational people. It is a subtle argument and difficult to respond to, and it quickly puts those who would report on the defensive.

Parental ego investment, if it has developed over time, can be particularly powerful here. The issue is then not just about the rabbi who is suspicious, but about the parent who supported him. Even in situations where there is undeniable criminal proof, admitting a mistake in accepting a predator may be too humiliating for some, who will continue to defend him as a way of defending themselves. There may even be circumstances where parents hide or protect predators because they don't want to be exposed as fools.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN:
DON'T ACT LIKE A CHILD MOLESTER**

Dear Abby:

My son-in-law insists on walking around naked after his shower. He claims that he's hot and must let his hemorrhoids air-dry. Abby, this man has four children, three of whom are girls ages 9, 7, and 4. My daughter has done everything from plead to scream to get him to stop this habit, yet he still emerges from the bathroom with the announcement, "Turn your heads, girls, I'm naked!" What more can my daughter do to get him to understand how potentially dangerous this is? --Disgusted in Jameson, MO

Although there is no indication that this father is likely to do anything more than embarrass his daughters to tears, his behavior sets a dangerous precedent. The message that it is socially acceptable for adult men to be naked in front of young girls and that a child must be responsible for propriety by averting her gaze is not protective. Casual nudity in a mixed-sex setting is one way in which children are desensitized to adult predatory behavior. When a child becomes accustomed to exhibitionism at home, he is more likely to accept it away from home.

Sexual behavior is endlessly varied, but child abuse education programs teach kids that physical contact of a sexual nature is equivalent to abuse. Programs built around the good touch/bad touch concept work on the assumption that sexual assault always begins with body touch. But in fact, sexual predators, tuned in to what children learn, vary their approach so that physical contact may occur relatively late in the criminal sequence.

Adult women are usually skilled at distinguishing the elements of seductive behavior, so that a male passenger on a bus who makes eye contact more than twice raises concerns about his intentions. Women learn from adolescence how to read context to determine risks.

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Rules of courtesy restrict social interactions to keep everyone comfortable. The rules for appropriate behavior between adults of unrelated opposite gender allow only brief physical touch between people who have been introduced; for example, a handshake, brief eye contact, or a pat on the back. Adult women are usually clear about the culture's social rules, which makes it easier to convey social signals and to avoid misunderstandings. Within this system, adults can meet others, pair off, and develop relationships if they choose. When the social customs are ignored, communication becomes chaotic.

Social Etiquette in Dealing with Children

When a man says to a woman, "*Sit on my lap*"; the meaning of the request depends on the person and the place in which it occurs. If a father says this to an adult daughter at a family gathering, it's very different than if a stranger says it to her on an empty subway train. Rules for behavior with other people are applied flexibly by adults depending on the social characteristics of the setting. Children can't manage much social complexity because it taxes their developing judgment.

Sometimes adults smooth over social exchanges requiring cooperation by asking others for permission, for example, *Can I ask you something?* Asking permission itself can be a manipulation technique, because it implies that the target person has some choice in the matter. When a nurse asks a child, *Can I look at your booboo?* the child will not be permitted to refuse in most circumstances.

In pretending deference to children, an adult pretends to respect children's rights. In fact, children have very little control over their lives for they must do what adults tell them to do. If they don't, they usually get into trouble. Whether adults are wise and caring or brutish and stupid, children have no alternative but to submit to their directives.

Changes in social etiquette over recent decades that have substituted personal preferences for social mores have increased children's vulnerability. For the father who likes to be naked

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around his daughters, shame and embarrassment don't control his behavior because social rules are obviously not compelling for him. When adults ignore social customs, this doesn't work very well, because in the contest between children's preferences and adult preferences, adults usually prevail.

What is needed is a new social etiquette that will help to protect kids; one that prohibits sexually seductive behavior with children. Littering and spitting in public were once socially acceptable, but these behaviors are no longer considered civilized. In an earlier era, experimental sex was the norm, but this changed over time.

Sometimes culture goes through very rapid transformation as exemplified by the beginning of the Victorian era in Great Britain. Prior to this time, open disregard of marital ties had been tolerated, allowing Prime Minister Disraeli to travel with both his wife and his mistress. But with the very young Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, societal rules prohibited such behavior and led to a period of Victorian restraint.

It is not necessary for the entire culture to become repressive for children to be safe. What is necessary is a change in the way that kids are treated, similarly to the way that women are treated differently from men. Because women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by males, social customs function to protect them and the same system can be invoked to protect kids. Although the feminist era brought about many changes in the social relations between males and females, the sexual signaling system did not change. Men may no longer hold doors for women, but they don't touch a woman's genitals without permission.

What kinds of changes would be necessary to protect kids from sexual exploitation? Changes in the following areas would help:

Touching: In general, adults should not touch children, unless it is done in a family context. We all keep our hands to ourselves. There are lots of exceptions—nursery school teachers, doctors, nurses, and dentists, but all of these people have a purpose in doing so. But as a general rule, we don't touch other people in

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polite society, and men don't touch women unless there is an intimate relationship.

Nudity: We don't take our clothes off except to get clean, use the bathroom or to have sex. Other people don't take their clothes off around us. Everybody stays dressed.

Isolation: There is rarely a good reason for an adult to be alone with a child outside the family. In public settings, adding an adult insures a child's safety. This is the "two-deep" practice of some organizations that is practiced in many nations with young females.

Sexual References or Conversation: Non-parental adults don't talk to kids about bathroom activities or sex. Making comments that refer to sex, telling dirty jokes, or asking for personal information are out of line.

Secrets: There is rarely a healthy reason for hidden relationships. If something can't be made public, it probably isn't wholesome. When somebody asks a child not to tell his parents, children need to see this as a danger signal.

These are social practices for the broader society and may vary in different situations in the same way that male-female rules vary. These new rules may limit some adult freedom, but only by changing social practice can we limit kids' vulnerability. Perhaps the most compelling reason for adopting new rules that outlaw touching, nudity, sexual discussions, and secrets, is that these are the behaviors used by child molesters. By prohibiting their casual forms, we restrict the circumstances under which child abuse flourishes.

A teacher who asks a child to keep secrets, a clergyman who talks about sexual subjects, a neighbor who likes kids to get nude, and a teenager who wants to wrestle are all beyond the pale, whether they are sexual predators or not. A parent in these circumstances can comfortably object to these behaviors as rude without accusing somebody of criminal behavior. Kids understand that behaviors like picking your nose or examining road kill are not done by grownups, and we can add these to this list.

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How would these rules affect dealings with children outside the family?

Touching

We can outlaw some behaviors as outside the realm of civilized society, including pinching a youngster's buttocks, playing games with body parts, pretending to be a spider on a child, tickling, picking up a school-aged child, swinging, tripping, or tying up a youngster or giving him a massage.

These prohibitions would apply to anyone other than parents. Limiting physical contact may seem like a withdrawal of love and affection, but adults can relate to children in many ways. Awkward adults sometimes substitute physical gestures for genuine conversation but there are better ways to establish relationships with children.

Kids appreciate adult interest, and physical behaviors may appear to demonstrate interest, but bodily contact doesn't further interpersonal communication. Grabbing a child and demanding a kiss rarely makes him feel comfortable, but quietly asking questions is much more productive.

If there is to be physical contact with children, it's better to let the child initiate it. Children do so when they feel secure and happy with an adult, and they demonstrate this by standing close to an adult, taking the adult's hand, or leaning against the grownup. These are the nonverbal signals that a child feels secure with an older person.

Children often feel comfortable with a pedophile in the early stages of seduction, when they are being bribed and flattered; but as the sexual pressure intensifies, a child's growing unease shows up physically and he usually tries to stay out of reach. What a child cannot put into words is demonstrated by his body language, because emotions always will out.

Kids are more likely to tell about somebody else's bad manners than to tell about bad touch. Breaches of etiquette are frivolous matters to kids, and they don't feel responsible for the behavior they observe. Most books about good manners have a

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great deal to say about how kids should act but very little to say about how children should be treated. If we create a new etiquette for dealing with kids, this would save them from having to sort out good touch and bad touch or sad touch or some other kind of touch. Adult men don't touch adult women in polite society, and nobody touches kids except their parents.

Parents can more easily protect kids if we eliminate social situations where uncertainty about adult-child behavior inhibits intervention. Friendly adults need no longer fear a misunderstanding of interest in children, because they will be protected from suspicion in the same way that men are protected when they act in a mannerly way toward women.

Acceptable touching would include a parent who hugs a child, kids of the same age playing together or a teacher who is directing a child to get into line or to go to his seat. Acceptable touching would *not* include a grandfather who wants a long kiss on the lips from a child, wrestling with youngsters outside of a sports facility or a teen boy giving a young girl a heat rub.

These are pretty much the same rules that govern how males can touch females when they are not intimately involved. Intimate relationships allow behaviors like sitting very close, running one's fingers over another's skin, back rubs and tickling. Because children can't legally be intimately involved with anybody, none of these are appropriate with kids.

Good touch/bad touch forces kids to determine whether behavior is criminal, but social etiquette defines behaviors based on the relationship and comfort of those involved. In a new etiquette, kids would not have to make distinctions, because the culture would be uniformly protective. Touching would be censored by adults regardless of how kids react. Wrestling with kids or tickling them would be in the same category as wrestling between a man and a woman, in that both activities indicate an intimate relationship.

Nudity, Isolation and the Two-Deep Rule

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Removing clothing is limited to a few areas of one's life—dressing or toileting, changing for athletic activities like swimming, bathing, or sexual intimacy. Nudity is a private matter, and children know about the social convention of staying dressed. Small kids sometimes playfully strip their clothes, and a three-year-old may suddenly appear naked in the living room; but as kids mature, they learn to keep their clothes on.

Elementary school children know that removing clothing is not ordinarily done, except in special circumstances. If childhood nudity is seen in the same way as adult nudity, that is, acceptable only in certain settings, then the context of children's lives becomes safer.

When a parent hears that at the new school all the boys go into the swimming pool naked because only male teachers are allowed in the vicinity, a parent will feel more confident in refusing his child's involvement. The challenge then is not to the possible criminal nature of school activities, but to the social etiquette being practiced.

The no-naked rule also applies to adults like those who have to dry hemorrhoids or have more convincing reasons for wanting to take their clothes off around children. Kids would be treated with the same deference as adults, and social convention would add a new protective layer to child safety efforts.

The two-deep rule is becoming acceptable practice in many settings where children operate freely. In dealing with a child, there must always be two adults, never just one. This protects kids from the social isolation that makes forced sex possible. This is sensible for many reasons, among them safety. If an adult recreational leader takes a child on a hike and is injured, there is little help for a child. If two adults go on the hike, the situation is far more workable.

Having two adults reduces the potential for sex crimes against kids, although it doesn't eliminate it entirely. There have been cases of sexual predators operating in pairs or in groups, although these are uncommon events. When it is widely accepted as a safe practice, the two-deep rule becomes a part of the social framework so that people automatically begin to arrange children's

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activities with more than one adult. That case where an adult wants to spend time alone with a child stands out as unusual and requires justification, thus adding an element of protection for kids.

Sexual Comments

When sexual subjects are introduced into a conversation, it signifies a change to a more intimate relationship. We would not expect to hear a policeman make reference to sexual subjects: *Your genitals are really unusual*, although a sexual partner may do so. Even though children live in an increasingly sexualized culture and there are erotic messages continuously coming at them, these are generic messages. An Internet advertisement may suggest, *Increase your penis size by six inches!* but this is very different when said by an adult to a child in private.

Intrusive comments are usually rude, and invading the private thoughts of another is discourteous. When this happens, often a person steps back as a physical expression of the violation of private space. Adults making embarrassing personal comments can violate children's private space in the same manner. This has nothing to do with an adult's knowledge or understanding of a child. Although a dentist may comment that your teeth need cleaning, it would be a *faux pas* to say so at a dinner party.

Insisting that children be treated with the same courtesy as adults allows kids enough space to operate emotionally and to retain control over how involved they become with adults. It also establishes a pattern that reminds adults that because youngsters are small is no justification for rude treatment.

Secrets

Asking a child to keep secrets in the new etiquette would be considered bad manners because it places a child in an uncomfortable position, and the basis of all social courtesy is the comfort of everybody. This is akin to asking an adult how much his income is, and is just not done.

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Children are uncomfortable when asked to keep a secret, because it may mean that they have to deceive a parent (*No, he never did that with me*), which involves lying and may bring consequences. It also forces an awkward social requirement on an immature social being: monitoring one's conversations and comments so that nothing slips out inadvertently.

In adult society, there are many situations in which asking someone to keep a secret is bad manners; for example, when an adult indicates he has a contagious disease or condition, or when a teenager is contemplating suicide. When the promise not to tell would supersede a more significant loyalty, it is also deemed unacceptable: *Don't tell your husband I told you this, but . . .*

Secrets are markers for intimate, special relationships, and their use is limited to a very few relationships. Adults may feel that they are honoring children or making them feel special by indicating that something is *just between you and me*. When the secret, like Mom's birthday gift, will be divulged very shortly, a youngster may enjoy the excitement and surprise, but permanent secrets can be a great burden to a child and yoke him to somebody else. Often this happens without warning, as when somebody says, "*Can you keep a secret?*" indicating an imminent disclosure. Savvy adults know that the best response here is "*No.*"

Secrets bind people into intimate relationships and control their behavior. But it may feel like a betrayal to disclose a secret even though there was no verbal commitment made to keep it. Social convention indicates that adult friendships involve secrets, but that if something is truly to be kept from the public, it is best to tell no one.

Law regulates some confidences as that between a lawyer and client. When sexual predators ask a child to keep a secret, they are tapping into the chaotic world of children's social relations, where to tell is to violate another person. "*I promised I wouldn't tell,*" a child may cry when revealing a sex crime, unaware that children cannot be held responsible for contractual obligations.

Dealing with Rude Adult Behavior

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Although adults may be generally courteous to others, sometimes there is a lapse in their social graces when dealing with children. Perhaps because youngsters are seen as inferiors, they may not experience the same good manners from an adult guest that their parents do. If a child complains that he or she doesn't like a particular adult, it is probably because the person is rude and a child recognizes this. Even without full training in social etiquette, anyone can notice another's failure in sensitivity. When children are embarrassed or angered or inconvenienced, they react as an adult would, with dislike toward the person responsible.

Many behaviors of sexual predators as they target children qualify as socially inappropriate behavior. It is rude to be intrusive in conversation, to touch others, or make them uneasy. Helping children develop a familiarity with social etiquette so that they can recognize social gaps as they occur creates a protective shield around them. Kids can identify social lapses more comfortably than sexual overtures. They aren't as likely to be apprehensive about the consequences of disclosure, because the police are not normally called for breaches of etiquette.

Parents need a code word that kids can use to get rescued from difficult social circumstances. When kids need to interrupt adult conversation or behavior, parents can help out by distracting the adult guest or rearranging the social circumstances. This won't be useful in a case where a youngster wants to become involved in some tempting activity with an adult, but it will help in those situations in which an adult's attention, conversation, or demeanor make a youngster uncomfortable. When a kid needs to be rescued, it is important that a parent help without hesitation or questions.

Kissing Kids

Kissing is part of a wider class of intimate physical contacts including hugging, pinching, patting a derriere, pinching a face, pulling ears, and countless other forms of touching that reflect intimacy between two people. Although most adults wouldn't dream of such forward behavior with an acquaintance, they may well use it on kids.

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These behaviors are often harmless, but they desensitize a child to physical touch and to others' overly familiar behavior with their body parts. Consequently, distinguishing good touch from bad touch in these circumstances becomes impossible for a child. If there is a parent standing by and smiling at a guest's intrusive behavior, a youngster may conclude it's all good touch, even if it involves covert genital contact as it sometimes does with sexual predators.

Children often resist hugging and kissing and submit with varying levels of enthusiasm. A loving hug from a parent returning from a trip is usually welcomed, but the bear hug from Uncle Bob may not be. Parents who smooth the social ripples caused by a resistant child by urging a child give Uncle Bob a kiss are training kids to respond to situational social pressure against their own protective impulses.

Without much thought most adults can identify the people with whom they comfortably make body contact. Parents can decide who is in their kissing circle and whether the same applies to their children. Social signals being what they are, most adults can also identify exactly how much body contact should occur in an embrace. This is because body contact can be a way to communicate sexual desire, which is prohibited in families. Although Uncle Bob may have the hots for his wife's sister, his marital vows and family harmony require that he restrain himself.

With children, kissing is usually limited to parents, siblings, grandparents, and some aunts and uncles. Social pressure for body contact with a child from people who want more access to children is an indicator that children need another layer of protection.

Things get considerably more complicated as we experience the neighborhood impact of globalism. This serves to mix up different customs and practices, so that the interpretation of meaning becomes much more difficult. It also means that decoding messages that may in fact be sinister is not easy to do.

What happens to big person-small person touch in those situations where the problematic guest is an older child or teenager? The social rules are different for kids with other kids,

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and more physical contact is generally accepted. While physical harm is forbidden, playful body contact is usually seen as harmless. This often involves picking, poking, teasing, sarcasm, and sometimes mean behavior that becomes more civilized as kids mature.

Sexual abuse by older kids can occur in this framework and can be difficult for adults to recognize. If an older child wants to have secrets or alone time with a younger child, it may be flattering to the youngster. Because sexual assault can involve more than one small victim at a time, there is little safety in numbers. Children may not feel social uneasiness in these situations because they are accustomed to having an older child set social standards. Sexual behavior will seem okay to young children if an older child describes it as normal.

Adults need to be aware of grooming behavior on the part of older kids or teenagers. Behavior that involves attempts to ingratiate oneself with a child stand out in this age group, because small children typically need no grooming to be entranced by an older youngster. When there are gifts and other forms of enticements, the situation needs further scrutiny. Relating that involves secrets, time alone, or disrobing is problematic. Although the easiest response is to bar the activity without explanation, this may cause problems for adults.

When parents visit with adult guests, children may be left to fend for themselves. Setting rules with one's own kids leaves them a great deal of responsibility for the behavior of others. Turning the kids loose with older kids without any adult involvement is much the same as dropping kids at a playground with strangers for the evening and hoping everything works out okay. It helps to have activities that adults and children can share within the vicinity of adults so that children are not left to manage themselves. Large social events, such as weddings or graduation parties, make it more difficult to watch kids, and they take advance planning. It is wise to arrange for youngsters' activities in advance or to arrange for baby-sitting at home while adults visit.

When Other Parents Don't Share the Concerns

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Sometimes naïve parents accuse others of being overprotective of their kids and creating pressure for conformity. It isn't necessary to point out to a neighbor that her visiting nephew looks like he's on drugs and has a lecherous eye for the twelve-year-old granddaughter. Better to claim a hard-and-fast rule that children can't play together unless they are the same age, and so little Lulu can't play with Buster. When other parents raise questions about why a mother hasn't enrolled her child in the confirmation class at church like the other neighborhood kids, she doesn't need to voice her doubts about the clergyman, although it may be wise to take it up with church leaders.

The goal in these situations is to discuss the problem with those who can change it after a parent acts to protect her own children. With close friends and family members, it helps to talk over concerns and rules that motivate parental choices. The general public, however, is not entitled to a detailed justification of a parent's decisions, and it is rude for people to make a mother or father uncomfortable by questioning their decisions. The best response to rude behavior has always been a polite refusal to be bullied.

If a parent voices concern about child safety, her comments may elicit reassurance, disagreement, or ridicule from other parents. Sometimes social requests are difficult to refuse, and a parent risks social embarrassment in doing so. Adult peer pressure makes it difficult for a parent to say no, and a parent may feel responsible for the ensuing social awkwardness. When it's hard to say no in social situations, adults may feel pressured to give assent so that they don't interrupt the smooth flow of social events. It can feel really awkward to block another adult's behavior toward a child, and this may seem to invite a social rejection of both parent and child. The elderly neighbor who wants help with his stamp collection may be deeply wounded if a parent refuses permission and is embarrassed when asked, *Why not?* In these circumstances, expressing fear of sexual assault only makes things more awkward.

Inappropriate behavior with kids doesn't prove that sexual crime is likely, but predators usually take advantage of

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opportunities that present themselves, so it makes sense to avoid presenting opportunities. Our social customs include closing wallets, locking front doors, and taking other precautions without arguing that our neighbors are all crooks.

The new etiquette focuses on protective rather than confrontational responses, and the goal is to safeguard kids without getting into conflicts with others who may have a different perspective and who, most often, are other parents:

Problem Situation: The girls are all staying over at a father's new apartment, but the father always wants to hug the girls.

This Works: I'm afraid Suzie can't make it, but we hope that Daphne will be able to visit with us soon.

This doesn't work: Suzie can't make it because I don't like the arrangements, and Daphne's father gives me the creeps. And who else is going to be there? And I don't really like the feel of it.

Problem Situation: The youth minister wants to take all the kids on a retreat, but now a couple of them just canceled, so it's only the two girls and him.

This works: Suzie won't be able to go on the retreat, and I'm sorry if that causes a problem. Yes, I know they might have to cancel the whole thing and that's too bad. No, I'm sorry, but she can't go.

This doesn't work: Suzie's not going off with that youth minister and just one other girl. No way. I know what these guys do. What kind of a mother are you, to let your daughter go?

Problem Situation: Uncle Bob is wrestling with the four-year-old on the floor.

This works: Excuse us, Uncle Bob (picking up Suzie and carting her off to the bathroom), but we have things to do.

This doesn't work: Could you not be so rough? She might get sick. I'm worried somebody will get hurt. It's probably silly, but what if she throws up, or something else . . .

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Problem Situation: The piano teacher has taken a special interest in the eight-year-old and they have many secrets.

This works: Suzie's not allowed to have secrets, and I'd appreciate your help in enforcing this rule.

This doesn't work: You must be a real sicko to want to have secrets with an eight-year-old.

Problem Situation: The band is going to a big competition and they'll be camping out in the church basement to save money.

This works: I'll be driving Josh to the competition, but he won't be staying over in the church basement. I'm sorry if that's an inconvenience, but that's the best we can do.

This doesn't work: The way the girls in that band dress, they just ask for somebody to jump them. My son's not getting into that kind of stuff.

Problem Situation: Uncle Bob repeatedly pulls 13-year-old Suzy onto his lap and won't let her up.

This works: I don't want Suzy on your lap. Please respect my wishes.

This doesn't work: You lecherous old pig. Get your hands off my daughter.

There are two social errors that will substantially complicate these types of exchanges. The first is to give a policy statement on *Proper Social Behavior With Children*, in which a parent tries to teach the rationale and theoretical background to her decisions about her child's needs. This will lead to a prolonged and probably heated debate about what is good manners and what is criminally suspect. This has the effect of making others feel as though they have been accused of a felony. This is not necessary to protect children and it rarely persuades others to one's point of view.

Consider a situation where a parent's religion (whom nobody has ever heard of) demands that a child's behavior be restricted in the ways described above. Nobody would dream of challenging decisions based on religious belief, because this is

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considered a private matter and individual religious practices are generally respected. If on the other hand, a parent invites others to debate his beliefs, things may develop quite differently.

The second social error that will complicate these problem situations is to offer excuses for doing so, and thus invite well meaning (and not so well meaning) others to attempt to solve the problems indicated. When a parent decides to restrict the behavior of her child, it's polite to apologize to any adults who are inconvenienced, thank them for their interest, and then *make the refusal*. It's unwise to get into the details of the decision or invent justifications. Under the U.S. Constitution, all adults have the right to avoid giving explanations for their behavior, unless they find themselves before a judge, and parents certainly have this right when they are behaving in their child's best interests.

Lots of perfectly nice adults who wouldn't dream of hurting a child behave in ways that support a fertile climate for child molesting. With the great majority of these people, among them loving grandparents thrilled with the little ones, uncles who really like kids, and cousins who are delighted to see how much a child has grown, there is often total ignorance of the whole field of sex crimes against kids.

These are the folks who can't believe that anybody would deliberately hurt a child and figure that all incidents of child molesting are somehow misunderstandings. It would be easier for these folks to accept that somebody ate a piano than that a person could rape a baby. In large part this ignorance, charming as it may seem, is the result of lack of experience with criminality, and although innocence may be charming in children, it is dangerous in adults.

How can we change the social patterns of these folks towards children? For a kindergarten teacher, a classroom helper who just can't help hugging the little ones is a problem. As the responsible adult, a teacher sets the standard for what is acceptable behavior toward the children in her charge. If anybody's behavior makes her uneasy, that's enough to intervene. Sometimes the easiest intervention is that which is offered without explanation: *We don't hug the little ones. Everybody in the classroom has to*

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keep their hands to themselves. If a teacher offers justifications and rationales for these directives, then the issue becomes person-centered, instead of behavior-centered, and the focus is on the helper adult rather than on where hands belong.

It helps to offer alternative behaviors. Our hands are not the only means for expressing affection and enthusiasm to children. We do so with eye contact, with smiles, with verbal expressions, and by those concrete types of help such as searching for the scissors that a child has lost.

The way that we judge behaviors depends a great deal upon context and accepted social customs. Taking a child's rectal temperature is normal when done by the nurse in the pediatrician's office, but it is questionable when done by a neighborhood teen. Similarly, a mother may listen outside the bathroom to make sure that a young child urinates, but when a stranger does so, it stirs concern.

When an older child or teen wants to play inappropriately with younger children, adults may feel pressured to accept behavior that they may object to in adults. Teasing and rough stuff among children seems inevitable, and to forbid it may seem to force children into a premature and passive adulthood. There are some forms of play, however, that are likely to make adults uneasy. These usually involve excessive physical contact, disrobing, bribing, or secret behavior. This is more difficult when a younger child thrilled with the attention of an older one tries to avoid parental limits on play. To deal with this when the older child belongs to a visitor requires a great deal of tact because the objectionable behavior may be acceptable in the guest's home. This is the time when statements need to take the form: "*In our house (or classroom), when we play, we keep our hands to ourselves.*"

When mom takes the kids to visit friends, it helps to know what's planned, what other children will be present, and what activities will be offered. In visiting another family, if a mother hears, "*Oh, your kids can go off into the woods with the older kids,*" as opposed to, "*Oh, we've set up the badminton net for them to play,*" a parent may revise visiting plans appropriately.

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It's useful to bring along toys and activities that can be shared so that children don't invent their own activities. A parent may be quite comfortable at home if children invent play activities, but this may be very different with unfamiliar children.

There is the occasional situation when an adult responds to an invitation by asking whether she can send her children without coming herself. There may be understandable reasons for this, such as both parents having to work, but agreeing to have children without adults is to baby-sit for them. This is a burden when one is also the hostess to other guests, and it is unlikely that these children will get the supervision required.

Identified Sexual Predators as Neighbors

There are more than half a million repeat sexual offenders on registries in the United States and many more who don't meet the standards for registration. A new social etiquette needs to address this reality and help all to be comfortable with neighborhood contact. As we acknowledge that there is widespread sexual abuse of children, and most of it is committed by familiar people in the child's environment, we need to be prepared to deal with identified sexual offenders who are not incarcerated.

Social etiquette, with its devotion to the common comfort, suggests that we avoid calling attention to anyone's inadequacies unless there is some risk to others. Social contact can be refused altogether if the risk is high enough, and parole conditions may require this. Megan's Laws throughout the country serve this purpose, so that the public and responsible law enforcement personnel know of an offender's past and whereabouts.

In social exchanges there is the obligation to gloss over inadequacies and to take an optimistic view of the other's shortcomings. This serves to make the social setting more comfortable and more charitable for all. Convicted sex offenders are psychologically inclined to minimize and rationalize their crimes, and friendly overtures can encourage their denial. Although one is not required to represent law enforcement in conversations with a convicted sex offender, neither is it necessary

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to join in the denial, for after all, the matter has already been settled by the courts. In the face of the following, one may do better to excuse oneself from the conversation when an offender voices the following:

- *It was a mistake—they mixed me up with somebody else.*
- *That girl seduced me. I never would have touched her if she didn't want it.*
- *It was a witch-hunt.*
- *The cops and the judge were crooked.*
- *It was my ex-wife just trying to get back at me for the divorce.*

Any of these interpretations could be true, but the place for them to be argued is not in front of the punch bowl at your holiday party, but in front of a judge on an appeal. In the same way that it isn't good manners to talk about the diarrhea you had last night and what might have caused it, it is not good manners to involve friends and neighbors in a review of one's criminal history. If the offender is a close relative included in family gatherings, a hostess is entitled to change the subject and save guests from the conversations that follow comments like those listed above.

We are generally a forgiving culture, reluctant to condemn or ostracize anyone for past sins. Offenders who are at high risk for repeat offenses are a real challenge to social relating. Avoidance is certainly a reasonable choice, and it may often be the best alternative. If the offender is a family member, perhaps a grandfather or a brother, the family may be split between those who deny the sexual crime and those who acknowledge it or were victims. A sexual offense against one family member by another is also an offense against the entire family, because it wrecks family security and harmony.

A secondary bruise to the family is the resulting discord as people decide to believe or reject the accusations and take sides. If a teenage girl accuses a cousin of molesting her, some family members may be supportive and angry with the offender, but

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others may defend him and so reject the girl. The result is that a painful issue produces a family civil war. Ironically, in some cases, the responsibility for the painful divisions may be assigned to the victim rather than to the offender.

In dealing with a chastened but perhaps not redeemed offender, things are easier if the offender accepts his guilt and responsibility and works earnestly to avoid victimizing anybody else, but this doesn't fit the pattern of most sexual predators. More commonly, the essential elements of denial and self-deception, which greased the wheels of the predatory process, continue to operate.

In social gatherings, others may not be subjected to sexual assault, but they may very well be subjected to the propaganda that accompanies such behavior. Just as it is difficult to resist the con job that goes with the seduction of children, it is difficult to resist the psychological con job of the repeat offender.

The first concern must be the safety and comfort of victims and the vulnerable. An offender can't be welcomed at a children's party or in other settings where guests may be uncomfortable or at risk. The hostess of a party is entitled to comfort as well, and to supervise a sex offender at a social gathering requires time and effort and may not be worth the energy.

Some families may prefer to have smaller gatherings, so that when the grandparents' anniversary is to be celebrated, there could be a series of small lunches rather than the big party that was planned. This is likely to be a safer choice, because large, festive gatherings provide many opportunities for hidden activity with children.

Far more difficult is the situation where the offender is a spouse or boyfriend. Most women would not knowingly marry a sex offender, and this information usually surfaces after a relationship has been established. It presents an acute crisis for a marriage, which often ends in divorce. Sexual assault on the vulnerable is enough to destroy a marriage, but the deception and exploitation that are part of it adds another dimension as well.

Some women refuse to accept that a sex crime has occurred and, instead, deny the accusations. This is more difficult when the

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claims are made by a woman's children, but not when they are made by a difficult teenager who can be seen as vindictive or hysterical. Believing reports of abuse casts a woman in alliance with her children against her husband or partner, which is likely to disrupt the relationship and cause financial and emotional strain. When balanced against the vague complaints of children, it may seem easier to believe that the children aren't telling the truth.

What is more difficult to accept is the betrayal of the adult relationship, which is similar to but worse than an extramarital affair. A distraught mother may rationalize that her husband's sexual exploitation is caused by a mental illness, which makes the molester seem like a victim himself. In fact, the adult deception and betrayal are key elements of the crime of child sexual abuse. Exploiting trusting adults seems to be pivotal for child molesters. Deceiving an adult about one's involvement with children supports the self-deception that allows for instinctual self-gratification under the guise of responsible adulthood. Like the dictators of small countries who require their ministers to attest to their goodness, sexual predators require a spouse to do the same. The mirror that one constructs is a source of self-enhancement in the face of terrible deeds.

A marital partner then, far from being merely an innocent bystander, can be drawn into acting as an unintentional enabler and co-conspirator. By deceiving a wife or partner, a sexual predator can continue to act out the fantasy of an upright citizen with a harmless secret pastime. He also has an excellent cover, because those who suspect him will assume a normal sexual relationship with an adult partner.

Part 4

Changing the Climate to End the Plague

**CHAPTER TWELVE:
WHAT PARENTS MUST DO**

Self-doubt seems to be part of modern parenting. Perhaps it is the result of the endless warnings in the media about children's problems. Implicit in these messages is the idea that parents could ruin children if left to their own instincts. But if parents are to keep their children safe, they need faith in their ability to raise healthy, successful human beings.

A parent's intuition and insight spring from an instinctive vigilance over a beloved child. These are powerful forces, and a youngster is well protected by them. There are many ways to raise healthy kids, but differences in parental styles sometimes cause parents anxiety. The only fatal error in raising children occurs when a parent stops caring what happens to a child, for then a youngster is truly lost. Although media experts, academicians, and clinicians all may have opinions about what is best, a parent has the greatest investment in a child's well being.

First, Trust Your Insides

Subconscious emotional signals are the human warning system, even though their underlying logic may not be evident. This part of the psyche is always perfectly rational, given the data available to it. A paranoid schizophrenic who believes that others are trying to harm him may act belligerently to protect himself and given the data his flawed neurological system provides him, his action is reasonable and meant to insure his survival. Sometimes the signals of a person's warning system are no more than vague feelings of disquiet, a sense that something is wrong, which may be ignored if others don't experience the same reaction.

Mothers are usually experts on their children, probably because they've spent lots of time watching them and trying to figure out what makes them behave in the ways that they do. From

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the earliest days, when she must determine why a baby is crying, a mother becomes practiced at interpreting a child's reactions. Mothers are accustomed to watching out for danger in the environment because during the early years a great deal of effort goes into protecting a child from injury.

The same vigilance operates in circumstances where a parent must make a determination about safety from child molesters. The internal emotional signal that warns of possible danger is often felt as indecision. A parent may hesitate in responding to requests such as "*Can Tiffany play in my bedroom?*" "*Can I take Tommy camping with me?*" The hesitation indicates an internal conflict, typically between foreboding and the wish to make a child happy, and a parent finds it hard to decide what to do.

Imagine the cave family of two million years ago, living without language but with the same mammalian drive to rear living young and to make sure they grew to adulthood. A mother's reaction was probably the only thing that protected the young from the predations of animals and other humans. Her instant response to threatening circumstances was obviously accurate enough to make sure that humans survived to populate the world. If the mother of those days ignored her internal warning signals, *homo sapiens* would be but a memory on this planet.

Modern psychology often interprets fears and anxieties as indications of pathology instead of the extraordinarily effective warning systems they often are. The result is that people sometimes dismiss their anxieties or medicate them, rather than learning how to read them. Protected by parental anxiety, most children grow into healthy adulthood. These internal danger signals need to be heeded to protect kids from sexual predators as well.

These reactions also communicate the context of love that surrounds children in a caring home. A parent's anxiety for a child's safety conveys the youngster's importance and his place in a parent's life. Most adults know that if a child is abducted or harmed, a parent suffers immeasurably; but often children believe only that a parent will be annoyed under these circumstances.

Parents Are the Best Defense Against Criminals

We live in a culture in which fault is found with virtually everything that parents do. Whatever problem a youngster may have is traced to the failures and omissions of parents, so that even the most diligent mother or father can feel inadequate. As a result, parents learn to be excessively careful so as not to injure their kids, as though they themselves represent a danger to them.

A parent is a child's best protector. Among all the primates, mothers are the ones who insure that the species continues by protecting the young from real and perceived dangers. In the human species, mothers are sometimes open to pressure from those clever enough to manipulate circumstances. Protecting children can seem uncharitable, and accusations of witch-hunts and lynch mobs often intimidate parents from asking questions and making independent decisions about child sexual safety.

If a parent is uncomfortable with how his child is treated, he can intercede without accusing anybody of criminal acts. This requires separating a parent's emotional investment in the questionable adult from his emotional investment in his child. Limiting a grandfather's time with a youngster may feel bad, but it may be necessary to safeguard a child's best interests.

Strengthen the Bond with Kids So That Predators Can't Break It

Any parent has doubts about her competence, and by the time kids graduate from high school and leave home, there may be anguish over all the things that they could have been taught. But no matter how limited the parent, he or she is better than any sexual predator who stalks a child.

Preferential child molesters seek to separate a child from his mother and father and to destroy the bonds of trust between a parent and child. A child molester may tell a youngster that his parents don't love him in order to replace his parents as the primary adults in his life. The parallel in adult relationships occurs when a spouse develops a friendship with a person outside the marriage that becomes more rewarding than the marital

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relationship. A wife may complain that her husband spends every night on the phone with his best friend, goes away with him for golfing weekends, and has lunch with him several times a week making wife feel she has been replaced.

In such a circumstance, it would be helpful to carefully evaluate the role of the outside adult in the child's life and the function he serves. If a teacher wants to spend evenings with a child to tutor, this can be rescheduled for the school day, or a parent can join the teacher and youngster for the extra work.

Check out Parental Self-Esteem

Trusting personal judgment requires separating need from logic. Need tells us what we really want to believe and think. Logic is the mental calculus that applies abstract reasoning skills to perceptions and data and produces a conclusion.

When a mother says, "*He would never do that*" about someone suspected of sexual exploitation, she is expressing a wish rather than using evidence and logic to evaluate the probability of sexual crime. When a parent expresses this thought, it is possible that a sexual predator has already achieved a separation between a mother and her child. It may be more accurate in those circumstances for a mother to say, "*I don't want that to be the case because it would cause me to be too upset if it were true.*"

A parent sets aside her own logic out of need, usually a need to see social circumstances in a particular pattern. When self-esteem is low, it may be hard to depend on one's own judgment and feel competent. A parent forms an opinion of herself that includes her character, judgment, and general effectiveness as a human being. Others may sometimes seem more capable and successful in the business of raising children. People usually become parents in their twenties, at the same time that they are learning to become adults, and learning is by trial and error.

One way to measure a mother's self-view is to examine the internal monologue that plays continuously and directs her behavior. If the comments inside a mother's head are generally critical and disparaging, as in "*You blew it again. What a jerk you*

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are. That kid sure had bad luck when he got you for a parent,” then a parent may easily set aside her own judgment.

For some parents, the internal voice is reassuring and problem focused: *You may not know what to do right now, but you'll figure it out. Try this and if it doesn't work, try something else.* Self-denigrating comments are a problem not only because they are discouraging to parents, but because they take time away from the real business of solving problems, which is the main part of raising children.

No parent can have faith in every judgment that she makes, because some will inevitably be wrong, but she can trust herself as the best protector of her child. Often parents would prefer to transfer this awesome responsibility to an expert of some sort, so that they are spared the anxiety of decision-making and the sense of failure when mistakes are made. But being a parent and being a child both involve a steep learning curve with lots of errors, and self-forgiveness is essential for success in both.

Some anxiety in raising children is normal because as kids grow, they take more risks. A parent who makes all decisions for a youngster, avoiding the potential for failure, deprives a youngster of learning how to solve problems and make decisions. When kids arrive at an age, usually eighteen, when they have great freedom, they may have little preparation for it unless they've had the chance to make manageable mistakes under adult guidance.

How parents maintain self-esteem in the face of the challenges of raising children reflects their growth as adults. One line of research suggests that the critical element is self-differentiation, which refers to the balance between emotion and reason in problem solving. Parents who have a high level of self-differentiation can react flexibly in stressful situations, choosing first one solution and then another, depending on what works. They can relate to others in close relationships without a destructive need for control or an unhealthy level of disengagement. In short, they are better at channeling their emotions to serve their purposes rather than being driven by them.

How does somebody get this way? Probably by dealing with other adults who behave in these ways. If an adult partner and

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other intimates approach life in this fashion, then it is easier to react in these ways oneself. It is simple to speak about individual thoughts and beliefs without discomfort and to hold onto opinions and perspectives. Emotions don't overwhelm or require immediate action for resolution and are only one more factor in solving a problem, and not the driving force.

A clear sense of self allows an adult to look for practical solutions to problems, because not every problem is an assault on the self that must be thrown off. If the leaves need raking, for example, then the issue is how to find the quickest and easiest way to get them up, and not whose fault it is that they need raking. And if the video arcade makes a mother nervous, she can coolly evaluate whether it is a safe place for her child to be without questioning herself.

Having a low opinion of oneself is a gift that keeps on giving because it affects the way others relate to us as well as the way we use our talents. Persons with low opinions of themselves may distrust a partner because they don't see themselves as lovable. If a woman sets a low value on herself, she may distrust anyone who finds her attractive.

In the relationship marketplace there is a system of assessing oneself and others that is applied to mating situations. People generally look for a good match in terms of attractiveness, financial resources, intelligence, social standing, and other characteristics; what Murray describes as *net social worth*.

When one partner gets a higher rating, either because of real differences or because of a diminished sense of oneself, it may introduce complications into the relationship and provoke suspicion or withdrawal. It may also cause power imbalances, so that the partner who feels a lower self-worth can become submissive to the partner who has a higher self-worth.

Self-esteem can shrink because of bruising life experiences like divorce, unemployment, or illness. Adults who feel that they don't fit in with the community because of their inadequacies may experience a decline in self-respect. Although we think mainly of adolescents as having strong needs to belong, this applies to adults as well.

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When parents feel beyond the pale, it reduces their ability to use whatever social skills they do have, so that social competence drops even lower. If people feel rejected or ostracized, they may experience an even stronger need to conform to whatever seem to be the group standards as a way to try to redeem themselves.

Those who see themselves on the fringe of the community may have particular difficulty in feeling confident and secure in their abilities to care for children, as well as themselves. Within this group, vulnerability to persuasion may be much greater than among those who feel strong and confident, and men often sense this.

Divorced Adults and Low Self-Esteem

Divorced adults are a highly vulnerable group, for although marital dissolution is commonplace in Western culture, it is neither admired nor held as a goal. Many men and women experience deep feelings of defeat at the end of a marriage which remarriage does not necessarily erase. Along with concerns about children's reactions to divorce, there are also financial tensions, residential dislocations, changes in social contacts and family bonds, and involvement in the legal process for mothers and fathers.

Self-confidence may be particularly difficult to sustain through the divorce process and afterward, when a parent can feel as if he or she isn't very successful in life. The sense of hopelessness that sometimes accompanies divorce is the core of clinical depression, in which most personal strivings seem to be futile and doomed to failure.

Depression is to low self-esteem what a hurricane is to light rain: deep, dark, and pervasive, with the capacity to wreck all sorts of well-functioning systems. The ability to reinforce, encourage, and reassure oneself is the opposite of depression, where there is only condemnation of the inner self. Depression sucks the life and the heart out of caring for one's children and erases parental faith in the future.

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The blanket prejudice against all parts of the self in depression makes it difficult to hear the signals of parental fear and anxiety when they occur. Those who feel socially unacceptable may experience diminished reasoning abilities and a distorted sense of time so that there is a reduced capacity to guard one's young. These are situations where sexual predation becomes a primary concern because the major protector may be out of action or working from diminished capacity.

Imagine those circumstances where an adult friend asks to take a child camping, and a mother is uneasy about it. Under normal circumstances with self-esteem at full levels, a mother can make a protective decision; but when she is operating with low self-regard and a sense of hopelessness, she may cave in to the combined pressure of her child's pleas and an adult's urging. If Uncle Bob and the child both plead for the trip, she may quickly feel overwhelmed and concede defeat. In this circumstance, the mother becomes the enforcer and the bad guy, the one who ruins everybody's fun. The other adult becomes a child along with the child, and the mother is sidelined.

In the same vein, when a parent is ill or unemployed, child protection systems may not operate well. The misery that arises from such circumstances makes it hard to cope with the increased complications of daily life. A friendly adult who repeatedly offers help may seem like a blessing when seen through the eyes of need, but cold logic may indicate otherwise.

Favors and help are characteristic of acquaintance molesters who use this approach to gain leverage in asking parents permission for other things. When an ingratiating sexual predator finally asks for time alone with a child, the request always includes an after-all-I've-done-for-you clause, reminding a parent that she is indebted to him.

To change the climate in which children are sexually molested requires examining factors that increase children's risk. In situations of single parenthood and/or remarriage, a parent's abilities may be undisturbed or only temporarily impaired, but in those cases where there is prolonged difficulty, parents need help from relatives and community members. Other mothers,

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grandmothers and female relatives can offer help to make decisions about a child's welfare and to consult on whether the offers to baby-sit from a neighborhood teenage boy are in a child's best interest. Because almost ninety percent of sexual predators are persons who are known to the family, those close to a temporarily disabled mother may be in a unique position to notice risks to a child.

Seduction of children and parents is not the only risk to kids during a family's hard times. When a parent is distracted, a child is at increased risk of molestation from strangers as well as familiar adults. Random events like a child using a vending machine or a child wandering the mall while a parent shops can be more risky if a parent is too preoccupied to offer guidance.

Increased Parental Cynicism

It may seem like parental vigilance could lead to a sense of persecution among child molesters and cause them to feel estranged and further driven to antisocial behavior. Research does not support this concern, but it may seem unduly harsh to create a climate in which one group feels itself targeted. Americans have a long tradition of cheering for the underdog, the fellow who seems to be outgunned and outnumbered. But in this case the underdog is the child, not the sexual predator. As the statistics indicate, it is the children who lose most, and the predators who suffer few consequences.

Increased vigilance and control of the contexts in which children live does not automatically translate to increased arrests and prosecutions however, although this may well be the end result. A parent can block access to a child without accusing anybody of criminal activity, and without giving any explanations, for he has the legal right to make choices for the welfare of his child.

There is an incidental positive result of this, however; all of the research on treatment programs for sexual predators involve treatment that has been forced on predators as a result of court mandates. There is no research that examines the effects of

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voluntary treatment programs undertaken by sexually dysfunctional adults for the purpose of avoiding sex crimes against children. If there is a climate in which parents respond to their inner judgment and control children's environs to protect them, it may lead to an increase in voluntary treatment for predators who come up against a brick wall in dealing with their antisocial proclivities.

Second, Teach Children Safe Behavior

It's not hard to understand why anyone would want to avoid learning about child sexual abuse. But if parents are ignorant, then it is left to kids to learn through sexual victimization. The fear of crime may cause some parents to retreat into denial and believe that sex crimes will happen to somebody else's child, in somebody else's family.

The result of parental ignorance is that American children deal with sexual exploitation alone and in silence. For many kids, the first sex education experience is fondling, sodomy, rape, or penetration with an object. Most victimized children never report sexual assault, so parents are unaware of what has happened to their kids.

Some children seem to do better in tough times and use whatever their parents and their own experiences have taught them to deal with challenging problems. *Resilience* refers to a child's overall sturdiness and his capacity to figure out solutions to problems when called upon to do so. In stressful times, resilient children get through troubles more successfully, and sometimes they even come out ahead.

Resilience involves a set of teachable skills, behaviors that move a child toward success. Current research suggests that six factors in a child's life influence his response to challenges: proactive orientation, self-regulation, planned parenting, attachments and academic achievements.

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Proactive Orientation

Proactive orientation is the ability to take the lead in problem solving rather than waiting passively for rescue or help from others. A youngster takes control of a problem facing him and strives for a good result based on an optimistic outlook.

We teach this orientation by pausing to let kids generate solutions as they get older rather than supplying them with answers. When their responses don't work, it helps to analyze what happened so that they can think up new approaches that counter the perception that parents have all the answers.

Using this approach, even preschoolers can feel confident in making a few small efforts toward solving a problem, and it is the effort that needs to be encouraged. Hypothetical problems for older youngsters such as, "*What would you do if your [teenage] brother's friends wanted you to take your clothes off?*" can serve as exercises. For small children, any serious response to this question would be welcomed as an indication that a child wants to

be active. As children get older, increasingly sophisticated solutions would be explored. Discussions of a child's response to a crisis can arise spontaneously from news stories, movie plots, television dramas, and what is happening at school.

<p><i>Resilience in Kids:</i> <i>Proactive Orientation</i> <i>Self-Regulation</i> <i>Planned Parenting</i> <i>Attachments</i> <i>Academic Achievement</i></p>
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Self-Regulation

Self-regulation or self-control, is a second factor in a child's life that correlates with resilience. It refers to a youngster's ability to deal with his or her emotional reactions in a way that improves circumstances. Very strong feelings can be disruptive and upsetting, adding an additional problem to the original one. Self-control means that kids can rein in their impulsive reactions and delay gratification in the service of some objective. This makes social relating easier for children and for anyone with them.

Teaching self-regulation requires practicing courtesy and social etiquette. Teaching the social graces may require reference to some standard, perhaps Miss Manners or Emily Post, and

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involves increasing complexity as children grow older. Even small children can be taught some self-regulation. By quieting his behavior, a child can sort out his thoughts and make decisions about his responses.

Without self-restraint, kids get drawn into behavioral turbulence and social chaos, because powerful emotions get set off by external forces. Choices are made impulsively and they may result in disapproval from others. When kids can organize behavior and decide how to act, they get lots of smiles from adults that support a good view of themselves.

Planned Parenting

Planned parenting is organized guidance thought out ahead of time, rather than a spontaneous approach to the challenges kids present. The best indicator of proactive parenting is an absence of discipline problems. When a parent anticipates a child's needs, he has goals for a youngster's behavior ("*By the time you're ten, I want you to learn to take out the garbage.*"). When a child is important enough to plan for, a parent teaches correct behavior rather than waiting for misbehavior and punishing it. This is very different than the random parenting that occurs with a disorganized, upset parent who is far too stressed to focus outside himself.

An organized parent helps a child to be organized, and everybody can be reassured that routine problems will be solved. A child can be confident that he will catch the bus, remember his homework, take his mittens, and remember his manners. This builds a child's faith in himself because he's prepared for his day and he gets lots of rewards from his surroundings; he is also insulated from fraudulent offers to raise his self-esteem.

Attachments

Attachments to others occur at many levels, but resilient children grow up in a web of helpful and supportive connections. They have a sense of belonging, and others value and like them. Strong connections to family and friends help kids develop social skill because they grow up in a setting where they get feedback

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from others. What a parent teaches is reinforced by an aunt, a neighbor, and others. As kids improve in social skills, they get the pleasant responses that the world offers to pleasant children, which helps self-esteem grow. It gets easier to have friends because kids know how to behave, and the sense of belonging enhances their good feeling about themselves.

Community and the sense of being part of a town, neighborhood, group, or wider association is important to children, because it gives them an anchor in the world and an identity that distinguishes them from others. A child's belief that there are many people who count on him to protect himself energizes his efforts. It also gives him courage to take the initiative in dealing with difficult situations, because a youngster may think of good role models and copy their behavior. A variety of groups in the wider community may provide support for youngsters. Athletic organizations, religious groups, and recreational groups generally support a youngster's value and potential for the future.

Social relating involves a dynamic equilibrium based on reading social cues and others' reactions. Kids get better at picking out what is polite and what is rude, so they can recognize when the behavior of others is out of line. As children develop social skills, they also learn to differentiate sincerity from dishonesty and manipulation.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is important in developing resilience because it is the only objective measure of a child's success as a human being. School grades are important to kids because they differentiate ability levels and indicate to a child whether he is making the grade. If a youngster does well in school, he feels normal and acceptable according to the one measure that all kids understand. Success in this area is solely the result of his efforts, and it is objectively measured so it is not skewed by a parent's bias in favor of a child. A child comes to know himself through his grades, and when they are good, he feels smart and hopeful, which functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Faced with a

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sexual predator, he can have faith in his ability to figure out what to do.

Whether nature or nurture exerts the primary influence in producing sturdy children, what kids are taught can strengthen whatever talents they are born with. Schoolwork is the daily challenge to a child's abilities, and teachers offer a great deal of help in developing these.

When hard times come, a child who has learned lots of ways to use his abilities has a layer of protection. Resilience is the opposite of post-traumatic stress disorder, in which events overwhelm and immobilize a person's resources. Resilience meets trauma by driving a person to draw on all of those skills and abilities that may have lain dormant and now spring to life to attack a problem.

Hardy responses are those which tackle challenges directly and mobilize energy and creativity. Rather than avoiding or ducking a problem, a person confronts the problem and exerts as much control as is possible. He deliberately takes a positive view of the problem, seeing it as a challenge rather than a threat, based on a level of optimism and faith in one's resources.

What Parents Need to Teach Themselves

Good teachers always learn their material before they try to teach it. To teach kids how to stay safe, parents need to prepare for criminal threats to children rather than hoping that kids won't be targeted. Child abuse prevention programs have offered parents little help in this area other than to teach them good touch/bad touch. Parental passivity is encouraged by these programs when, in fact, active parents can make a dramatic difference in insuring their kids' safety. To see oneself as a major asset to a child in this way is a change in perspective for many parents.

Before children can be taught to use their energy, brains, and courage to protect themselves, parents need to learn the same thing. The 1966 Coleman Report found that ninety-five percent of the variance in kids' academic achievement is attributable to parental influences, and kids' security is probably attributable to

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parents in the same proportion. When parents become confident about protecting kids, children can copy the attitudes and approaches that work for a parent. More important, perhaps, a parent becomes a source of inspiration, motivating a youngster to act strongly to protect herself. Parental awareness of kids' statistical vulnerability to crime is the beginning of energized efforts to shield them.

Many mothers begin to teach their daughters sexual safety after puberty, by instructing them in ways to avoid vulnerable situations. This same type of teaching is valuable in helping school-aged children to avoid risk.

A second painful lesson that has to be learned is that the vast majority of sexual crimes against children are committed by friends, family members, acquaintances, and, in general, people whom parents trust. Preferential pedophiles that sexually exploit children are also exploiting parental trust, and the crime is as much one against parents as it is against children. To accept that a relative or friend could sexually assault a child is not a sign of disloyalty or paranoia but only an acknowledgement of statistical reality.

The way that this type of betrayal is accomplished involves a planned strategy for gaining a parent's confidence in order to molest a child. This is the psychopathic behavior of a con man, seen in other criminal activity as the loan shark or the flim-flam man. These are criminals who seek their own ends by finding appropriate marks and disguising their purposes. All such behavior depends on the need of the mark to be conned.

Parents need to know the laws protecting children so that they can be confident in identifying criminal sexual behavior. An eighteen-year-old young man who becomes sexually involved with a girl of fourteen, for example, is probably guilty of a second-degree felony in most states. Most important, parents need to have an action plan to protect kids who may become the target of a sexual predator. Often parents hesitate to intervene until there is clear evidence of sex crimes, even though a parent can act protectively long before legal action is required.

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The Internet represents a whole new frontier for sexual predators and criminals of all sorts. Parents need to learn the Internet the same way that kids do, by random exploration. Entering terms such as pedophile in a major search engine, for example, produces a Website called the Pedophile Information Exchange. Its credo is, "Any damage to children is inflicted by society and the law."

As parents learn more about a youngster's life in cyberspace, it gets easier to create good protective strategies. Even though software that screens children from criminal behavior is helpful, a parent is the very best screen for a child, online and offline.

What Parents Need to Teach Children

Kids learn information, skills, attitudes, and values from parents either by direct instruction or by observation. Adults are sometimes intimidated by the idea of teaching kids, perhaps because of bad experiences in supervising homework or other school related activities. But by the time children reach school age, a parent has already taught most of what children need to learn. The ability to walk and to talk, the daily habits that make for routine existence, all result from parental instruction and support. Teaching children safe behavior is well within the realm of parental abilities, although it may be more difficult for a parent who has been a child victim of crime, because the topic will summon up painful associations.

Faced with increased risk to kids as they grow up and spend more time away from home, parents may also act to shield children from threatening circumstances. If this happens without teaching, an overprotected child will automatically look to adults, any adult, for direction on how to behave and how to make decisions. In effect, an overprotected child is more, not less, vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Although parents may have serious self-doubt about their ability to teach safety to their children, any teaching is better than none. For without adults to

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help children prepare for criminal exposure, kids are left to figure it out by trial and error.

One area in which all parents instruct their children is pedestrian safety. Often they give verbal explanations by explaining what is needed. A parent may demonstrate the act of looking both ways, providing a verbal directive that children can use on their own: *We look both ways, and then we cross quickly.* A parent may have a child act out the same behavior under supervision with correction offered. Sometimes adults ask a child to practice the behavior on a quiet street so he will get used to it.

Research on pedestrian decisions in children finds that children as young as seven can be trained to cross streets safely, even when it involves crossing through traffic gaps on busy thoroughfares. Knowledge of cars and traffic laws may be useful, but developing anticipatory understanding and an awareness of one's size and speed are critical.

It is important that kids don't observe reckless or careless crossing behavior, because they may conclude that this must be safe if nobody gets hurt. A parent may use stories and examples of other people's experiences to illustrate the safety practices at issue. The adult can raise questions or discuss a child's mistakes to provoke thinking and develop conceptual understanding. If a youngster attempts to stand in the middle of the street and procrastinate, a wise parent will explore this with a child when they have reached safety.

In teaching a child safety from criminals, it helps if a parent sets realistic expectations and limited goals, working on the project a little at a time, for five to ten minutes. This is a long-term activity, not something that is accomplished in one sitting, because the way a child deals with issues of safety changes as he develops and matures. It isn't necessary to have all of the answers at one time, and it makes sense to come back to difficult or perplexing problems.

Teaching by using hypothetical problems can be particularly helpful:
See that man over there in the food court? The one who seems to be cleaning off tables? What would you do if he came over here and he asked you to help him carry some boxes out to his truck? Would you say yes? Would that be a safe thing to do? Would you talk to him?

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A child's learning develops over time, so that a child will give quite different answers to these questions at age ten than he would at age fifteen. Younger kids need much more supervision, but older kids need to develop self-reliance as they get closer to sixteen, when a driver's license gives them unlimited freedom. At about age nine, children become more skilled at sorting out human motivation, and so this introduces a whole new realm of judgment.

For young children, learning in one situation cannot generally be applied to other situations. A six-year-old may know that it is dangerous to leave a shopping mall with a stranger who asks for help, but he may not transfer that understanding to a neighbor who asks for help in finding a lost cat. In general, any instruction to a child needs to be refreshed every six to twelve months, or about as often as he needs new shoes, as his cognitive framework grows and he is able to generate more complex explanations of behavior.

Teaching children observable conditions that put them at risk is a realistic goal, and kids can use simple rules to protect themselves increasingly as they get older. Many of these rules are the same as those that women learn to avoid sexual assault. When an adult woman is uneasy in her surroundings, perhaps if she is walking to her car on a dark street, there may be no indications of criminal activity, but the situational cues will prompt self-protective behavior. If women relied on a good touch/bad touch differentiation to avoid sexual assault, they would be trapped by sexual predators.

By teaching children to notice circumstances and protect themselves, they are more likely to avoid sex crimes. Kids can't determine adult motives, but they can react to observable conditions. Planning for sexual solicitation may seem like a grim approach to childhood with all of its associations of innocence and freedom, but in fact, childhood has never been these things. To

Kids' Safety Habits

- **Always have an escape hatch**
- **Two Deep**
- **No secrets**
- **Keep your hands to yourself**
- **Seductive behavior**
- **Illegal behavior**
- **Protect other kids**
- **Internet safety**

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acknowledge that kids live in a culture where criminality surrounds them is not to destroy childhood but, instead, to safeguard it.

If kids are aware that sexual predators, like computer viruses, are a part of the landscape, they are less likely to feel stunned by the sexual overtures that a preferential pedophile makes to kids. Preparing for sexual advances removes the shock and confusion and lessens the shame and isolation of a child's experience in these circumstances. It is not a matter of telling kids that they will be crime victims but that they need to be aware that crime is out there and they need to protect themselves with several key habits.

Always Have an Escape Hatch. Most kids have seen movies where the spaceship or the submarine escape hatch gets stuck, so that the characters are trapped in a dangerous situation. Even at home, families often develop an escape plan in case there is a fire and people need to get out of the house. The concept of an escape hatch is one that kids know: *Don't ever get into a situation that you can't get out of - Don't Get Trapped.*

This applies to situations where a youngster is at risk for sexual exploitation, because there can be times when a child is alone with an adult in circumstances where it is difficult to leave. The most obvious example is a locked room, but there are other circumstances from which it may be difficult for a child to extricate himself:

1. *A sleepover where everybody else is asleep*
2. *The back of the school bus*
3. *A foreign country or ethnic neighborhood where a child doesn't know the language*
4. *A ride on a motorcycle or in a boat*
5. *An elevator*
6. *Unfamiliar woods*

Teaching children to look for an escape hatch before they enter a situation is a wise idea, because it provides a child some control. Where there is an escape hatch, a child can exit or call for

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help if he needs to. Teaching this rule allows a child to be proactive, because he can look at any situation and decide whether it has an escape hatch and then avoid it if it doesn't. Some kids learn this from playing with other kids when a prankster locks somebody in the basement.

Avoiding situations that can trap a child requires social skills because there may be pressure for a youngster to submit to an adult's wishes. Sometimes it is useful to anticipate problems with a child and help him create graceful excuses for circumstances like those listed above, such as:

1. *I have to call my mother (from the sleepover) because she said she'd show up here if I didn't.*
2. *I like sitting in the front of the bus so that I can watch the driver work the bus controls.*
3. *My parents said no to the trip.*
4. *Motorcycles (or boats) make me throw up.*
5. *Oops! I guess that was the Emergency Button I pushed!*
6. *If I went in the woods, my mother would kill me.*

Two Deep. No adult except a parent has reason to spend time alone with a child. In all other situations, the presence of two adults protects kids. If an adult wants to be alone with a child, it puts a child in a vulnerable position. Like any of the other safety rules, this is not a guarantee for safety, because children have been molested when there is more than one adult or child present. But as a general guideline, it is a useful practice. In the same way that an adult woman will avoid being alone with an unrelated adult male (for example, her best friend's husband), this works to prevent inappropriate behavior and the appearance of inappropriate behavior.

For a child, the focus needs to be on where his feet are going, because it is behavior, not intentions that are at issue. Children can be overwhelmed in trying to sort out the complexities of adult-child relations, but a child knows where he is and where his feet are taking him, and by focusing downward, he can anticipate where he will end up. If there are only two other large

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feet in the room with him, and they don't belong to a parent, he needs to look for the exit. As two deep becomes increasingly the practice in all facilities that cater to children and parents, it will be easier for children to accept it as normal and proper.

No Secrets. Secrets are a sign of an emotional intimacy between two people. It is socially gauche to have secrets with somebody else's spouse because it excludes the legal partner who has a rightful claim to information and it creates a competing bond. Similarly, asking children to keep secrets excludes their parents, and burdens a child with a sense of obligation. Pressuring a youngster to keep a secret is an unkind thing to do, because most kids don't have the ability to keep a secret for very long.

Children can be intimidated into secrecy, however, by their own shame at participating in something bad. This separates a child from her parent and immediately imposes a special connection of a child to an adult. A child can't easily say, *Hey, why should I keep your secret? You don't mean anything to me!*

It is a kindness to instruct kids to avoid sharing secrets, because they can't keep things to themselves, anyhow. For young children, secrets are always temporary and are quickly told or forgotten. A young child may be honored if a teenager seems to confide in him, but rarely can he handle decisions about how to manage the shared information. When a teenager wants a younger child to keep something secret, it indicates risky behavior.

Keep Your Hands to Yourself. This has always been a good rule for reminding kids that they shouldn't touch other kids or objects either. It has helped them to stay out of trouble, because it eliminates the *He hit me first!* complaints that kids use to avoid blame for a ruckus. It also works well when kids are in other people's homes, fancy stores, museums, or other places where valuable objects can get broken, particularly those stores where the signs say, *You Break It, You Bought It.*

We need to extend the rule to adults dealing with children so that they keep their hands to themselves around kids. This helps to reduce the risk of sex crimes because it eliminates most forms of

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touching. Sexual predators often touch children to relax a child's inhibitions and train him to accept physical intimacy. Parents routinely touch children as part of caring for them, and this is an expression of the intimacy of family life, but those outside the family rarely have a legitimate reason to do so.

By teaching children to avoid the touch of adults outside the family, we help them to identify risky circumstances. People generally don't touch each other much, although women who are close friends may do so. But men and women, and men together, don't touch each other because this is a signal of an intimate connection. The habit of keeping hands off others creates a safer context for children because they would no longer need to distinguish good touch from bad touch..

Seductive Behavior. Women recognize seductive behavior, and the man who says, "*Come up and see my etchings*" is clearly making a sexual advance to a woman. People make sexual advances to children as well, and adults need to recognize the signs of these advances, which are remarkably similar. The person who flatters, makes frequent eye contact, tries to get near you, wants to touch you frequently, and wants to share secrets is often a person making a sexual overture.

Women may feel flattered or repulsed by a man's advances, but they are likely to be aware that this is a sexual overture underway, as opposed to a salesman making a pitch for his product. When this becomes too intrusive it is harassment, and people are legally protected from this sort of predatory behavior. Children approaching puberty are beginning to learn about the social rules governing sexual behavior, and information about courteous behavior becomes more important. This is a time when kids can understand the concept of a wolf in sheep's clothing and be aware that people are not always honest in their motivations, nor do they always have the best interests of children at heart.

Women who are the target of seductive behavior are being groomed for a sexual approach, and children can be groomed in the same way. The response to unwanted sexual advances is to remove oneself, even though this may be awkward. This is an important

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aspect of the situation to explore with kids as they reach puberty because it is this part that can hook them into the relationship.

Legal and Illegal Behavior. Kids feel more confident when they are aware of the basic rules of the wider society, and it's even better to feel like an expert in something. In New York State and many other states, youngsters under age seventeen cannot give legal consent to sexual activity, and having sex with a person under seventeen is technically sexual assault. This may seem ridiculous or offensive to a teenager, but it is the law, albeit rarely enforced.

Children are protected from crime under the U.S. Constitution and they cannot be forced into sexual activity by an adult. This underscores their value to the society and their standing in the courts. This discourages the shame and guilt that kids feel if they are victims of forced sex and gives them a sense of power to protect themselves.

Child pornography is illegal because it depicts a sexual assault on a child and is evidence in legal proceedings. Regardless of whether children smile or consent to the pictures, it is illegal activity. Buying, selling, or creating child pornography is also illegal, whether it is done through print or electronic media. For an adult to engage in any sort of sexual activity with a child is illegal, and under U.S. law, traveling outside the United States to engage in sexual activity with children is also against the law.

Fraudulent practices, those acts aimed at swindling and cheating victims, are always illegal, and they involve a wide variety of forms of trickery, deceit, dishonesty, misrepresentation, and fake and crooked behavior. Grooming and sexual exploitation of children (and adults) are one example of these.

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Protect Other Kids. When kids don't report sexual advances, it recycles a predator, so he is now better prepared to approach other kids. Although kids rarely report sexual abuse, they may act to protect other kids, particularly younger or disabled kids. They are far more likely to report this type of activity if it involves somebody else, not them, and if that somebody is smaller and weaker than they are.

They are also more likely to report such activity if we call it criminal rather than inappropriate behavior. Being a crime victim is not a shameful thing in the way that being a sexual participant can be. Criminal activity is more familiar to kids from television and the media, and law enforcement figures are portrayed as heroes.

Internet Safety. The Internet separates kids from adults so that there is little guidance or protection for kids online. Youngsters usually feel safe on the Internet because they seem to know more than adults. It's easy to assume that others on the Internet are harmless because they are usually other kids, but because almost fifty percent of Internet predators are young people themselves, this is a dangerous assumption.

Adults can teach kids Internet safety by finding ways to be safe themselves, which requires active learning about the Internet. Parents believe that they speak openly to their kids about safety, but surveys indicate otherwise, because kids believe they receive little direction from parents. Parents may speak, but kids may not pay attention because much of what is said to them is based on ignorance.

Email and Instant Messenger are open to anyone clever enough to cut into them, because they are variations of chat rooms. One of the ways to get this across to kids is to suggest that whatever they write or post online should hang on the family refrigerator. This makes the point that strangers may be monitoring a writer's communications without his awareness.

Understanding illegal activity requires recognition that criminals may pose as responsible adults. As a safety exercise, parents might disguise themselves when they contact kids online to

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teach kids to identify dangerous circumstances. This helps youngsters to recognize fraudulent social overtures.

Kids and teenagers love cell phones, and these devices can be a useful safety devices. If a youngster is in a tight spot, a cell phone call can serve as an escape hatch. Newer cell phones contain an E911 chip that allows GPS systems to locate the cell phone on a grid, which means that whenever a youngster makes a call, his location can be identified. This also means that the child who makes prank calls from a cell phone when home alone with a friend can be located if somebody has the necessary equipment. With the right software, there are no anonymous calls.

Increasingly, kids share information about themselves on the Internet out of narcissism and a need for social connection. Personal Websites and blogs that detail a youngster's life and inner thoughts are intriguing ways for kids to develop their understanding of technology and be creative as well. Even when these are password protected, which is rare, the information is still available to the general public and to predators scanning the Internet for targets.

Information about these sites ranges from the trivial to the intimate and can include pictures, music, personal writing, and graphic designs. It is common to post photographs of oneself and one's friends and family. Kids see these as harmless, thinking, *"Who would care about some pictures of little old me?"*

Imagining cyberspace as having a criminal undercurrent gives a very different perspective to youngsters, akin to how a woman feels if she leaves her purse on a shopping mall bench. The odds of a happy ending in these circumstances are not good because criminals seize opportunities to exploit others. Pictures and other personal information about kids on the Internet are open to whatever use anybody wants to make of them.

How do sexual predators use this information? Information can help locate a youngster by using MapQuest.com, reverse telephone directories, and search engines that turn up enough data to track a youngster's movements and to find out, for example, when her soccer team will be playing and where. This isn't likely

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to happen each time a youngster makes such a post, but it creates a setting in which the risk to a youngster increases.

A second concern is the massive industry of child pornography that involves millions of Websites and billions of dollars. This is an illegal activity that exploits needy people for profit, and like the drug trade, it does great harm to individuals and to society at large.

Child pornography cannot exist without children as models, and kids who post pictures on the Internet are offering their visual image to be morphed into pornographic portrayals. Many kids become live victims of pornography either through sexual assault or by voluntarily offering to sell themselves as models in the production of pornography.. Using Google's search for images feature for example, opens a search of graphic images and will produce many shots of young girls.

It is worth exploring with youngsters how they would feel if they saw a picture of themselves in a sexual portrayal, and how it would feel if their friends saw it. *It would be hard to explain that it wasn't really you*, a parent can tell a child, *so it might be wiser to give friends printed pictures of yourself rather than sending them on the Internet*. Although print material can be scanned onto the Internet and used in pornography production, this is less likely.

Any online contact leaves a child open to sexual solicitation, and this may come in a form that kids cannot recognize as such. People who are friendly in chat rooms and show an interest in a youngster may be what they seem, or they may be criminals on the prowl. A child has no way of distinguishing these through the mechanical contact of the Internet.

Online sexual addiction is a growing problem, particularly for those whose lives are lonesome and isolated. The Internet seems to offer automatic social connection and a way to become involved with others at minimal risk. Contacting a live person to make social plans can seem more intimidating, and the Internet reduces the risk of rejection by hiding personal shortcomings.

Relating on the Internet reduces rather than builds social competencies, and so it narrows rather than widens the social network. Depression and obsession with the Internet seem to fuel

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each other so that the more kids are depressed, the more likely they are to turn to the Internet, and the more often they use the internet, the more likely they are to be depressed. Dependence on the Internet and depression may be obvious only by the endless hours, often late into the night, that a youngster spends online.

When kids encounter online solicitation, it comes in a form that is not easily recognized. Behaviors from online friends that involve sexual topics are usually a signal that the other person wants to develop a sexual relationship. Kids are not likely to report online solicitation unless they feel it would serve a higher purpose. If they see it as a sign of criminal activity that can hurt younger kids, they may be more likely to take action. Teaching kids how to report criminal activity using Cybertipline (cybertipline.com) is useful and makes them part of a larger vigilante network that seeks to protect the freedom of the Internet from eventual governmental control.

The Need for Cyberguidance

Although online technology is dazzling, the questions it provokes involve the more mundane issues of raising kids. Teaching young people the values that make life dignified and productive is the same challenge with or without personal computers. Although pornography can be enticing to adolescents just learning about sexuality, it is based on the debasement of needy people for the profit of others. To produce pornographic images, desperate youngsters who will do anything to physically survive are sold into sexual slavery for others' financial gain.

Online pornography is one form of cybersex, that is, sexual stimulation devoid of human connection. It is a remarkably narcissistic form of sex that offers the illusion of relating to others while compassion and concern for others is blunted, and sex becomes essentially a solitary act.

According to recent surveys, young people are increasingly likely to engage in oral sex without any interpersonal relationship. This type of activity, which usually consists of a girl performing oral sex on a boy, is another form of depersonalized relating.

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Whether one reaches orgasm through online sex or through genital stimulation by a female, there is little chance to come to know and understand another human being.

The subtle conditioning process that is invoked by these behaviors makes it increasingly difficult for the participants to become aroused in a later relationships with other partners. Whether the choice is to use pornography, cybersex, or hookups for sexual release, there is a decline in the capacity for sexual arousal. The healthy sexual functioning of young people becomes impaired through these behaviors.

Other approaches to guiding kids may be useful in teaching online safety. One of the useful practices in trying to prevent drunk driving among teens for example has been for parents to give kids a free ride when they need it, no questions asked. This means that if a youngster is out with friends, and the driver has been drinking, a teen can call parents for a ride home with no fear of interrogation or criticism. The same practice needs to be applied to Internet usage, so that if kids get into trouble on the Internet, perhaps through viewing forbidden Web sites or by giving out personal information, a parent will rescue them, with no criticism or accusations. If parents experiment enough on the Internet, they will understand how easily one can become trapped in an online problem.

A different approach to Internet safety has been to ask kids to sign safe behavior contracts for Internet activity. But since people under eighteen are generally deemed too immature to fulfill legal commitments, this might be an overly optimistic approach. Asking a youngster to sign a contract for safe Internet practices transfers the responsibility for his safety to him rather than keeping it with a parent, where it belongs.

Children cannot be in charge of their own safety, and they lack the judgment to take care of themselves. A parent who provides guidance is a much better bet than a contract, because an adult can insure that a youngster is in safe circumstances. When the inevitable mistakes are made after a contract has been signed, children are blamed for the failure of the contract because they did not adhere to it. Depending on this type of agreement with a child

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is like making a contract with a child to be taller, because it commits him to behaviors that are not yet within his reach. While anyone can behave in a mature manner occasionally and for brief periods, true maturity is continuous and takes years to develop.

Develop an Abuse Action Plan

Teaching kids to deal with sexual predators is part of the larger challenge of teaching young people to use good judgment. The goal is to help kids to be smart and independent so they can have increasing freedom to explore the world. An action plan to deal with sex crimes normalizes kids' risk and makes allies of parents in dealing with it. This may seem a pessimistic view of children's lives: that they should have to plan for episodes of sexual solicitation or assault. It is unfortunate that the statistics indicate that this is the case, but it is foolhardy to pretend that the problem doesn't exist, for then children are at high risk. What should an action plan include?

To formulate an action plan, parents need to ask themselves, what would I do if it became clear to me that my child was the target of sexual exploitation, either by a friend, acquaintance, family member or an older youngster. It helps to announce a policy:

Here's what I would do if I found out somebody might be a child molester: I'd talk to the police or to a mandated reporter, because this is criminal activity, and I want to protect our family and everybody in it. Here's what would happen to you. You would have to talk to the police and that's probably all. We would all hate this, but you and I, we didn't commit any crimes, and we don't want to protect those who do. We don't want other kids hurt by this person.

The new etiquette offers a way to recognize risky settings, to preempt the behavior of sex offenders and prevent exploitation of children. Persons who want to be alone with or have secrets with a child are people who need to be constrained. Identifying these behaviors to kids as part of a potential criminal pattern allows them some distance from the events and insulates them.

Helping Kids Deal with Emotions

This is part of the larger issue of teaching character to children as they grow older. Children who have learned social competence and a measure of self-control are less likely to be crime victims; and when they are targeted, they have a better chance of reducing the damage. Self-control allows kids to pay more attention to their surroundings and decide what is good for them rather than being eternally preoccupied with their impulsive wishes and the results that follow their acting out.

Learning to deal with emotions is an important part of character building, because emotions are the surging tides that throw the boat to one side or the other. Children differ in the intensity of feelings they experience and in the frequency of emotional reactions, and some are cooler reactors than others. Emotions like fear, anger, confusion, and panic can destabilize good behavior in a child, so parents need to offer help to a youngster by training him how to respond.

Terror and panic are difficult feelings to master at any age, but it helps to anticipate them by using movies or news stories to inoculate an older child against the disorganized responses that they produce. Saying, “*What would you do if that were you?*” is a useful way to help a child explore his reactions to a frightening challenge.

As children grow older, it helps to gradually increase the challenge of hypothetical situations, so that a small child deals with very simple situations, and an older youngster would deal with more complexity. For little kids, answering the phone or the doorbell with supervision is an opportunity to discuss the choice of response in the face of the emotions produced. For older kids, television shows dealing with police stories can be useful, because the cognitive agility of older kids allows them to consider several perspectives at once.

In teaching kids how to deal with the strong reactions that fearful situations set off, they need to focus on their behavior, not on words or feelings. When kids interact with adults, they need to notice what behaviors are involved because predators use words to

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distract kids from physical activity, and kids are safer if they ask, “*What am I being asked to do?*”

Part of character is courage—the ability to manage fear and make good decisions about behavior. Courage is about what people do in terrifying circumstances, not what they feel. It helps kids to hear stories and see movies about kids who have courage and who get through tough times by being brave. Courage is a muscle, and it gets stronger with frequent use.

Bravery raises self-esteem, because a child can have more faith in himself if he knows that scary circumstances won’t disable him. Kids need to be reminded that courage grows over time and is acquired with practice and occasional retreats into cowardice. Optimism about a child’s growing ability in this realm is helpful, because it gives a youngster hope. Courage is a necessary part of taking the initiative in directing behavior so that one is not passive in the face of life’s challenges.

Third, Talk With Children

Conversation is essential in raising healthy kids because when the young don’t listen, don’t speak, and don’t converse, then they are without preparation for challenging experiences. Adults can help them, but to do so, as in any teaching endeavor, the work must start where the learner is. This is an old precept in education: the idea that learning has to match the level of the learner’s functioning, otherwise, he will be bored at hearing what he already knows or confused by information beyond his grasp.

The key to learning about the learner is listening to him, listening with real interest. This is a lost art in Western civilization, as people may speak and converse, but if you pay close attention to their dialogue, often there is little consideration of the meanings being transmitted. This is obvious in heated debates, when each person is arguing with what he thinks the other person is saying rather than their actual words.

Listening is most likely when adults are in relationships where there is genuine communication, and there is an opportunity to explore thoughts, feelings, and experiences. If instead adults are

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in frustrating relationships where they can't be understood, it becomes very difficult to hear children.

The first step in learning to listen is to practice silence and avoid filling the quiet space with words. Sometimes communication makes people tense, so in a conversation, they hold their breath, squirm in a chair, or interrupt the speaker. Intent listening has good consequences for the listener, because blood pressure immediately begins to drift to healthy levels and breathing reverts to a normal rhythm.

When the goal is to communicate with children, an attitude of interest in kids is important. In listening to youngsters, our feelings about a child's conversations are reflected in how we respond, and kids usually don't want to talk to somebody who doesn't really want to hear them.

Mental monologues are those continuous internal commentaries about anything that comes to our attention. Mental monologues are about ourselves, and they have a distinct tone of positive or negative bias about the self. This shows up most clearly with a stubbed toe, when an internal voice is either accusatory [*You clumsy fool!*] or supportive [*Ooooo, that's too bad, you'll feel better soon.*]. These internal voices are learned early and continue throughout life, often in the original childish form in which they first appeared. Often they imitate someone who was prominent in childhood. If an older sister often said, "*Nobody will ever love you,*" this may cycle through the mental mainstream over the decades.

Often the habitual comments that happen inside our heads make it hard to hear children in a fresh way without being colored by the prejudices of our insides. "*He really knows how to push my buttons*" and "*You're such a whiner*" are internal comments that predetermine our hearing, so that whatever a child says conforms to these interpretations. In fact, these preset responses override all of the richness and variability of a human's behavior, so that a parent stops noticing a child and sees only what he expects to see.

A parent's negative internal comments can make a child the enemy, the one who is always wrong. When children get used to this type of response from a parent, they begin to look elsewhere

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for support. A career child molester knows how to pick up on the loneliness and despair of a child in these circumstances and supply what a child needs to foster a dependency he can later exploit. Parental self-esteem often determines attitudes toward children, so that the mental monologue may be either harsh or kindly, and it is matched by the external commentary. A kind and generous mental monologue is far more productive with children and a whole lot happier for an adult.

In a good conversation, the ball goes back and forth frequently, with short sentences and acknowledgement of what the other person has said. Children need more help in conversation, however, for their social skills are developing and they often need guidance in how to proceed. It can be useful for a parent to leave a tape recorder running at home to get a more objective view of family conversational patterns.

To foster understanding, it helps to repeat back what the other person is saying without making judgments or giving opinions. This allows everybody to be clear on what's being expressed and encourages the speaker to expand and explain. This is how it sounds:

Child: I hate my teacher. She's a real jerk. I'm not going to school anymore.

Mom: It sounds like you're pretty upset with her.

Child: Yeah, she's a jerk. She said I was cheating!

Mom: That sounds pretty tough. What happened?

Listening to a youngster doesn't abrogate adult responsibility for guiding and correcting behavior in a child. It merely postpones adult action until a parent is clear about the situation.

It helps if a parent knows what she can tolerate hearing, and most parents don't want to hear a description of how the table looked after Joey threw up on it in the school cafeteria. It is difficult for a parent to listen to reports of sexual exploitation by a boyfriend, husband, or grandparent, and many adults respond poorly out of shock and disbelief. In the infrequent instances of a

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child reporting sexual exploitation to a parent, it causes a child great difficulty when a parent replies:

*Are you sure? Maybe his hand just slipped.
He wouldn't do that. Why are you making things up?
You have a strong imagination and I think its working overtime.
It was that TV movie you saw last week. Now you think everything is child abuse.*

To acknowledge and accept a child's report of forced sex is serious business, because it is the report of a felony, and will involve police, lawyers, and potential jail time. Further, it confirms that a parent has been betrayed by the sexual exploitation of her child, and so it ends adult relationships. It is a small wonder that a parent, taken off guard by a child's comment, may respond with denial and disbelief.

Why Kids Don't Talk to Parents

IRS examiners have a tough life. How do you have a casual conversation with somebody who could have you arrested for unintentional mistakes on your tax return? It's hard to be relaxed when the other person has great power, and that's probably the single greatest difficulty parents have in talking to their children: that kids are afraid to talk for fear that they'll get into trouble.

Conversation is always overshadowed by a parent's enormous control over a child, the power to discipline and punish, to condemn and disapprove, and to generally make a child's life miserable. Often these consequences happen out of the blue, in a child's perspective. *Just because I said that grandma smells bad, mom went ballistic on me.*

Much of the communication between a parent and a child involves repetitious exchanges:

Did you brush your teeth?
Yeah.

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Are you sure?

Yeah.

Parents ask these questions as a form of providing guidance, and children answer with the expected response. They may serve as reminders for behavior, but often they give parents a false sense of assurance:

If anybody ever touches you, you tell me, you hear?

Yeah.

You understand?

Yeah.

They reassure parents that a problem has been handled constructively and that a child is safe. Children become accustomed to much adult talk of this nature, the mantras that parents utter that have long been- devoid of meaning.

Even long verbal exchanges with parents may not have much impact on a child, if they consist of scolding lectures with repetitive elements. When a parent says, "*I want to talk to you*" or "*We have to have a talk,*" it usually means that a youngster won't hear good things about himself. Often a child can repeat all of what is to be said by a parent in these circumstances.

These may be the same conversations that a parent heard growing up, and occasionally, adults recognize their own parents in their words. In these situations, a parent's words are essentially public policy statements by parents to children, of the form, "*Here's how I stand on tooth brushing, and why.*" Sometimes adults use the same types of lectures on other adults, particularly spouses, which usually causes resentment.

The following are adult speaking habits that block conversation and the development of understanding. They can be changed, the same way that any habit is changed, first by developing awareness and then using more effect habits.

Name Calling: It can feel good for a parent to use expletives if she is angry. When we call somebody a nasty name, there is typically

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an adjective that goes with it. You're not just a brat; you're a *spoiled* brat. Not merely a punk, but a *rotten* punk. The child gets the message that a parent doesn't like him and is very angry, which makes a child angry as well.

What works instead is to find a good name, if a parent has to call one. Even if you don't feel it, it will remind both of you that a child is valuable. *My darling child* will put less of a dent in the relationship; and will help to slow down a parent's reaction. In the process of coming up with a good name, an adult is forced to be more balanced in the way that he addresses a child.

Downing: Downing is name calling extended: a detailed explanation of why a child is headed for disaster, why his life is already ruined and why he could have avoided this if he had listened to a parent. The hope here is that a child will hear all this, wise up and change his ways. This rarely happens and the real result can be that after years of downing, kids get depressed and turn to drugs or sex or alcohol as a way to deal with the enduring hopelessness they feel.

What works better is identifying a problem and then predicting that a child will grow out of it, mature and learn to do better. It is useful to see any of a child's shortcomings as temporary problems, things that will surely change as a youngster gets older. When a parent predicts growth, then a child is less likely to resist the things he needs to do to mature, and he is more likely to listen to his developing judgment as it emerges.

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Catastrophizing: This is predicting the worst in any situation, so that it's not merely a bad mark on a math test, instead it's a clear indicator that the boy is just like Uncle Joe and will end up in prison for embezzlement just like his uncle. This is the parent who overreacts when any of the garden-variety problems of childhood appear. The problem with this reaction is that it makes it hard for a child to understand what is really important, because everything is really important to the parent. A mother or father becomes like a pile of explosives, ready to go off at any second, so kids try to avoid lighting the fuse, and they learn to hide things.

It works better if a parent refrains from giving opinions on first hearing a child's bad news and instead concentrates on listening and trying to confirm the facts. Often explosions are learned reactions, and a parent can get set off merely by the sound of a child calling on the telephone.

When a parent feels calm enough to respond to bad news, it helps to validate a child and her feelings. "*It feels bad to get a failing grade in math doesn't it?* What can be learned from this little experience, and it is a *little* experience? What did Einstein learn from all of his mistakes (he flunked math early in his career)? Is it likely that this small setback will be reversed? You bet.

Nit Picking: If a child has head lice, you need to get the nits out of her hair, clothes, bed sheets, and everywhere else that they can hide, because this is a serious problem. But who wants to pick nits when it's not necessary? Focusing on minor problems in life and making a child miserable results in kids avoiding adults because they aren't much fun to be around. When children have head lice, they need adult help; and rarely do they avoid it, because even youngsters can sense that a case of head lice isn't a good thing.

It would be far better to take note of minor problems and then set them aside. "*We'll deal with that when you're older.*" "*You'll grow out of it.*" "*You weren't yourself when you did that.*" "*You'll do better tomorrow.*" Let it go. Let the child be himself. Think of the parents whose offspring disappeared in the World Trade Center on September 11, and remind yourself that life is

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precious and unpredictable, and you don't want to waste it by tormenting kids with trivia.

Running on: Children make a captive audience, and sometimes a parent becomes bewitched by the sound of her own voice and the beauty of her syntax. The words seem so true and so wise that a parent feels good just talking, without noticing that a child isn't listening. Talking at length in this way is a narcissistic activity, performed for the speaker, and usually boring to everybody else. It can easily become a habit in a family, with one person dominating the dinner table and the others escaping as soon as possible. Long lectures give the appearance of solving a problem, but more often they block creativity, which is the source of solutions.

It helps to practice silence and to refrain from filling in conversational gaps. Companionable silence has its place and at least the other person won't feel that he can't get a word in edgewise. When a parent speaks, it helps to limit comments to two sentences. Young listeners usually drop out after the first two sentences, so beyond this, a parent is probably the only listener.

Sobbing: Children usually find it very distressing to see a parent break down in tears, and they rarely have the social skills to respond well. Often youngsters just freeze, which can lead a parent to believe that kids don't care about their upset, but this is usually a mistaken reading of the situation. A parent's display of emotional dependency, represented as I'm-so-helpless-I-need-somebody-to-take-over reverses the parent-child balance, so that a youngster is thrust into the parental position.

An occasional tear or snuffle doesn't create the same problem as frequent full-blown emotional collapses. If circumstances such as a major life tragedy do lead to such a parental outburst, then children will need separate help, as will adults. But in the ordinary disappointments in families, it's wise to explain one's reactions matter of factly: *"I'm sad because you said you hate me and that hurts (blowing nose). I wish you would find kinder words when you're angry at me."* For the powerful emotional experiences of life, it's important for parents to have

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adult friends and people who can empathize and give support. These relationships can be very rich, as they involve the exchange of emotional experiences over the years and offer comfort and insight to everybody, but they aren't possible between children and adults.

Blasting: Big emotional reactions scare kids. Sometimes this may be a good idea, but only if it happens no more often than once every five years, and if the issue is as large as the explosion. The normally serene and gentle parent who gets angry and yells leaves a profound impression on a child, and it is important that the behavioral transgression be grave enough to be marked in this way. Unfortunately if the misbehavior is that serious, the response usually needs careful consideration and a more considered response.

When parents react by yelling, slamming things, or cursing, kids learn to avoid the parent. Sometimes a parent becomes addicted to adrenaline, which gives a rush and a sense of power. Like road rage, rage at children is inherently destructive and usually leads to bad decisions.

Angry outbursts are usually conditioned reactions to environmental cues that involve an instantaneous but careful consideration of behavioral consequences. Road rage subsides quickly, for example, when it becomes evident that the targeted vehicle is actually an unmarked police car. If anger toward a child is habitual, it will help to write down a list of the consequences as a reminder to restrain oneself.

Behaviors That Speak Louder Than Words: Human beings are skilled at reading body language, mannerisms, expressions, and movement. The man who sits too close or the woman with the unfriendly expression both transmit meaning. What do we communicate to children in our nonverbal behavior?

Disinterest is shown when an adult appears to be waiting for his turn to speak, ignoring a child's words, and thinking about his own thoughts. Sometimes people don't let a speaker finish or they finish his sentences, which is a good indication that the

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speaker's thoughts and feelings have little value to the other person. A person who takes a phone call during a conversation indicates that the conversation is secondary. When adults push a child to speak and express his feelings, it becomes clear that the purpose is to serve some adult need and not to put a child at ease. Conversation with children is not all that different from conversation with adults, except that children need more help in this social exchange.

Sometimes the external characteristics of a conversation can have a big impact on how it develops. Gender differences, for example, affect the way that people speak. By age eight, children are aware of the different styles of men and women in conversations, and they tend to copy them. This means that a boy's conversations often focus on who is in control and who is stronger or smarter. Girls, in contrast, are more likely to reflect a need for closeness and cooperation in their conversations. There are differences as well when children speak with a man or a woman, and they may be more conversational with someone of their own gender.

Parents have different conversational styles in chatting with children, and one dimension on which they vary is in how much support they give to a youngster's thinking and talking. Some research finds parents are different in how much they fill in the blanks for kids when they have a conversation together. These are parents who carry the conversational ball and keep it rolling by talking along with a child. If a youngster isn't very talkative, they may supply information for him or prompt him to remember aspects of the subject under discussion. They ask questions in a variety of ways so that a child has time to chew on the question and approach it from different perspectives. They also accept sparse answers from kids, and extend them, so that kids participate more. Open-ended questions are frequent, to which a child can't give a wrong response. These helping parents are generally friendly and positive in their conversations so that the experience is a pleasant one for everybody.

This approach doesn't work well when a parent needs immediate, factual answers to a question; but it is usually not a

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good idea to rely on children for this type of response anyway, because youngsters, particularly if they are very young, generally can offer little.

Some parents, perhaps not as knowledgeable about child development, are far less supportive of children in conversation. They may ask one question and repeat it, perhaps expecting that a child will respond if they hear the same question two or three times. When a child can't answer, they move on to another topic rather than help a child, and their conversations with children tend to be shorter. If a child responds to a question by saying "*I don't know*," this type of parent may insist on an answer and even accuse a child of lying if he doesn't supply one. This leads to exchanges like,

What did you do today in school?

Nothing.

You must have done something. Why won't you talk to me?

I dunno.

Did you get in trouble at school? Are you hiding something?

A parent who helps a child converse, in contrast, is more likely to ask questions that a child is able to answer, such as, "*Was it nice riding on the bus today? Did you get to paint in school?*" Helpful parents might comment, "*That's interesting.*" Or "*Tell me more about that.*"

One way to think about the casual conversation that needs to happen with children is encompassed in the current research on gossip. Gossip is usually understood as maliciously disparaging another for one's personal satisfaction, but there are alternative definitions. Dunbar, for example, argues that gossip is a way to pass down information and solidify social standards and practices. It is the telling of social stories about other people in an informal manner that delineates what is acceptable behavior and what is not.

Telling stories that are untrue or that exaggerate in order to harm someone damage the social structure. In contrast, relating

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tales of misdeeds or heroic efforts can set a standard for listeners and outline what the culture expects. Gossip is often informational and provides a way to update people on events as well.

Gossip is at the core of urban legends, instructional tales that teach listeners how to avoid danger and injury. Although the basic information may be distorted through repeated telling, it is still instructional in nature. The story of the mother who didn't watch her toddler carefully at the mall store and the security guards who caught the kidnappers right after they cut the child's hair and changed her clothes is a case in point. Whether this episode actually occurred is less important than the purpose it serves in reminding parents to watch their children in stores.

Others make the point that gossip teaches by example, allowing us to learn from the mistakes of others, and that it has a long tradition, evident in *Aesop's Fables*. These are tales that tell of character flaws in animals that bring them to a bad ending. Girls often learn sexual safety from adult women in the same way, for example, how Aunt Miriam was walking to her car and a man grabbed her and she fought and got away.

Gossip is a way to teach children safety as well, because kids learn about what happens if a child runs into the street or plays with matches. The same kind of teaching can be done with sexual exploitation so that kids learn safe behavior in diverse circumstances. Parents can omit the graphic details of sex crimes but they can communicate enough to allow youngsters information to make them aware of dangers.

Women's conversations may be expanded to share information with kids. Women speaking with young girls often speak in an instructive manner, telling them about the risks of a young man who is too friendly or gives gifts or who lies, for example. Older women may tell stories from their own youth that illustrate the dangers a female can get into. It would help if children were instructed in the same manner, learning about the value of an escape hatch and not keeping secrets.

Sometimes adults are afraid that by telling stories of this kind, it will "put ideas in a child's head," so that the child may then invent a story accusing someone of a sex crime. But this could be

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applied to any news shared with a child, so that a youngster, particularly one who has often fabricated events, could do so on hearing a story of a bank robbery.

As Dunbar points out, gossip is a form of good grooming behavior in social relationships. In primates like gorillas and apes, this behavior consists of picking fleas out of each other's coats and can consume hours each day, but it also serves to cement the group bonds. It has a good effect on both parties; it releases endorphins, lowers pulse, and produces all the signs of reduced stress symptoms. Gossip that teaches cautionary tales to the young is good grooming behavior in that it involves fussing over them, focusing on them, and telling them things that are clearly aimed at increasing their safety.

Other researchers have explored the protective function of gossip in limiting the damage that can be done by exploitative others who seek social benefits without offering anything in return. To trade stories, impressions, and hearsay is a way to warn others of potential victimization.

So what kinds of conversations can a parent have with kids that will help to protect them from sexual predators? With a child of six or older, imagine the conversations that would follow comments such as: *I like the guy who cuts the lawn, but he stands too close to me when he talks. Does he do that with you, too?*

The goal of these types of conversations is to help a child to grow a voice and learn to speak for himself. When a child is routinely asked his opinions or thoughts on how people behave, he develops confidence in his own judgment, and he can test his ideas on others and correct them where they are in error. When adults share their opinions with kids and engage them in conversation, it develops a setting where a child can voice his feelings and test out his developing judgment.

Fourth, Take Stock of Kids' Lives

Taking stock is making an assessment of resources and probabilities in order to develop an estimate of the risk of sexual crimes. There is no way to foolproof a child against sexual

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predators, because a clever criminal mind can always invent new ways of targeting children; but most crime is highly predictable and can be avoided.

The approach here is similar to that of the American Secret Service in protecting public figures, requiring that agents explore every possibility and prepare extensively for all eventualities. This is likely to be a more familiar process to adult females who generally anticipate situations and work to increase their own safety so that no woman would take a midnight stroll through New York's Central Park.

Look at Your Child

The beginning of a safety inventory is to think carefully about a child and evaluate his maturity and developmental level. Comparing him to other children in his school class gives a relative indication of how well he does for his age. All children have large gaps in their knowledge and experience, but it helps to have a general understanding of how much can be expected of a youngster. A child's self-control usually develops at the same pace as his judgment, so that the more he is able to decide how to act and then go forward, the more likely he is to make reasonable judgments.

How good is a child's judgment? Does he still need guidance in crossing the street, or is he mature enough to get himself into bed on time? Often children who seem feisty and bold are kids who are dependent on adults to restrain and guide them because they are not yet self-reliant enough to do so.

Can a youngster stay home alone after school without getting scared or getting into mischief? Is he mature enough to be responsible for other children, or does he need continuous supervision himself? If he has had baby-sitting experience, how has he handled these responsibilities?

How needy is a child? How much emotional help and support is required with routine matters? Small children, those not yet in school, need extensive emotional buffering and cannot sustain themselves, but by ninth grade most kids can operate alone

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for lengthy periods. How does a needy child get adult help? By tearfulness? Acting out? Or clinging? Is she selective in the adults she turns to, or will anybody do?

What makes a child feel worthwhile? Completing a project? Getting Mom's approval? Is there concern about depression? Does a youngster have difficulty in organizing himself to get what he wants?

Sexual predators target children who are dependent or needy so that they can give kids the impression that they care about them and will help them. For a child who needs more help to grow, this alternative can seem very promising.

How skilled is a child at dealing with emergencies, even small ones? Has he ever put on his own band-aid? Called 911? Can he answer the door safely? Deal with the telephone? Does his behavior in these circumstances inspire adult confidence, or does it make a parent anxious for his safety? Can he get himself home without help if the situation arises? How creative is he in a situation where he encounters a problem and there is no obvious solution? Are his ideas safe ones, or does he forget safety considerations?

How many times has a child's actual behavior in challenging circumstances been observed? How much of a parent's assessment is based on what she *believes* a child would do, rather than on what she has actually observed? When a child does show controlled behavior and mature judgment, is this surprising to a parent, or is it a child's usual behavior?

If a child seems to need a great deal of help, he may need more parental supervision than another child of the same age. Just as children learn not to stick pointed objects in electrical outlets and all children eventually learn to be safe, some may need more time or additional teaching. This type of assessment allows a parent to make good decisions about how to help a youngster.

What are a child's Internet habits? Does he use the computer when no parent is home? Late at night? Does he create Websites and put his picture on them? Does he have Internet friends whom a parent hasn't met? How often is television on in the home? This can effectively block communication with parents

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and hide important aspects of a child's life. How many electronic devices does a child use, and who is he in contact with in using them? How competent are parents in using the Internet and how much do they discuss challenges to safety on the Internet.

How comfortable are parents in discussing specific risks and how a child can handle them? When a parent surveys a child's environment, there are no safe neighborhoods, for sexual predators can operate anywhere, but there are kids who know how to behave safely.

Think Like a Criminal

In examining how a child spends his day, it is important to look for opportunities for crime that happen unpredictably. Sexual predators are rarely spontaneous, for they are always on the prowl, hunting for vulnerable kids and aware of the odds that they can successfully escape detection. To be a sexual predator is to have a secret life and a hidden agenda, much like that of the undercover operative who is never quite what he seems but always has his own work to do.

Like drug dealers and loan sharks, sexual predators rarely attack openly but instead often draw their victims into a web of illegal behavior from which it is difficult to escape. They exploit others for their own satisfaction and, sometimes for financial gain with no remorse and no compassion.

There's little point in contemplating people's personalities to determine if somebody is a sexual criminal, because this type of deviant personality has at its core the capability of masquerading as a good citizen. Unless a parent has extensive law enforcement experience, he is not likely to be successful in approaching safety from this angle. It is far better to look at behavior and circumstances and to estimate a child's vulnerability to crime.

Women are practiced at making automatic and unconscious safety judgments. A female adult is not likely to walk down a dark city street, because her assessment of the situation projects a high-risk level. People weigh risk and consequences in an equation, so that if the consequences are low damage, higher levels of risk are

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acceptable. In ice-skating, people are aware of the risk of a fall, but the damage is likely to be limited so that even poor skaters will take a chance on the ice. On a dark city street, the risk of rape and murder, even if low, are such damaging consequences that no risk is acceptable.

It is harder to compute the risk of sexual assault against children because often these crimes are invisible to adults. They are rarely reported in childhood, so it can seem as if they don't happen. If there were no reports of rape and murder of adult women, walking down a dark city street might seem far safer than it actually is.

Given the FBI estimates of children's risk, parents can assume that the overall probability of sexual assault is substantial. It is heightened when a child is alone, isolated, and physically available to other adults, regardless of how trusted these people may be. The key is to examine situations to determine where kids may be accessible and then work to reduce their availability.

There are two initial questions to estimate a child's vulnerability: Is an adult alone with a child, and is there an opportunity for a child to be unclothed? Sexual predators try to divert attention from these two central questions; and with young predators, children may be molested while they are with other children. As another exception, sexual exploitation, particularly sodomy, can occur while a child is clothed.

Although all children are occasionally in circumstances where there is risk, the pattern of an adult's behavior needs particular attention. The adult who always wants to help the kids change their clothes or who prefers that parents not be present when they spend time with kids is a source of concern. This doesn't mean that the adult should necessarily be reported as a child molester, but that isolation of a child should be blocked. If an adult always seems to end up alone with children, even though he protests that he doesn't want to be the baby-sitter or the driver, it is wise to restrict access to kids. Although the person may be bona fide, the context raises a child's risk.

Sometimes circumstances may appear safe because there are many people around, but a child may not be able to reach them.

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A small child alone on a carousel, for example, is effectively cut off from adults because communication is difficult on a moving carnival ride. A middle-aged child at a shopping mall can be quite isolated, even in crowds, unless he is capable of finding help should he need it.

From the criminal's viewpoint, the mall is preferable to the carousel for assaulting children, because at the mall a child can be observed and stalked, and escape is easy for the predator. Even though it is a crowded place, a child's escape routes depend very much on his own cool head and ability to locate help. Victimitizing children in a windowless van in the mall parking lot lowers the risk to the perpetrator even more.

Some settings may seem safe, but because kids' social patterns constantly change, a safe situation can become risky for a youngster. Sleepovers where youngsters gather at somebody's house, are in this category. If unfamiliar youngsters or teenagers join the party, or if a parent who is a predator targets a sleeping youngster, a child is in effect alone and isolated.

Perhaps the most risky of the overnight activities are those where a youngster travels far from home for overnight travel. When youngsters go to other countries, their parents have no control over what happens to them; unless the kids are fluent in the language and culture of the new place, they have no access to help. The news that a child has been chosen as a student ambassador to visit a foreign country may seem like an honor, but the scenario is still one in which children are isolated with no escape route.

Circumstances in which an adult asks a child to keep secrets are always a concern. When the secrets are temporary and will be revealed to all shortly; for example, where the Christmas presents are hidden, they can be ignored. As a steady diet, however, it is unwise to train children to keep secrets for adults, because they cannot distinguish which secrets are dangerous to keep, and such behavior desensitizes a child to exploitative advances.

When an adult or teen wants time alone with a youngster, this should be avoided. Sometimes a man may say that he needs time to bond with a boy, but this can happen with other adults

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around, and there is no good reason for an adult to want to spend time alone with a child. Single mothers may feel particularly vulnerable in this area, as they try to supply adult male time to kids who may not have much contact with an absent father. But the adult male contact can be arranged with a mother present, too, which doesn't dilute the experience and adds an escape hatch for kids.

Adult women can usually tell if another woman is trying to seduce their partner, boyfriend, or husband. It may become apparent through external indicators and through intuition; when there is a jealous feeling, there usually is a reason for it. This process is not much different in the case of sexual predators, who seek to separate a child from a parent and break the connection between parent and child.

If a woman wants to seduce somebody's husband, she may be particularly friendly to the wife in order to allay her suspicions that she has ulterior motives. She may act like there is a special relationship, with "us girls" having a lot in common. This flatters the wife and helps her to ignore the attention given to the husband. This also allows the seductive friend to have access to time with the husband that may not otherwise be available. Meanwhile, the husband is the target of special attention, such as lingering eye contact and casual body contact, while the lady is assessing whether he is available or whether he will alert his wife that a seduction is under way. Sharing small secrets with somebody's husband is a way of determining whether he is likely to keep things from his wife.

Acquaintance child molesters use the same patterns to seduce kids and their parents. The seduction is easier, because a child is more likely to be gulled into believing that an adult's interest is benign, and because a child is far more easily controlled once the sexual activity commences. A youngster can be made to feel guilty and ashamed, so that there is no disclosure as well. Predator grooming behavior is similar to illicit adult seductions, in that there is likely to be the same fantasy that the seduction is good for the target, while in fact, it serves only the needs of the predator.

Become an Objective Observer of Your Child's Life

There are no reliable signs of a sex offender personality other than many of the usual indicators of criminality. Watching adults and trying to figure out who is a pedophile is not a good investment of energy. Rather, looking for behavior patterns that occur repetitively helps a parent decide when to restrict access to a child.

A grandfather who loves to give kids baths or who wants to be alone with them puts children in risky circumstances. When an adult finds excuses to have physical contact with a child, perhaps through birthday spankings, massages, back rubs and wrestling, the behavior, rather than the person, puts a child at risk.

Parents are more often aware of circumstances that pose a risk of abduction, so that playing alone in isolated areas is usually forbidden. Although sexual abuse by strangers is rare, it is extremely dangerous, for the likelihood of death is higher. Career child molesters who kidnap and molest children learn that leaving victims increases their risk, which in turn increases the potential for homicide. These crimes typically target children in middle childhood and early adolescence.

But abduction of children most often happens during family conflicts. Family abduction accounts for the majority of missing children because parents frustrated or angry about custodial arrangements take children and move to new locations. Sometimes these abductions involve sexual abuse as well as kidnapping, or they can be triggered by the fear of sexual abuse by the other parent. Whatever the reason, the effect on children is traumatic because of the loss of the other parent and the familiar circumstances of life. The new setting is rarely an improvement on the original circumstances, and subsequent moves are common. The need for secrecy often makes routine services like pediatric care and schooling impossible for a child. A parent needs to tell a child that if he were missing or abducted, the search for him would never end.

It is extremely rare that the courts end visitation rights, so parents must learn to work within the framework that the court

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outlines in a divorce. If a parent withholds visitation, this only intensifies the uncontrolled reactions on both sides. If there are concerns about abuse, contacting law enforcement or a mandated reporter is the safest route to protect kids.

When there is a concern for children's welfare, it may be useful to provide cell phones so that kids may call if necessary, although this should not be used to interfere with normal visitation. In a highly conflicted marital situation, third parties such as legal guardians and therapists can help to monitor a child's welfare.

Wherever the children spend time, relevant court papers and orders should be kept on file. Although the primary concern may be the conflict over parental rights, it is very important to be clear about who can pick up a child besides parents, because it is easy for the divorce conflict to obscure more significant safety issues.

Conflicts between divorcing parents over child custody often reach a peak immediately after a divorce is settled and when one parent remarries. In addition, if there are adolescents in the family at the time of the divorce, there may be increased upset over visitation, not because of parental conflict, but because teenagers generally resist impositions on their free time and their convenience. It may feel to the nonresidential parent that the teenagers are being prevented from visiting, but in fact, it may not fit with their schedule.

Abductions by Strangers

As children grow older, the range of their roving increases, much to the concern of parents; and as kids become more adventurous, parents can't oversee their activities and protect them. In the later years of elementary school, children visit malls, movie theaters, video arcades, playgrounds, toy stores, libraries, and parks, raising new safety concerns. Less obvious are the "no-destination" places that kids use with increasing freedom, such as apartment building stairwells and elevators, city subways and buses, and public restrooms. Because they are part of other activities, these places may be overlooked in a safety assessment. It

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helps to tutor and train and to anticipate dangers with children. Using a walkie-talkie to monitor short trips with young kids enables a child to talk through initial decisions with a consulting parent.

When a child uses an elevator alone for the first time, it helps to anticipate challenges and sometimes to discuss them while in the elevator. Examples of these may be:

- *A lone man gets in.*
- *Some threatening teen boys get in.*
- *The elevator goes to the basement, the doors open, and it's creepy.*
- *It goes up to the top floor where there is only construction.*
- *An elderly man asks the child to help him carry a package to his door.*
- *Somebody gets off the elevator with the child and appears to follow him.*
- *The elevator gets stuck between floors.*

All of these are realistic challenges, and asking a child to think up solutions is a good exercise in developing judgment. Preadolescent kids wouldn't normally have enough skill to deal with these situations, and even teenagers may need some help. Kids may believe that there is a right answer to all of these, but in fact, danger presents itself in a variety of forms, so the primary issue will always be the need for flexibility in finding an escape route and protecting oneself.

The greatest risk is always in those circumstances that develop suddenly, with no time to ponder the alternatives. They may happen, for example, when a youngster who walks home from school with his friend suddenly finds that his friend had to stay after school, and he must walk alone. Flexible judgment is critical for young people trying to be safe, and it is unwise for parents to teach absolute rules and demand obedience. Although it is a good rule to stay out of cars if the driver friend has been drinking, if it means a young girl will be left alone at a deserted place to walk home, this may require more creative thinking.

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Opportunities for discussion present themselves continuously with young people, so that kids can learn to take stock of their circumstances and anticipate challenges before they arise. If a youngster expects to get a ride home with a friend's parents, it is useful to ask what the child will do if this doesn't work and to explore the alternatives before the situation occurs. Judgment gets stronger with practice.

In taking stock of a child's life, there are many situations that seem commonplace, but unfortunately, sexual crimes are also commonplace. When families get together, and the grownups and the kids divide so that the kids go off, sometimes with older kids, for what is essentially unsupervised play, there may be reason to investigate. Because parents are on the premises, things may seem safe but may not be so.

Young adolescents sometimes get interested in activities that involve photography that can leave them open to sexual exploitation. Modeling courses, or photography deals, particularly if adults and parents are not welcome to the events, should be checked carefully.

Get to Know the Children Who Know Your Child

Becoming familiar with a youngster's social set gets more difficult as kids get older and more cosmopolitan in their contacts. The best route is to open the home to child guests and make them feel welcome. Lots of food and a willingness to provide transportation, along with a friendly welcome, usually encourage kids to hang around. This gives a parent time to get a feel for the way the kids relate and how other kids behave. It also provides a sense of how much supervision children get in their own homes. Entertaining youngsters and their friends at home often allows parents to see their kids from the perspective of other kids: *He's not quiet when he's with us!*

In every school, there are kids who are the strays and the stragglers. These are youngsters who need help, perhaps because of parental illness, financial stress, or divorce. They can be a danger to other kids because they can involve them in activities

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that are unsafe, like hitchhiking. Sometimes they are runaway kids or throwaways or children who leave home because of conflict with parents. They can be at risk for drug abuse, criminal victimization and dropping out of school as well.

Concerned parents can be helpful to stray kids by contacting the relevant social services or police for support services. It is an important lesson for other children to learn that kids need protection when they are homeless, and that this sort of freedom is not freedom at all.

A compassionate youngster may become friends with kids in trouble, which may put him at risk. Kids need an automatic excuse to refuse other children's pressure for dangerous activities, such as, *My mom would kill me if I did that!* It's also good policy to give a kid a "get out of jail free card" for any of the various social pickles that kids can get into. This is the equivalent of the free ride home, no questions asked, but it applies to any situation. If there is a child (or adult) a youngster wants to avoid, for example, a parent will help him do just that, no questions asked.

Be Vocal About How You Would Handle an Abuse Disclosure

Plan for the unforeseeable. It may seem crazy to plan for an episode of sexual victimization of a child, but it is likely that this will happen to a large number of children. In the same way that we purchase life insurance and car insurance to protect ourselves in the event of a problem, families need a plan to deal with sexual crimes. By doing this, the shock and disbelief are reduced, and a plan that was developed during quieter, less pressured times can be implemented. Having such a plan and making it known, creates a climate that reduces the risk of sex crimes, which thrive on secrecy and denial.

Parents need to be clear about how they would handle indications of sexual victimization. It helps to get in the habit of mentioning this when the subject comes up to friends or family, so everybody knows where a parent stands. Psychopaths are not deterred by loyalty or concern for the welfare of children, but they do try to avoid arrest. If a sexual predator considers it highly likely

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that he will be caught and prosecuted, it reduces the risk to children.

Parents need to discuss with kids how criminal activity would be handled and describe their concerns and the rationale for their choices. A predetermined policy reduces pressure on a parent to decide how to react in the middle of a crisis and insures that a child's best interests are primary in the situation. A family plan needs to include reporting to the police or a mandated reporter (pediatrician, psychologist, social worker, teacher). These are professionals who are trained to recognize child abuse and have a legal responsibility to protect children. A parent is not usually trained or experienced in determining whether a crime has occurred.

Those in law enforcement know that children who have been sexually assaulted may not react like adult crime victims, and that they may seem like willing participants because they have been conned rather than attacked. A child may defend a molester and cling to the relationship, refusing to cooperate with those who would prevent further abuse.

If there are signs of forced sex with a family member, such as a grandfather or boyfriend, things become much more difficult. In these circumstances, a parent will be subject to a great deal of pressure and may feel torn between loyalty to a partner or relative and responsibility to a child. By referring the problem to a mandated reporter, a parent can function as a parent, rather than as a law enforcement representative, and can allow professionals to make a determination if there has been criminal activity.

When a parent launches an investigation by interviewing the accused, this makes it harder to insure a child's safety. It is unwise to discuss criminal concerns with the school principal, the camp director, or the archbishop, for these people are not trained to investigate criminal acts and are likely to have a strong bias to protect their institution and its employees. Even if their primary concern is child safety, they usually lack the proper training to determine if there has been criminal activity. It invites them to try to reassure a parent and to protect the institution.

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When evidence of criminal behavior does not reach law enforcement, it essentially recycles a predator and trains him to avoid the mistakes that led to his exposure. Although parents may want to keep their child out of legal proceedings, other children will suffer if a predator is not reported and restrained. If parents in a community want to make it a safe place for kids, they must stop predators from molesting other kids when it comes to their attention that their own have been targeted. The belief that a sexual predator targets only one child and can reform his ways hides the reality of chronic sexual crime.

Talking with a mandated reporter when the adult in question is a dear friend or relative is very difficult. It may feel disloyal to suspect an adult of hurting a child merely because of a parent's suspicions, but in fact, when adults molest children, they are betraying not only the child but the parents who have raised and cared for that child and who have entrusted that child to a teacher, babysitter, or relative.

Don't Recycle Offenders; Prosecute Them to the Full Extent of the Law

Parents need to cooperate with law enforcement in protecting the safety of all children. Accepting an apology and a promise that a child molester won't commit more crimes is a dangerous exercise in wishful thinking. Instead, parents need to request prosecution to the full extent of the law and supply any information related to the criminal activity. When a sexual predator is indicted, parents additionally need to seek civil damages as well as criminal penalties. The civil testimony, which has far fewer requirements, can be used in the criminal trial. This lengthens the legal process, but it helps to create a climate where all institutions have a vested financial interest in protecting children.

Parents need to do this as a community service, a protection for all other children who could become victims of this offender. This type of threat puts pressure on pedophiles and sexual deviants to find constructive ways to deal with their proclivities and makes it clear that there is no alternative to their getting control. All of the

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research on offender treatment programs shows little success for offenders who were forced into treatment by the courts. If sexual predators see it in their own best interest to become good citizens, they stand a far better chance of changing their habits. Without prosecution, offenders return to the general population with a high probability that they will re-offend, hurting others as well as themselves.

Examine your own vulnerabilities

There may be pressure on parents of a victimized child to take no action as a way to spare the youngster further upset. This may be phrased in terms of protecting the family as a whole, and parents may be pushed to accept some sort of token resolution of the problem rather than full criminal prosecution. If a parent accepts this view, he is turning a criminal problem into a social consensus problem and allowing the sexual predator to move on to new victims. Although most parents would not knowingly ignore the obligation to insure kids' safety, the opinions of other adults can eclipse a parent's judgment in a crisis.

Submission to peer pressure, whether by children or by adults, usually happens because it is a way to raise one's self esteem in the group and to avoid group rejection. It seemingly preserves the harmony of the group and allows everybody to think they belong. If a parent has great anxiety about peer disapproval, it may be time to take stock of his own self-esteem level and to begin to deal with perceived deficiencies.

Use sex offender registries but don't bet a child's safety on them

Sex offender registries, which list names and addresses of convicted sex offenders who are likely to re-offend, can be helpful in taking stock of a child's surroundings. Occasionally they are extremely effective, as in the case of the lady taking her child to daycare who met a new fellow at the facility. Trusting her instincts, she checked him out on the registry and found that he was a level three sex offender.

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More often, these registries list some of the threats to a child's safety. They list only convicted offenders and those who have pled guilty to a lesser charge are not included. More intelligent predators may be able to escape detection entirely, so they are never listed. Often criminals don't comply with the laws that force them to alert local police when they move to a community, so they become lost to the system.

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN:
WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO DO**

Teachers are the heart of any school, and in the best of schools all personnel are teachers because all have as their priority the education and healthy development of youngsters. There are many ways that teachers encounter the criminal exploitation of children in the course of teaching. Perhaps the most common is the indication that a youngster is the target of sex abuse at home. A small child may spontaneously share information with a teacher and inadvertently disclose abuse. *My brother's friends play spin the bottle with me, and if I lose I have to play with their peepees.*

More often, there is no proof of sexual exploitation, but instead there are ambiguous signs that something may be wrong. A youngster may seem afraid of a parent, or be sexually precocious or seductive. In other cases, the news appears suddenly in the media:

- *A high school science teacher had a fifteen-year-old girl go to his Website for a cybersex experience, but although he believed that he was performing for the youngster, he was in fact being watched by the girl's mother and two police investigators.*
- *A Hauppauge, NY, music teacher was arrested for taking pictures up the skirts and down the blouses of cheerleaders and posting them on the Internet.*
- *The former school superintendent of Burrillville was indicted, along with the former PTA head, on charges of possessing child pornography after they allegedly traded sexually explicit images.*

There are a wide variety of sex crimes that come to the attention of teachers, and they may involve children, family members, school faculty or staff, volunteer helpers, strangers outside the school, or online predators.

A child's school day includes educational activities that take place outside the classroom, such as arrivals and departures on school buses, moving from one room to another, as well as

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programs associated with athletic playing fields, surrounding areas, storage facilities, bus garages, and parking lots. Children sometimes travel away from school grounds for field trips for the day or overnight. These are all places where people have access to children and can isolate them from others.

Schools have a large investment in keeping children safe from criminal exploitation because their mission is the education of the whole child, with the full development of all of a child's potential. When a child is sexually victimized, it shrinks that potential because it harms a child in many ways. In the same way that schools often provide breakfast so that children will be well nourished and able to concentrate on their studies, so they have a concern with protecting children from sexual exploitation.

Mandated Reporting

The term *mandated reporting* refers to the requirement in most states that licensed professionals report evidence of child sexual abuse when they encounter it through their work. The receipt of federal funds are contingent on compliance with mandated reporting laws. These laws prescribe professional training and apply to teachers and school officials, health professionals, dentists, childcare workers, therapists and day care workers. Religious clergy are subject to mandated reporting in some states, but not most. Under these laws, reporting is legally required when there is evidence of sexual abuse, whether disclosed or discovered. Dentists, for example, may find signs of oral and perioral gonorrhea or syphilis in young children that present no symptoms but are indicative of sexual abuse, and so they must be reported.

Mandated reporting preempts professional prerogative and eliminates personal discretion in dealing with sexual crimes. Although a suspected offender may be angry if he is reported to authorities, the law protects mandated reporters, so it insulates professionals from peer pressure in cases of child abuse. If a perpetrator pleads for another chance, a mandated reporter cannot

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submit to his plea without risking his license as well as legal penalties.

Teachers and school administrators are mandated reporters, and most schools have a structure within the administration for dealing with child abuse concerns as well. This works best when it is part of a district-wide child protection policy involving all personnel and providing continuing education.

Reporting is not the same as indictment; it transfers the responsibility for determining whether crime has occurred to the relevant law enforcement professionals. When a mandated report is made, usually to a child abuse hotline, investigators are required to take immediate action to determine if a child is in danger. Mandated reporters are not required to inform a parent or guardian when a report has been made, and in most states, the identity of the person making the report is not released.

Failure to report subjects the licensed professional to charges of a Class A misdemeanor and criminal penalties in most states. Mandated reporters can be sued in civil court for a failure to report abuse, and monetary damages can be granted. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that if providers make a good faith report of child abuse following legal guidelines, then they are immune from retaliatory lawsuits.

Mandated reporters must take training to identify child abuse and neglect so that they can determine when there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse. Indicators of sexual abuse include disclosure of abuse, sexually transmitted disease, genital injury or pain, sexually promiscuous behavior or comments, sexual assault of other children, and behavioral symptoms.

Law enforcement professionals make the determination of crime, which is a complex matter that requires training and experience. Sexual abuse legally is defined in most states as the use of a child to engage or assist in sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct, and includes rape, sodomy, statutory molestation, or other forms of sexual exploitation.

A major benefit of the mandated reporting system is that it cuts through the criminal con activity that is fundamental to child sexual abuse by acquaintance perpetrators. Even though a sexual

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con man may have charmed, seduced, persuaded and otherwise hoodwinked children and adults into seeing him as a good guy, a teacher who encounters evidence of sexual victimization is required to report or face legal consequences. This protects the professional from peer pressure to believe a child molester's deception. It also prioritizes responsibility to children.

Parents need to understand the legal requirements for mandated reporters, so that the system of child protection is clear to them. If this is presented as part of open school night, it creates a climate of safety for children that reduces the risk of sexual exploitation. This helps parents to understand that when there is a concern about child abuse, the system constrains and directs individual decisions to protect the rights of all involved.

Sometimes a report of sexual abuse based on indicators seen in a child, such as a diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease, provokes disclosure of abuse from another child who may feel empowered to break free of the hold of the abuser. Other events, like media reports of sex crimes, may lead to disclosures to school staff, because through them, a child recognizes that his or her experience is one of criminal victimization. Children who are emotionally distraught by abuse may disclose after successful experiences, such as good grades or an athletic achievement, because these boost a child's courage.

Children who disclose abuse in school are often highly conflicted and extremely anxious, so they may tell confusing stories. If there is public information about a crime against a child, other victims may come forward to tell of their own victimization. Fears that younger siblings may be targeted sometimes provoke disclosure to protect the younger kids. Because this is a legal matter, the law dictates the requirements for evidence, and it may be that many victims cannot supply sufficient proof or supply proof after the statute of limitations has run out, so their claims cannot be validated.

Avoid Reliance on Abuse Prevention Programs

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Teachers know better than anyone how children's thinking and reasoning develop, for all of their teaching is based on their understanding of children's learning. The problems inherent in abuse prevention programs are most apparent to those who understand children well, because they experience daily the limitations in children's thinking and judgment.

Distinguishing good touch from bad touch requires a sophisticated understanding of sexuality. When we teach kids that some touching is bad, they naturally wonder why, and unless we are prepared to expound upon the entire range of sexual behavior and related values, we are forced to tell them, in essence, "*Because I said so.*"

Why is it bad for an adult to touch a child's genitals? Because it involves a child in sexual activity that he can't understand and isn't ready for physically or emotionally, and because an immature person can't make a choice about participating in an intimate relationship that risks sexually transmitted disease, physical injury, pregnancy in post pubertal children, and stress.

When children touch each other's genitals, it's not a good form of play, but it's not a crime unless there are large power differences. When one child is much older or bigger, the smaller can be victimized by the other's ability to dominate and exploit. At its worst, sex is a means of controlling and intimidating another person, and so large power imbalances are not conducive to healthy relationships.

These are not concepts that can be taught to elementary school children; their understanding of social relationships is very superficial, and they cannot grasp the complexities involved in child-adult relationships. Although we can present information to children and get them to repeat what we tell them, this is not the same as teaching mature judgment.

Career child molesters don't begin by touching a child's private parts, as abuse prevention programs imply, but instead they move very gradually into forced sex, engaging and seducing a child along the way. Kids' intuition doesn't work well (if it ever works) when they are up against skilled con men, because

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predators are adroit at disguising their behavior. *“This is only a first aid check to make sure that you aren’t bleeding internally,”* a predator tells a child.

A career child molester usually makes the opening stages of child abuse pleasant for a child and avoids causing discomfort or unease. If the predator is well practiced, the early stages of sexual exploitation may make a child more at ease with a sexual con man than he is with anybody else in his life. Kids can’t recognize victimization until they are well into it, and then they are likely to be trapped by a web of guilt and shame. By the time a child recognizes that he is a sexual target, he is likely to feel he is a part of the criminal activity.

School abuse prevention programs tell kids to say no to bad touch, but predators in school settings are often particularly skilled in dealing with kids. Child abuse prevention programs assume that kids are much more mature than they are, and that sexual predators are much less skilled than they are

Implicit in prevention programs is the expectation that children will recognize and report sexual exploitation by family members. Because most sexual abuse of children is committed by those whom they know and trust, a substantial portion of perpetrators are parental figures, siblings, or other relatives. If we are to teach kids to recognize sex crimes, we must teach them that these crimes are usually committed by people they trust. In effect, we would have to teach kids to be suspicious of family members, which would require that they police the adults in their lives and report on their behavior.

If kids actually begin to report sexual exploitation, these reports will most likely be made to those people with whom they spend most of the day—their teachers. If all child victims reported criminal activity to teachers, the schools would have to become an active arm of law enforcement. This would require a great deal of time and expertise and would remove educators from their primary mission of educating children. School personnel would hear reports of sexual abuse within the family, and so they would become supervisors of family relationships as well.

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None of this is likely to happen, because abuse prevention programs have little impact, although they do feed the illusion that they protect children. If they could be made effective, the schools would be forced to deal with an impossible burden that more properly belongs to social service and law enforcement agencies.

Since kids generally don't report sexual crimes, when they do, adults may not believe them and may ignore their claims. The standard advice to children is to keep reporting until somebody listens to them. If they are reluctant to make a first report, it is unrealistic to think they would continue to report if the first disclosure isn't believed.

Teaching kids to keep reporting until somebody believes them isn't realistic, and it may be dangerous as well. The report, after all, is on criminal activity, not a breach of manners, and a criminal is endangered by such a disclosure. After thirteen-year-old Katelind Caudill reported Melvin Keeling to police for sexually targeting her best friend, she was found shot to death the next day. Charges of sexual assault are serious ones, and children cannot be encouraged to make them repeatedly. It is easy to assume that most child molesters are not violent, but there is no way to predict the behavior of a cornered psychopathic felon.

It would help to create abuse prevention programs for *parents* and provide federal funding to reach all mothers and fathers. Kids can't prevent abuse, and they don't report it when it's happening, so that leaves only parents to protect them. As long as adults count on kids to keep sexual predators in check, the crime statistics will continue at the same dismal rates, and more kids will get hurt. If mothers and fathers are willing to take on the prime responsibility of protecting kids, things may work out better. To do so, they need far more information and preparation, because sex offenders depend on parental ignorance to target children successfully.

Imagine if adults had the same attitude toward fire safety, in that they knew little about the indicators of a fire and the responses required. When they smelled smoke, they would try to ignore it or debate whether it really was smoke or try to avoid the

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smoky area. Fire requires aggressive action to protect people, and so does sexual victimization of children.

Crime Prevention Programs for Kids

There are many types of crime that threaten youngsters, and part of being a free citizen involves learning to act safely. This type of teaching fits well in a school health curriculum, because it involves learning to protect one's health and welfare. The model to copy would be driver education programs, which provide a great deal of information and instruction so that most kids become safe and responsible drivers.

Internet crime is an area that is particularly important, because kids surf the web freely and are vulnerable to criminal exploitation. In online shopping, fraud and identity theft are serious problems, and youngsters need to learn how to protect themselves when they shop online. Gambling and online gaming can involve kids in activities they are ill equipped to handle and that may trap them in compulsive or criminal behavior.

Using the Internet to make friends and carry on interpersonal relationships is an area of increasing popularity, but it poses a significant risk of criminal victimization to kids. It is difficult to end or limit relationships online, so the potential for harassment is real, as is the isolation that comes from neglect of offline relationships. Although most kids know that online sexual discussions and offline meetings are dangerous, statistics indicate they are common. Kids need to know that viewing or creating child pornography distorts the ability to participate in intimate relationships and that these activities are illegal.

Although abduction and kidnapping are rare, they are frightening enough to make it important for kids to learn about these crimes and how to respond if victimized. Widespread media coverage brings them to kids' awareness, but if youngsters develop protective response patterns, they are less likely to feel helpless and hopeless. More important, kids need to know that most youngsters who are the target of abduction and kidnapping

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attempts escape unharmed, and they need to understand how this happens.

Youngsters may be aware of the danger of stranger abduction, but they may not know the risk of acquaintance kidnapping, which can sometimes involve juvenile perpetrators. In a teenage romance gone wrong, an aggrieved and disappointed youngster may react impulsively to control the outcome of the situation by abducting his girlfriend. When this occurs, there is a serious risk of injury, and kids need to know the dangers of disintegrating romances.

In a separate vein, it is important for kids to understand the issue of custodial kidnapping, where one parent takes children and disappears during a custody dispute. For a child, this situation is extremely confusing, and often there are strong feelings of guilt and responsibility as a result.

Most kids don't know how to get help in public places. If taken off guard by a sexual predator or a familiar person in an abduction, they may be at a loss about what to do. Girls, in particular, may become meek and submissive if someone attempts to force them into compliance. Kids need to recognize the importance of eye contact and explicit complaints: "*He's a stranger! He's kidnapping me!*" rather than yelling, "*Help!*" Bystanders can easily misinterpret a noisy youngster's outbursts, and training in emergency action can empower a youngster.

Often children don't know what constitutes a sex crime and can't distinguish the perpetrator from the victim. For adolescents, sexual activity is new and intriguing {and sometimes disgusting}, and it occurs entirely within a secret, adolescent world. It is often difficult to understand when sexual activity becomes felonious activity and why it is defined as such. If a seventh-grade girl performs oral sex on several boys in her grade, it is legal, although certainly not wholesome. But if the same activity is demanded by an eighteen-year-old person, it constitutes sexual assault.

If an older person shoplifts an item and gives it to a child, the youngster may feel uncomfortable at being drawn into the theft. If an older person involves a youngster in sexual activity, a child may not understand that legal liability attaches only to the

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adult, not to the child, and that a child cannot be arrested if she is sexually molested. A crime prevention syllabus needs to be available for youngsters teach them the difference between criminal culpability and criminal victimization.

Laws pertaining to photography are particularly important for kids to understand. It is illegal to take another person's photograph without permission, and it is always illegal to take sexually explicit photos of children. A skilled sexual predator who knows how to use alcohol, drugs, bribes, and persuasion can induce sexual submission in a child for the camera; but children need to understand that the legal responsibility is always with the adult, regardless of what the perpetrator says or what the child does.

Kids generally see crime as one directional, such as when a criminal perpetrates a crime on others ("*Somebody stole my lunch money.*") But when children get into mischief and involve other kids, often everybody is held responsible. Sexual assault may seem like this type of activity to children, because they lack an understanding of laws that apply to them.

These are not pleasant topics, but neither are the diseases and dental decay that health programs often cover with children. Teaching kids basic crime prevention information is a better alternative than leaving it to them to instruct each other in these matters or to learn from sexual predators who teach in order to mislead and exploit.

Young adolescents are more likely to be victimized by criminal seduction, so the elements of the sexual con need to be taught. A career sexual predator can create a setting that a young preadolescent may experience as infatuation but that allows the adult to sexually exploit the youngster. A loyal youngster won't want to report or give evidence in these circumstances because this seems like a betrayal, but he may do so to protect other kids once he has recognized that he is not unique to the predator.

Safety programs dealing with this type of crime would be geared to the cognitive level of kids, with different age groups receiving different types of instruction. Elementary-age children might be taught a general understanding of crime (because sexual

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predators often are involved in other criminal activities as well). Although drug abuse is often taught as part of the health curriculum, it is more rightfully presented as illegal activity that can lead to imprisonment.

Kids have been given more instruction on safety and crime as a result of school shootings and terrorist activity. They learn that if another youngster brings a firearm to school, they need to protect the safety of all youngsters, particularly the smaller ones. The same applies to safety from criminals who commit sexual crimes.

Helping Kids Who Abuse Other Kids

Along with the common misconception that most sexual assaults are perpetrated by a stranger, is the belief that all sexual predators are adults, when many are themselves youths who prey on younger children. They may involve a teenage boy who sells his younger sister for sexual favors or the youngster who takes pornographic pictures of toddlers and puts them online. Other youngsters may exploit children as part of a larger pattern of delinquent behavior. These types of assaults may follow a very different pattern than their adult counterparts and can involve multiple victims and/or multiple offenders. In these circumstances, even though children may not be alone, they are very much in danger.

Kids who sexually exploit other children are often assumed to have been abused themselves, but this is not always the case. Exploited youngsters may show behavioral signs of abuse, such as sexually provocative behavior with other children, as for example, a five-year-old who tries to engage other children in sexual intercourse.

Children who victimize other kids are most often behaviorally disordered youngsters who have difficulty with appropriate social behavior. Although there may have been early abuse, much more significant is the history of neglect, chaotic home life, and an absence of minimal health care.

Bullies sometimes engage in sexually assaultive behavior as well as physically intimidating or injurious acts toward weaker

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children. Children who bully are often bullied themselves by others, and victims and perpetrators of violent delinquency often change roles. These kids are often from homes where there is poor or nonexistent family support, and they frequently have problems making friends and achieving a sense of belonging.

Sometimes behavioral problems are compounded by substance abuse. Although hard to imagine, young children can develop an addiction to alcohol that impairs judgment and behavioral control. Alcohol is the drug of choice for very young addicts because it is cheap, readily available, and it does not involve the complexities of illegal drugs. Twenty percent of eighth-graders report having been drunk in the recent past, with more than half having done episodic binge drinking, and ten percent of fourth-graders report drinking behavior beyond the initial try.

Some researchers have identified personality and trait factors as underlying the acting out of behaviorally disordered children, with sexual misbehavior as one manifestation of these deficits. Children who have trouble inhibiting or stifling their impulses are in this category. These kids may be powerfully affected by new experiences or by interesting spectacles; so much so that they cannot maintain whatever activity they were engaged in. They may seek out experiences that provide thrills and episodes of high excitement, often involving danger.

Underlying these problems with organizing and directing behavior may be significant physical impairments too subtle to be noticed by an untrained eye. Neurocognitive deficits, particularly in boys, have been identified as underlying antisocial behavior in some situations. Children with these problems are likely to have a variety of difficulties in the school setting, most often in intellectual achievement. The difficult child who fails to complete or submit homework, listen to the teacher, or pay attention in class may be suffering from an underlying disorder.

This doesn't mean that any child with behavioral problems is likely to become a sex offender, but that some proportion of youthful sexual predators suffer from underlying deficits. Schools already screen for these types of problems, but sexual exploitation

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of others needs to be added to the list of developmental impairments.

Educational programming must include planning for youngsters with sexual disorders. Any child who threatens others needs restraint, regardless of the type of damage he might inflict, for all children are entitled to an education. Children at risk need to have supervision during those periods when neither school personnel nor parents may be available, which is most often the time between the end of the school day and when parents arrive home from work. Not coincidentally, this is also the time when children are most at risk for becoming crime victims.

Supervision needs to include guidance to help kids learn appropriate ways to interact socially, and an IEP (individual educational plan) that includes social objectives for behaviorally disordered children is imperative. It is essential that this plan, with its goals and methods, be made available to any adult who has responsibility for a child outside of the regular school program.

School Administrative Issues in Dealing with Sexual Crimes

Most school districts already have procedures for reporting child sexual abuse, along with programs for teaching child abuse prevention to children. These may give the illusion of security, although safety would be better served by programs that educate parents in protecting children.

What follows is a set of ideas for reducing children's vulnerability to sex crimes. They involve a change in policy and principles on the part of school districts and parents. Prevention is the first step in developing a more powerful response from schools. Current child sex abuse prevention programs appear to have little impact on children's safety, but they give the illusion of increased safety. This is part of a larger pattern of denial, in which the effectiveness of programs is never seriously assessed, and the statistics on crimes against kids remain high.

It makes sense to begin with a statement of children's rights in order to define the pivotal issue in child abuse. This needs to be clear enough for children to understand and without obvious

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contradictions and illusions. Children don't have to keep secrets, and nobody can make them do so. Nobody can touch your private parts, and even if you let them do that once, you still have the right to say no the next time.

Any prevention program has to include a social influence curriculum that teaches kids to recognize nonviolent criminal behavior. This includes all such behavior, whether sexual seduction, drug seduction, or participation in delinquency. The ways in which children get drawn into criminal behavior are complex, but they parallel the way a child molester cons parents into believing they can have confidence in him.

Teaching responsible citizenship is another aspect of a good prevention program. It should explore the issue of obligation to the wider community. It isn't realistic to ask children to disclose sexual abuse, because they are statistically disinclined to do so, but it may be productive to ask them to be on guard to protect smaller children.

With any citizenship issue in a democracy, the central skill required is judgment, and the essence of good education is the development and maturation of judgment. Developing the thinking habits necessary for mature judgment requires practice and correction, and it can be included in the school curriculum in many places. This becomes a central issue with young adolescents, as the forces of peer pressure and group dynamics often drive individual behavior.

Another aspect to prevention within the school system is to develop systems of record keeping and permissions that regulate the patterns of adult contact with a child. School records can be central in locating missing or kidnapped children. Records should include any incidents of noncustodial removal, and these need to be forwarded to future schools after a youngster changes schools. This practice alerts a new school that a child who has recently enrolled may have been illegally moved. Publicizing these policies to all parents may help to discourage parental abduction, because it sends a message that an offending parent will be apprehended.

To deal with the issue of juvenile predators, schools need to have an informal system for recognizing children at risk of abusing

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other children. This may well be part of a wider approach to behavioral difficulties. This usually occurs among teaching faculty when they give one another support and help. In schools where teachers are too pressured by nonteaching issues, however, this type of consultation may not be possible if there are constant crises.

It is important to keep track of developing communication technologies, perhaps through the computer specialists in the school, in order to anticipate opportunities that arise spontaneously and may put kids at risk as a result. The ability to transmit information, both written and graphic, at high speed anywhere in the world is now available to any child. This means that children can immediately tap into or fall into a vast criminal network that sexually exploits youngsters for profit.

Pictures of children that can be morphed into pornography and then used to blackmail a child, data collection on kids that can be a type of stalking in preparation for a criminal attack, and participation in pornography creation for profit are all forms of criminal activity. But they are forms that would not have been possible a decade ago, before changes in technology occurred. More unforeseeable opportunities will arise as technology advances, and teachers and administrators need a mechanism for staying as informed as their students.

Schools need a personal privacy policy to deal with issues of pictorial and verbal information about children and their families. Should the picture of the spelling bee winner be made available to the press? Should it list the child's first and last name and address? If parents want to take pictures at school events, are they free to do so? Does this include pictures taken at a swim meet or in the locker room? If these pictures were used to plan an attack on a child, would the school be legally liable?

In developing policies to deal with technology-related changes, parents should be included in efforts to safeguard kids. Such innocuous matters as whether kids can use a cell phone-camera in school are important for parents to consider.

School-Related Venues and Activities

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When kids and staff are away from school, the rule-driven behavior that has become automatic in the school building often lapses, giving way to far more spontaneous behavior and raising a youngster's risk. When kids go to off-premises school-sponsored events, or evening or after-school events, school rules and codes may not seem to apply. Younger children see rules as the result of adult idiosyncrasies more than as the basis for personal safety. It will help if schools teach children to develop personal safety codes that apply wherever they are, so that they can be transferred freely to new situations.

At sports events, activities are usually well regulated, but often the leader, usually the coach, has a great deal of discretion over kids' behavior. Kids are generally safer in structured programs so it might be useful if parents traveled with the team to add supervisory help in these situations.

Because sports activities often involve undressing and physical contact, they require more planning than other types of activities. The policy of two deep, that an adult always has another adult with him in dealing with kids, is particularly applicable to locker room situations. Locker rooms need to be open to any parents, and it is a good policy to have two adults in the locker rooms when the kids are there. This prevents some of the spontaneous play that can turn ugly when kids are left alone, unsupervised, and unclothed.

When the team travels, extra adults who are parents can provide additional safety. It should also be the policy that these adults cannot bring older children with them so for example, the high school freshman would not come along with a parent for the sixth-grade girls' soccer trip.

Other school-generated excursions may appear to be part of the school program, but in fact, during such trips kids are often far from the normal protections that apply in school. These events may not even be covered by the school's regular liability insurance, because the insurer may consider them separate from the school itself. Sometimes these are arranged and conducted by commercial businesses unconnected with the school, although they may have

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the appearance of being sponsored and protected by the school. Because these organizations often exist at a geographical distance from the community, it will take some effort to investigate the people and the policies that will be in control.

Parents may assume that such an outing or trip must be safe because so many children are going, but it is relatively easy to separate and isolate kids from the group in school-generated excursions. Whether schools are liable for damages when they disseminate information about commercial enterprises will probably be a matter for the courts to settle.

Day trips, common toward the end of the school year, need adequate advance planning. When children go to an amusement park or other public facility, parents need to know who will have responsibility for their children and whether there will be children who do not attend the school accompanying the chaperones. In addition, parents need to know about the insurance liability coverage, the transportation arrangements, and facilities staff that will have contact with kids. When children are at a large outdoor amusement park, it needs to be clear whether they can leave to go into the parking lot, whether they can freely roam the park to go on the rides and talk to whom they please, and whether a buddy system is in place.

Sometimes kids get into the habit of gathering outside school at a local convenience store or fast food restaurant. Although the school may have no technical responsibility for what happens to children when they are involved in informal gatherings unrelated to school activities, it is wise for school staff be aware of them. School personnel need to become acquainted with places in the community where children tend to get together, like the pizza place near the school. This is a way to learn the risks kids face that are related to school participation. It is also a way to open communication with kids (e.g., “*Boy, their pepperoni sure is spicy!*”) and to learn about kids’ concerns in such places. This allows the school to work with local police to prevent criminal exploitation of children. When all of the sixth-grade boys go to a single father’s apartment to watch videos on a regular basis, the school needs to explore the issue of youth safety.

District and School Policy Must Be Secondary to the Penal Code

It is curious that in the vernacular, people treat child sexual abuse as though it were a breach of etiquette that causes social awkwardness. When people hear about it, they are often embarrassed or unbelieving, and it is treated as quasi-criminal activity. Many parents respond to sexual exploitation of their kids merely by keeping their child away from the offender.

In fact, sexual activity with children is a felony in every state, punishable by incarceration and on a par with armed robbery, assault, and manslaughter. People serve long prison sentences when they are convicted of sexually molesting children, and they may be required to register as sex offenders for the rest of their lives if they are released. Why then is sexual abuse not automatically cause for a 911 call, when noticing an arsonist setting a fire would provoke that reaction? The difference seems to be that the damage is not widely known or understood, and the subject is an embarrassing one for people to deal with. In the school system, there may be fear of retaliation should an adult be accused, and concern that the accusation would disrupt the community and upset parents and children.

In planning a response to allegations of child sexual abuse, school personnel must keep in mind that this is criminal activity, and the same clarity must be brought to bear as in responding to any other criminal activity. The best interests of the children must prevail, and the laws must be enforced. This may seem obvious, but the decisions are complicated in real-life situations. What is the best response, for example, if the police arrive at school to interview a child in response to allegations that a parent has molested the child? Should the principal allow access to the child? Should he call the parent first?

If this is handled like any accusation of criminal activity, the police will handle the entire matter, and school personnel will aid the police in whatever way they can. If it were handled like a

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social breach, the principal would deny access to the child and call to inform the parent of what was happening.

A school representative such as a guidance counselor or school nurse may prefer to believe that particular allegations are false and that a parent is innocent, but by making this assumption, he is in effect making a decision that affects the investigation of the case and determining the person's guilt or innocence outside the legal system. Whether he is right or wrong, he is interfering with the constitutional rights of parents, children and the public.

The best choice is to assume in all matters of criminal investigation that law enforcement professionals are best qualified to investigate and determine whether there is criminal culpability. It is wise to inform parents of this policy along with other notifications of general interest at the beginning of the school year.

What happens when there is child sexual abuse and a teacher or staff member fails to report it through the appropriate channels? In most jurisdictions, failing to report suspected child abuse when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child is at risk is a basis for a charge of endangering the welfare of a child, both against the teacher and, potentially, the school.

Indications of child abuse are complex and may appear as typical child behavior problems. Some, however, are clearly linked to sexual crimes as, for example, when a child has genital pain and bruising. In any case, only an investigation can determine whether there is criminal activity.

When a teacher fails to make a report in such a situation, it can be through disbelief that a parent or teacher could have committed such an act. Such incredulity leads an observer to change her interpretation of what she observed to fit her beliefs. The child who reports abuse may then become a child who is suspected of lying to get attention, and the child with genital pain may be viewed as a hypochondriac.

The signs are complicated for anyone to sort out, but trained investigators know, for example, that young adolescents may refuse to admit criminal exploitation, even when there is clear proof, like having a sexually transmitted disease. Lies at this stage are most often told to protect a romantic partner. The young victim

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feels considerable loyalty and doesn't want to get the adult into trouble for something he participated in.

School districts are liable for damages where there is evidence of a sex crime that is unreported. The courts have been receptive to claims for civil damages against institutions whose policies shield abusers. School districts need policies that hold any teacher or staff member accountable for unreported evidence of child sexual abuse, and provide internal sanctions as well as legal action.

Allegations Against Faculty or Staff

May it never come to pass, one school principal groaned, when asked about how a school would handle allegations of sexual exploitation made against faculty or staff. Having a policy in place, one that is well thought out and widely publicized, is preventative. Child molesters are generally not insane, and they usually are quite capable of rational thought in protecting their own interests. In the same way that we control our driving behavior when a police car is behind us, child molesters are more likely to control their behavior if they believe that others are on guard.

Perhaps the best illustration of this point is the case of Robert Noyes, a teacher who sexually exploited students when he took them to soccer tournaments. He was dismissed from one teaching job after another, each time agreeing that he would never teach again. Each school that failed to report and ask for prosecution helped Noyes's criminal career as he was repeatedly returned to the point where he could begin deceiving and molesting again. Schools need to make sure that sex offenders in schools are prosecuted and they are barred from educational venues. Noyes was finally stopped when a girl reported to police that she believed he was molesting other kids.

Sometimes there is no reportable proof of sexual abuse by a teacher, but only a group of giggling middle school girls telling stories about the school play adviser. Perhaps there are reports of how the special education teacher takes the kids for special parties at his house. While the school cannot safely ignore rumors, it

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would be unfortunate to ruin a professional's career on such a basis. The wise choice is to involve those who have training in the area and are best equipped to deal with making the determination about whether children are at risk.

School district personnel are not equipped to investigate whether criminal activity is occurring, and consultation with police investigators in these cases protects everyone involved, including the professional whose behavior is in question. If the behavior is truly harmless, a police certification to that effect protects a career. If the behavior is dangerous, it allows school officials to intervene with justifiable cause.

It is a sad experience for a teacher to realize that another teacher is guilty of molesting children, and the immediate response of denial is easily understood (“*That can't be true! I've known him for twenty years! He would never do that!*”). Who would choose to believe not only that a trusted adult could harm children, but that oneself could be so blind as to be perhaps an unwitting enabler?

It is painful to learn that a trusted family member or professional has committed sex crimes against kids. In cases where this involves teachers, there are additional considerations and obligations because teachers are licensed in every state and hold a public trust in obeying state laws. It may feel like a betrayal of a colleague to report suspicions, but the colleague has already betrayed *his* colleagues and his profession by molesting children. If a sexual predator expects others to keep his secret, he seeks to make them accessories to criminal acts and to put their licenses at risk to protect himself. In the same way that he has exploited children for his own benefit, he would exploit fellow teachers.

**CHAPTER FOURTEEN:
WHAT CLERGY NEED TO DO**

Perhaps more than many institutions, American houses of worship have felt the historical impact of sex crimes against children. The reports of allegations against clergy, criminal investigations, victims' testimony, and huge financial settlements have kept the issue in the public consciousness. Historians will determine the long-range impact of these crimes on religious life in America, but for the present there is increased concern about the safety of religious institutions.

Like all the other areas of society, these facilities are vulnerable to criminal activity, for wherever there are children, there will be sexual predators. This is particularly painful for those who treasure their religious communities. It implies that faith alone may not be sufficient to protect the innocent and vulnerable, and that trusted leaders can be hardened criminals in disguise.

The hidden nature of sexual crimes encourages denial by perpetrators and by those who suspect them. People feel safe in houses of worship, even when there is no reason other than their own wishful thinking to support such an assumption. Sometimes this type of optimism is exposed as fantasy when a church is robbed or a clergy member assaulted. These are public acts, however, committed by distinguishable felons. The institution enjoys some measure of protection because of the visible distinctiveness of the crimes and the criminals.

The invisible character of sex crimes against kids, however, forces the faithful to accept evil that cannot be seen. When sexual crimes come to light, religious adherents are again pressed to accept that a seemingly good adult or teen has done seemingly bad things.

How can people retain their beliefs and have faith in the goodness of people when they have been betrayed and injured? This is a fundamental challenge for religious institutions dealing sexual crimes against kids. The fear of these crimes puts everyone on the defensive, in part because most people don't understand the nature of sex crimes against kids.

The Costs of Innocence

Ignorance is a major factor in the reaction to sex abuse, because most people, unless they have been trained in law enforcement, find it inconceivable that an adult can force a child into sexual activity, and it is even harder to imagine a religious leader doing so. The result is that when a sex crime is exposed, it may be cast as a misunderstanding, and disappears as an issue. People assume that sexual exploitation must involve acts other than sexual intercourse, because size differences between children and adults make this act seem impossible. In fact, about twenty-five percent of sexual abuse involves rape or forced sexual intercourse. Sometimes the victims are toddlers or babies who suffer genital damage that is not detected until they are much older.

Sexual exploitation of children includes rape, sodomy, forced penetration with an object, and forced fondling. In religious institutions, it can present in many different forms, each requiring a distinctly different response:

- *The youth leader, a person in his early twenties, becomes sexually involved with a ninth-grader.*
- *A child in Sunday school reveals to her teacher that her stepfather is sodomizing her.*
- *The cantor becomes romantically involved with a fourteen-year-old.*
- *The police contact the mosque to reveal that a family has reported that a preschooler has been sexually assaulted by a person in the organization.*

When events like these occur, congregants are taken off guard and often respond spontaneously. The religious organization and its members experience substantial consequences as emotions become the slide that people ride.

The institution sustain may injury on many levels, the most powerful being the direct harm to the children and family involved. Kids suffer more than physical damage, because they are also at

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risk for sexually transmitted disease and premature pregnancy in adolescence. Of equal concern for the institution is the impact on religious faith, which is very destructive. For the congregation at large, a sex crime can feel like a betrayal of all: a member of the group has deceived and exploited the vulnerabilities of the congregation for perverted gain. Doubts about the institution's purpose and validity are likely to surface at this time. The wider community may take a cynical view of the institution as a result of news about sexual crimes.

News of the victimization of a child is likely to spread throughout the congregation even as its leaders are attempting to address the issue. In the past, religious leaders might have launched an internal investigation to protect the victim and the institution. Unfortunately, even more damage can be done by this type of ad hoc problem solving.

This was the core problem in the many reports of child abuse by members of the Catholic clergy as their superiors attempted to internally investigate and assess the claims made. With little understanding of criminal behavior and relevant law, religious leaders failed to recognize the extent of the problem and tried to solve it by transferring clergy to new locales.

Although this was seen by the public as an attempt to cover up the crimes committed against children, well-meaning church leaders who sought to protect the privacy of victims and to avoid disruption of the wider church community might have believed they were acting in good faith. Unfortunately, the fundamental ignorance of sex crimes and lack of investigatory expertise doomed these efforts. The attempt to see sexual predation as a moral failure rather than a criminal act preempted the protection that law enforcement might have provided to all involved.

Response of the Congregation

Religious organizations, feeling the public disapproval provoked by sex crimes in their midst, often rally to protect their houses of worship. At its best, this involves a reconsideration of the organization's mission and its responsibility to children and

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their families. At it worst, this can lead to blaming the victim for the bad publicity or denying that the crime happened.

The ability of religious leaders to deal with sex crimes depends primarily upon how well the organization is administered. Whatever bureaucratic problems had existed in the past will be exacerbated by reports of sexual exploitation and will impair the effectiveness of the response. It is difficult for religious institutions to accept the level of preparation and organization required to protect the institution from sexual predators not only because of the cynicism that this seems to represent, but because religious organizations usually have few paid staff and larger numbers of volunteers.

Tightening up procedures may seem to interfere with spontaneity and imply a lack of faith in others. It is difficult for any institution of this sort to anticipate the emotional and media hurricane that is set off by a report of sex crimes against kids, and to prepare for it when it is not happening.

Depending on their proximity to the individuals in question, people within the congregation will respond quite differently to reports of sexual crimes. Younger parents may be most concerned, and older people perhaps may be more detached about the issue. Members who are closely tied to either the victim or the accused may feel protective of the individuals involved. Genders appear to respond differently to reports of abuse, with women being more active in the face of such reports. These differences in levels of concern may spark conflict because emotions run high, and threatened feelings abound.

Why Houses of Worship Are Uniquely Vulnerable

Religious institutions fulfill many functions. They serve as social gathering places, childcare and education facilities, and community marketplaces. In schools and stores whose primary functions are these services, there is substantial supervision and administrative structure. In religious facilities where these services are offshoots of the main program, there is little oversight.

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Religious organizations operate primarily with volunteer help, and the volunteers are the people most likely to run the various programs. It is said that in any organization twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work, and this is probably true for most houses of worship. Because volunteers are mainstays of such programs, screening may seem a burden, involving too many requirements and regulations. In small religious centers, this is even more the case, because there are generally a small number of volunteers who determine the programs and run them. Without them, the church or temple would close.

Approaches to deviant behavior are distinctly different in religious organizations and law enforcement, with the former seeking to bring the fallen back to the fold, and the latter seeking to prosecute and punish them. Although it is the mandate of law enforcement to protect the citizenry, religious persons may feel that the church should be a refuge for anyone.

When a sexual predator assaults a child within a religious organization, the consequences are far reaching. The harm to children and their families is real and criminal as well, and since 1984, churches have been liable in civil courts for the damaging actions of their volunteers or their paid employees. Although church members may believe that others would never sue the church or temple, the anguish of injured parents may lead to decisions quite different from those which may be made in more normal circumstances. If wronged parties believe that their children were put at risk by negligence, there is more impetus to sue for damages. Good church administration and programs organized with children's safety in mind will safeguard children and will also reduce the risk of liability lawsuits.

Where a religious institution has poor internal communication; untrained leaders, and a defensive, self-protective attitude, the risk of liability lawsuits increases substantially. Financing the necessary administrative structure will be easier in larger and wealthier houses of worship, and smaller organizations may have difficulty raising funds for paid staff.

There are many ways that institutions can be vulnerable when sex crimes against kids are at issue. They may be equally

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liable if false charges are brought against individuals and the church or temple has been a party to them. Lawsuits for slander or defamation by injured parties who have been wrongfully accused of sexual abuse are also a risk.

Insurers may require houses of worship to implement new policies to protect children from sexual crimes. Financial losses from successful insurance claims against religious organizations drive the development of policies and procedures that protect institutions. In general, liability insurers seek clear lines of organizational responsibility, well thought-out response plans, and good paper records of all administrative matters as a defense against claims of organizational responsibility for criminal acts.

How to Protect Kids in Religious Organizations

There is no way to guarantee that children are safe in religious institutions, but we can change the climate to reduce criminal risk. The doors of most houses of worship are locked to discourage theft when nobody is in the building. This may seem cynical because a locked door seems to signal a lack of trust, but most people would agree that it is a necessary form of protection. Religious institutions need to protect themselves from exploitation by psychopaths who see trust as an opening for criminal activity against children as well.

In order to protect youngsters successfully, congregation members need good information about sex crimes against kids. Education is the first requirement, and this can take the form of a parents' meeting, a presentation by law enforcement, or a newsletter with relevant information. The goal is to continually update parents' understanding of sex crimes against kids. The topic is a threatening one for many people, and without good information they may find it difficult to keep their attention focused on children's safety. Unnecessary debates can spring up, draining energy in ways that benefit no one.

In designing a child protection program, it is worthwhile to repeat that the focus needs to be on behavior or policies that increase the risk to children, not on identifying potential child

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molesters. One way this can be accomplished is to imagine that the plans are being made for some other church, one where none of the members is known. This removes the inevitable bias that comes with knowing individuals in a spiritual context, where assumptions about the goodness of other people may color one's judgment. *Although it may not seem necessary to have protective policies in place for our church where everybody is trustworthy, it is necessary for that other church where we can't be sure of the people.*

In fact, since a skilled sexual predator can figure out the ways to have himself seen as a familiar and trustworthy person, focusing on behavior instead of character is more protective. Although sexual criminals are invisible in the general population, their behaviors are not, and if the behaviors are controlled and restricted, then so is the predator. Child molesters try to achieve isolation and control of children so that they can molest without interference or discovery. The following will help to develop safe houses of worship:

Two Deep

It is relatively easy to change the policy of religious organizations so that children are not alone with adults. This is immediately done by following the rule that requires another adult be added when someone needs to be alone with a child. But there are other ways as well; for example, where there is tutoring of children on the premises, this is best done in a large room with many working pairs instead of having each adult-child pair in a separate room alone.

In a case where a child needs to be dealt with individually, it should always be two adults who talk with him or help him to change clothes or dry tears. This is a policy that is becoming increasingly popular in organizations that serve children and families, and it serves as a reminder of the need for child safety. Even where this policy is in place, situations may occur in which a child is alone with an adult, but this will be the exception rather

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than the rule and will draw increased scrutiny, all of which protect kids.

In the same vein, it is important to explore how much separation there is of children from their parents in religious programs. Kids operate in a safer climate where parents are invited to visit and participate in religious education classes and where they receive regular news about kids' activities. When parents help to plan trips away from the facility, and the group stays with its schedule, kids are safer.

Childcare arrangements during religious programs and functions need to be well organized and planned in advance, with trained staff to care for children. It helps to provide cell phones that can be used to reach parents in the event of an emergency. If childcare facilities are videotaped, and parents have an opportunity to watch the video, this also safeguards kids. Teenagers who provide childcare in these circumstances need to be screened and trained by parents to be sure that they have the requisite skills and experience.

The adults who chaperone and supervise religious activities need to be screened and trained as well. If there are children's religious programs during which other adults show up randomly, it also helps to have ways to observe and safeguard the children. Many religious institutions plan activities for young people rather casually so that an event takes shape as it happens. Sometimes the religiously observant assume that all people and events connected with a house of worship must be benevolent. This is wishful thinking and ignores the reality of risk to kids from those who look for opportunities to exploit them.

If kids attend religious conventions or meetings away from home, they may stay in public facilities or private homes, and housing and travel arrangements must be scrutinized. Responsible adults must be designated as leaders and plans made in advance. The same rule applies when kids are away overnight working on a charity project. Although the Hebrew class may be learning to do a mitzvah for somebody who is in need, this doesn't protect the members from criminals.

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Religious camps may seem safe for children, but sexual predators usually seek out those settings where adult behavior with children is less likely to be questioned. The widespread sexual exploitation of children by Catholic priests is probably as much a reflection on the clergy as it is a commentary on the assumptions about trust that people make in religious circumstances.

When children travel on religious outings it is important to be aware of who will have access to them. A pilgrimage to Mecca will involve contact with many people outside the home mosque, and this requires a youngster to have substantial maturity and skill in self-protection. Although the religious leaders from home may practice good child protection policies, these may not be the leaders who will make the safety decisions during the trip or the outing. In some circumstances it may be other kids who make safety decisions; for example, if the church youth leader has brought his girlfriend and is preoccupied with keeping her happy, choices about activities may fall to children in the group.

No Secrets

Sometimes adults play with children by telling them secrets or by creating secret passwords, secret hideouts, and other types of arrangements that an adult and a child share. This is a dangerous precedent for children, because it gets them accustomed to private relationships with adults and relationships that are intimate and exclusive.

In religious organizations, there may be important theological understandings that are shared, but these should always be public, and it is important to teach kids the shared nature of religious belief. Sometimes there are religious ceremonies that are shared with children as they reach puberty and begin adulthood, and they may be restricted to children of this age. In this case, the religious organization needs to include members of the child's family in the activity so as not to disrupt the connection of children to their parents by having secrets with others.

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Children in Need

Kids who are shy, depressed or troubled may seek out special relationships with caring adults in order to compensate for deficits in their families. This puts a child at risk because he is inclined to form a strong dependent relationship with an adult or older teen, making him vulnerable to exploitation. His neediness reduces a child molester's risk because by appearing to meet a youngster's needs, the predator gains control of a child's safety.

It is useful to assign responsibility for these youngsters to an adult *couple* that can offer safe special attention. This transforms the situation to a two deep arrangement, and a youngster has the attention of two different genders as well. It also reduces the burden on caring adults because the dependency of a youngster in need can be tiring.

In a situation where a youngster has become attached to an adult or youth leader, a youngster's vulnerability should be considered. This may be a confusing situation for young adult leaders who have little experience in understanding how family life affects kids. It is important that help be provided in working out behaviors that keep everybody safe.

Volunteer Selection and Screening

Screening volunteers in small religious organizations can discourage the already limited pool of volunteers. When people offer to help in religious activities, a screening requirement may be seen as an assessment of personal worth. It may confuse some who fear that old traffic tickets, a poor credit history, or other personal information will be publicized. Screening is best done at the beginning of training with the assumption that all volunteers will pass.

When volunteers are interested in working with children, it is wise to ask for detailed information about experience and to ask for references. To gain as much information as possible about the volunteer is a service to the children and families who trust the institution and are willing to have their children in their care. The

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main interests in screening need to be whether the volunteer has a criminal history or has been labeled as a sex offender. This information is increasingly available over the Internet.

Integrating volunteers into the organization's programs should begin with adult services, so that new people become known to members of the congregation before they are trusted with responsibility for children. This allows time for training and teaching as well.

Training and Continuing Education

There are many ways training can be arranged, some of them formal and information-intensive, and some casual and open ended. Ongoing training is a way to insure the smooth operation of programs and activities and to update personnel on new procedures. At its best, it can keep work interesting by giving people ways to grow in competence. Religious organizations will benefit from using available child safety experts who can be consulted for information and advice on training. This reduces the work required to arrange training and allows personnel to concentrate on other issues.

Volunteers and staff need a general familiarity with the physical facility, the goals and values of the institution, its paid and volunteer staff structure, and its programs. It is particularly important that all personnel have training in emergency procedures and in handling crises with young people. Reporting of sex crimes is particularly important as well as a good understanding of the laws that apply to youngsters.

In working to create a safe context for children's activities in religious institutions, it is important to teach protective policies and procedures and to explain how these safeguard children. Rules like two deep and no secrets are a good beginning for developing an understanding of children's vulnerability and crimes against children.

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Will These Types of Policies Alter the Practices of a Religious Organization?

In institutions where a child is routinely alone with a single adult, where secrets between adults and children are commonplace, and where there is little supervision or training of those who have contact with children, then the policies and practices of the house of worship need to change.

One way to assess the utility of child protection policies is to imagine that there are a lot of level three offenders who are members of the religious congregation. If the policies and procedures are such that children could still be safe even with predatory adults around, then little change is needed. This is not as far-fetched as it might seem, because even the most active of sexual predators behaves as a law-abiding citizen where circumstances make it dangerous to molest kids.

The changes suggested here will alter the standard operating procedures of many organizations by making programs more structured, volunteer supervision more organized, and programs planned in advance with parental input.

Reporting Policies

A report of child sexual abuse needs to be investigated by those with professional training, and a determination must be made about the validity of the report. This is a difficult business because if the report is based on evidence, then a crime has been committed, and arrest and prosecution will follow. If the complaint does not meet the burden of proof, then a child's family may believe that justice has not been done. The decision about the reliability of an accusation needs to be made by a person who has no vested interest in the outcome and who has the training to assess the situation.

For this reason, any sexual assault claim must be initially explored by a mandated reporter or by law enforcement personnel. In a religious organization, anyone connected with the incident may have an opinion about the validity of the claim, and the

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potential for conflict exists within the congregation as one group supports the child and his family, and another supports the accused. Because the congregation will have to deal with the outcome for a long time, it is best handled by professionals outside the organization.

A claim of sexual abuse is a criminal matter that may result in formal charges and imprisonment. It is not the same as a claim of sexual seduction by adults that may be unacceptable in a religious organization but not a crime under civil statutes. The impact of a criminal justice proceeding on people's lives is so massive that it is important that those involved have appropriate standing and training.

When this process is under way, full information must be made available to all members of the organization and to the community through the media. There are legal protections for privacy, but withholding information when there is a report of a sex crime against a youngster is likely to generate rumors, misunderstanding and resentment. It is particularly helpful in these situations if there is an established policy in place for dealing with sex crimes.

There may be some who wish to keep the complaints from public knowledge as a way to protect the institution, but this is not feasible. Information of this sort always becomes public, and there is more damage from misinformation than if the correct facts are widely available. Child sexual abuse is a widespread problem; and rapid, reasonable responses will indicate the determination of a religious institution to protect its children and its members.

The relationship of the religious organization to the victimized youngster and his family will be critical in determining how the institution recovers from the injury of a child abuse accusation. When a child is exploited in a place of religious faith, it severely strains a congregation. It will be helpful to invoke all of the supports available to families in crisis.

Whether the religious organization should offer support to the offender and his family, if they are separate from the victim's family, depends very much on the theological orientation of the

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organization. In any case, dealing with the offender is always secondary to protecting the victim.

Spiritual Issues

When religious organizations deal with transgressions of such magnitude, they will inevitably turn to their foundational beliefs about human failure and wrongdoing. This can be a fertile time as an organization considers anew the tenets of its theology and their application to human behavior. The thorny issues of how much trust and how much safeguarding fit with one's belief about human beings become practical problems.

In looking at how offenders become capable of evildoing, it is important to explore the role of self-delusion in individual integrity. At the core of a sexual predator's personality is the preference for seeing the self in the best light, so that a child molester believes himself to be someone who truly loves children and has their best interests at heart. To a lesser extent, all people are capable of deceiving themselves in everyday matters. To identify when this become a dangerous habit and to distinguish between an optimistic view of oneself and a denial of the reality of one's wrongdoing will take careful thought and discussion.

Perhaps the most fundamental issue is that of the value of children to the religious community. Although everyone agrees that children are important and should be protected, how far people are willing to go to achieve this is a separate consideration.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: WHAT RECREATIONAL DIRECTORS NEED TO DO

One of the great joys of parenting is watching kids having a good time, laughing at play, discovering nature, and learning how to do things as they participate in recreational programs. Even though parents hope that activities like these are educational or character building, the sheer joy a child finds in them is often enough reason for participation. Many recreational programs teach skills, but they are different from schools in that learning is a pastime rather than a requirement.

Recreational programs also serve as childcare services offering supervised play to children of working parents. Day care facilities, day camps and sleep away camps, scouting, religious recreational organizations, and sports teams all offer healthy activities for kids.

It's an unhappy thought that these organizations can harbor child molesters, because this seems to impugn institutional character. Those who automatically come to the defense of a favorite organization under challenge feed a denial that opens the way for criminals to use social influence to hide their predations. If sex crimes are unthinkable, then a predator is protected by the illusions of the onlookers.

It is more realistic to assume that sexual crimes against children will occur wherever the opportunity arises, regardless of how popular the organization. Put more simply, wherever there are children, there will be sexual predators. This need not lead to suspicion and cynicism but to only a more realistic protective attitude.

What types of sexual offenses occur in these settings?

- *A teen boy gets a second-grade girl to hang from the balance beam, and then he molests her instead of helping her down. She can't get free because the drop is too far to the ground.*

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- *On a camping trip sponsored by the bike club, two girls are given liquor and molested by the bike repairman.*
- *A boy secretly takes locker room pictures of other boys in the nude with his cell phone and posts them on the Internet.*
- *A young female camper falls in love with her CIT and becomes pregnant.*

When parents tell kids not to leave food or dirty plates in their rooms, and kids object, parents may explain, “*Because you’ll end up with bugs.*” This works pretty well, especially if the child doesn’t like bugs, and kids’ rooms may be cleaner as a result.

In working for safety in children’s recreational activities, the goal is also deterring pests from harming children. The assumption that there are predators in the environment that are drawn to attractive targets need not destroy children’s recreation. Finding insects on plates carelessly left out and finding sexual predators around unprotected kids are two similar consequences of failing to take precautions, although the damage caused by sexual predators is catastrophic to children..

Recreational activities present opportunities for sexual predators because of the relatively fluid nature of their programming. The use of volunteers to help with programs and the changing schedule of events allow a criminal to conceal his activities under the guise of helping out. Most kids’ organizations find it hard to enlist volunteers, because parents are busy and other adults don’t have the same vested interest of those with participating youngsters. A recreational leader often has to beg for adult volunteers and cannot be selective about the persons brought in to help. Those who do help are likely to do so on an occasional basis, and so their activities cannot easily be monitored.

If the Little League team is looking for help with a fund drive, an adult or older teen may be there for the neighborhood canvas but participate in no other activities. If a child should report molestation during the fund drive, this would be difficult to investigate and might be dismissed as a report that cannot be

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confirmed. If the accused is not involved with the team again, there are likely to be no consequences. This random type of predation is very difficult for law enforcement to investigate, because often it does not seem to reach critical mass and parents fail to report it.

Should an organization attempt to protect its children by imposing requirements on volunteers, it would run the risk of discouraging and insulting people who support the organization. To question the good intentions and character of supporters is not wise, but to avoid doing so can offer a hiding place for child molesters.

A second factor that leaves recreational organizations open to criminals is that their focus is on enjoyable activities, Sexual predators often entice kids into criminal exploitation by defining activities as fun and by luring kids into playful participation. Children can't easily distinguish between healthy and criminal activities if they are enjoyable.

An illustration of this is the criminal activity of Lewis Sialle, Raymond Woodall, Richard Halverson, and Harry Cramer, who created Boy Scout Troop 137 in New Orleans and arranged many activities the boys appeared to enjoy. When the "scout leaders" carelessly left pictures at a photomat for development in 1976, the police were contacted because the photographs revealed evidence of a child sex ring in operation. Under the guise of legitimate scout activities, these four men had created a criminal organization that trapped kids in its predatory structure. This was an unusual situation, because millions of volunteers work with scout troops each year, and there are fewer abuse reports in scouting than there are among the general population. The activity of Troop 137 does not illustrate problems in the Boy Scouts but, rather, it warns of the cleverness of determined criminals in their drive to gain unfettered access to children.

Recreational organizations may also have characteristics that improve child security, however. Most recreational programs involve groups of children and relatively few solitary activities. This is no guarantee that kids are protected, because children are sometimes molested in multiples by youthful offenders, but it does make it easier to implement a two deep rule.

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Spontaneous neighborhood play, including stickball games or play in the park, is less common these days, perhaps because it is harder to protect these activities from predators. Where there are kids, there are likely to be pedophiles trying to target kids. Random play activities usually involve more kids and fewer parents, so the exposure risk to molesters is reduced as well.

A third factor that increases the risk of criminal activity is the emotional bonds that often form between children and others in a recreational setting. Many meaningful moments occur at a camp or club as kids learn about themselves and life, and this leads to an affectionate sharing of insights with other kids and with staff. Strong relationships, many of which last a lifetime, often form. How can we distinguish the healthy relationships from the unhealthy ones and keep the powerful emotional attachments and rewards of these programs intact?

Screening, Training, and Supervision of Workers

The most powerful way to protect kids in recreational programs is to restrict the people who have access to them. Screening can take many forms such as checking names against the state or national sex offender registries to see if somebody is listed as a repeat sex offender. Organizations such as the Civil Air Patrol and Big Brothers and Big Sisters search for criminal conviction records as well, which is an expensive but useful undertaking. Screening adult participants in organizations also avoids public embarrassment when a sex offender is discovered within the ranks. Even if there has been no crime, such a discovery casts a negative light on the organization and its mission. When a repeat offender was found to be the poster boy for a local newspaper holiday charity drive in Albany, New York, the fallout was substantial.

As technology improves, the easiest approach is to screen and investigate everybody, beginning with the top leaders of an organization. Undoubtedly entrepreneurs in the security industry will create online instruments for fast scanning of identity and history to pick out those with criminal records, arrests for DWI and

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sex offender registry status as the market for these instruments develops.

If all adults pass screening, it reduces the risk to children, although there are always predators who are undetectable. Sex offenders will find it more difficult to keep up-to-date with the effectiveness of screening, so it may deter their involvement if they believe they may be identified.

In earlier times, offenders were sometimes dismissed and forgiven in hopes that their offenses had resulted from temporary lapses of control and judgment. Such was the case with Edwin Dyer:

Scoutmaster Edwin Dyer—mentioned earlier for getting 20 days in jail—had been kicked out of a troop in the town of Redmond in 1984 for molesting Scouts, after officials from the sponsoring church found a pattern of abuse stretching back 25 years. The church let him go without telling police about him, and Dyer went on to molest another local boy who was not a Scout. Dyer was arrested, convicted and got his three-week sentence. On January 22, 1986, before Dyer served any time, the local boy took a sawed-off shotgun to Dyer's house and blew a hole in his chest.

Had it been available then, screening would probably have revealed Dyer's earlier offenses and protected everyone in the situation. Screening is only one part of restricting access to children and must be part of a larger program of training and supervising staff and volunteers, reporting sexual offenses, and then insisting that they be prosecuted.

In most recreational organizations, training is offered to paid staff but less often to volunteers. For the organization to fulfill its mission, everyone must be working toward the same goals as a team. An organization's programs stem directly from its goals, and both of these constitute the core of any training. If recreational workers are given a mission, it is important to evaluate their effectiveness and growth on a regular basis.

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A strong supervisory structure for workers in childcare also protects the workers and the organization from spurious claims. The courts have held organizations responsible for the criminal acts of their employees and members where there has been no clear attempt to train and supervise workers. Insurance companies also look for administrative structures that deter criminal behavior and, hence, limit their liability.

In particular, organizations need to train workers and volunteers in the safe practices that are determined under the organization's child protection policy. Staff and volunteers need a clear understanding of sexual crimes. Adolescents and young adults often volunteer in organizations that involve primarily adults, and they have little awareness of the laws protecting them. What may seem to young eyes like a breach of manners by an adult may in fact be a criminal assault, depending on the target's age. When everyone is aware of what constitutes criminal activity, it has a deterrent effect on those who would perpetrate it.

Effective Child Protection Policies

When a child is sexually exploited as part of a recreational program, the organization suffers a terrible blow. Not only is the child hurt, but also the organization is wounded. In fact, the sex offender has embezzled the organization's good name and used it for his own criminal purposes. When a sexual predator chooses this venue for his crime, he is attacking the organization as well as the child.

Good recreational fun is the goal of children's recreational organizations. If these settings become too restricted, then kids don't have the freedom to enjoy themselves. Good child protection needs to be subtle and automatic so that kids are secure outside of their awareness. The first step in making this happen is establishing the organization as one that is not receptive to the predations of sex offenders. If this is the starting point, then many other things can be done without threatening anyone. The purpose is not to root out anybody with odd sexual proclivities or a rich

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imagination, but instead, to create a climate in which sex crimes are highly unlikely.

Sometimes this already has been achieved by a larger parent organization or by a franchise's headquarters. It is important to review and adjust the national policy to local conditions. Recreational directors need to ascertain upon which entity the liability falls for criminal victimization of children and how the insurance coverage is written. Particularly in regard to the use of volunteers, the liability may affect only the local people who train and supervise volunteers, and it may not be attached to the parent organization.

The second step needs to be a commitment to follow whatever policy is developed. This should be assumed without question, but many organizations have policies that are well worded, carefully constructed, beautifully bound, and stored on a shelf, and nobody knows they exist. One way to make sure that the policy is well understood and followed is to avoid putting it on paper. This keeps it short and forces everyone to be aware of its elements. It helps to designate a compliance officer, somebody whose responsibility it is to raise questions and challenge practices to keep everybody following the policy.

What are the elements of such a policy? Some of these have been adopted by organizations already:

Two Deep: There must be two adults present when a child is separated from the group, taken from sight and spoken to, physically held or washed, has his clothes changed, transported or given first aid. This reduces the likelihood of sex crimes against kids, for although it is possible for two sexual predators to assault a child, this is very rare. This policy also protects the adults, so that if claims of mistreatment of any kind are made, there is a witness to the behavior. Although circumstances may arise without warning where this is impossible, training workers to think of two deep reduces the organization's vulnerability to an attack by a sexual predator.

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Keep Your Hands to Yourself: Every elementary school teacher is familiar with this directive, which usually is given to kids who can't resist poking, picking, tapping, tripping, and tickling other kids. Teachers recognize that touching kids leads to unhappy endings; it loosens control and inhibitions and often cycles downward so that somebody gets hurt.

It's better if adults keep their hands to themselves around children. This is not always possible, and there are some situations where physical contact is a good idea. But where there is free flowing physical contact with lots of touching, rubbing, wrestling, tickling, hugging, and other forms of contact, it opens the way to sexual advances by child molesters who can disguise their activities to fit those of a recreational program.

If the policy is to keep your hands to yourself, then whenever somebody is touching somebody else, a question will form in the minds of onlookers about whether this is necessary. This reduces the vulnerability of the setting to sexual crimes. Physical touch is an important part of relationships, but it is also an index of the intimacy of a relationship. Touching children needs to be reserved for family relationships and not made into a characteristic of passing encounters with adults. If children are desensitized to touch and learn that all relationships are intimate, then we make them vulnerable to sexual victimization.

Sometimes people substitute physical touch for verbal touch, which is having conversations that express interest, concern and affection. Physical contact may seem like a way to reach a child when words don't work. The problem with this is that children find it difficult to refuse touching by an adult and often submit even if their feelings are not accepting. If verbal connection cannot be made with a child, physical touch can be a subtle form of forcing a child into relating. It works better to develop adult sensitivity and conversational skills with children.

Everybody Gets Privacy: This means that when kids use the bathroom or disrobe, they do so in private, without adults present. Adults wait outside, or there are two adults present when kids disrobe. The same needs to apply to changing clothes or changing

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out of swimsuits. This may require a review of arrangements for the activities available to children. If there is a midnight skinny-dipping party on the last weekend at camp, this may need to be revised to include parents.

Reporting Policy: The first responsibility of the organization is to enhance children's lives; when there is evidence or a report of sexual exploitation action must be taken immediately. Whether the accused is a volunteer, parent, guest, or another youngster, the procedure should be the same. A report is initially made to a mandated reporter within the facility. This person should be a professional who has received training and is legally responsible for making a determination about whether a crime has occurred, and then making a report to law enforcement if indicated.

Under no circumstances should the organization's staff do an investigation. Unless staff members have training as mandated reporters, they are not likely to be competent to determine whether criminal activity has occurred. If they erroneously decide that abuse has happened where there was none, the organization could become the target of a slander or defamation lawsuit. If staff members decide erroneously that abuse has not happened when it has, the victim and his or her family may sue the facility for damages. When mandated reporters make this determination, they usually are immune from liability under most state laws. By using a mandated reporter, the organization is likely to fall under the protection of reporting laws as well.

Using a mandated reporter also protects the organization's staff from pressure not to report incidents of suspected abuse, because mandated reporters are constrained by law to report and can suffer legal sanctions if they fail to do so. Objectivity is difficult for staff members when, for example, a trusted volunteer is accused and a staff member feels sympathetic and incredulous. Mandated reporting also protects the organization from those well-meaning people who would prefer to hush up child abuse to protect the organization's reputation.

Although it is true that such news may hurt an organization, trying to cover it up causes additional problems and can result in a

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civil liability action for damages against the facility. It also obscures the fact that the damage is from the *sexual predator*, not from the protective efforts of the organization. If staff members try to cover up the abuse report, the news stories can easily confuse the public into believing that the organization conspired with the offender.

The best way for recreational facilities to distance themselves from sexual predators is to take prompt action to deliver them into the hands of law enforcement. When organizations or their staff try to hide sexual crimes by separating the person from the organization and ignoring the episode, their behavior recycles the molester and sends him on to his next victim, better prepared this time to avoid detection.

Sexual offenses against children are not one-time events. They indicate severe character flaws and are almost always repeated in one form or another. Only by interceding with action to stop the iterations of the abusive personality will there be safety for children. Reporting sexual exploitation through a mandated reporter allows the relevant professionals to make a determination, with full background and history, about the best way to protect the public. This is not an activity for amateurs.

Because most professions licensed by the states are required to report suspected child abuse, there are usually mandated reporters among the staff, parents, or volunteers who can be recruited to serve as the organization's first line of defense. It is important to check with the organization's insurers to determine the requirements for policy coverage.

Child protection policies should be made known to the kids in the organization and to all involved. This creates a climate where sex crimes are not a distant problem but one that the organization is well prepared to deal with. Some may feel that teaching crime safety to children will darken their lives and frighten them. Sadly, a large proportion of children are already familiar with sexual crimes, ones that they keep hidden to try not to darken the lives of adults

What happens when the suspected offender is himself a juvenile? Sexual offenses against children by older children or

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adolescents are not uncommon, and they hurt all youngsters. A mandated reporter needs to determine whether the perpetrator's age makes this a criminal activity within the reporting requirements of relevant state laws.

When these incidents are reported to law enforcement, it is not likely that a young child will be prosecuted as an adult offender, but more often a child will be required to undergo treatment and his behavior placed under court supervision. This can be a great help to parents who may not have the capacity or the resources to help a youngster who falls into a criminally deviant pattern. With older youngsters, sexual activity is not illegal if they are consenting individuals within the same age range.

The law protects youngsters under sixteen from sexual exploitation in most states and works to deter sexual activity when there is a large disparity in the ages of those involved. Statutory rape is defined differently in each state, but relevant laws seek to protect very young children from the sexually exploitative behavior of older partners. Should a girl of twelve become pregnant by a young man of twenty-four, the law would object. In practice, statutory rape laws are rarely enforced because they require the cooperation of a victim who may resist. Statutory rape prosecution assumes there could not have been informed consent because of the minor status of the victim.

Probably the greatest effectiveness of statutory rape laws has not been in the prosecution of offenders but in the threat of prosecution to control sexual exploitation of youngsters. A distraught parent, for example, may be able to discourage a much older suitor's attention to his daughter by invoking statutory rape laws.

These laws also offer recreational organizations a basis for developing policies that prohibit involvement of older youth workers with younger participants. The eighteen-year-old counselor who is the idol of the twelve-year-old girls can be clearer about his legal liability and can resist the allure of even the most mature-looking preadolescent.

Recreational staff may become aware of sexual victimization outside the organization's programs. When a child

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shows evidence of sexual victimization at home, perhaps by a stepfather or older relative, a trained staff member needs to consult a mandated reporter to assess the situation. It may seem kinder to discuss the matter with the parents involved, but this puts the organization at risk of becoming complicit in the possible sexual assault of a child.

Spin-off Activities: Kids make friends in recreational activities, and these can be enriching relationships that last a lifetime. Caring counselors may stay in touch with their protégés after the camp session ends and exert a continuing influence over kid's lives. Sometimes this can be a source of inspiration and motivation for youngsters who want to become like an admired older youngster.

It helps to have a child protection policy that defines appropriate behavior in activities that spin off from the regular program. This means that keeping your hands to yourself is a good policy during the organized programs and when kids meet afterwards as well. This sets a pattern of appropriate behavior and helps kids to become used to healthy behaviors. It also protects the organization and the children from those who use such organizations as hunting grounds for victims. If a relationship originates in a recreational program, this can't be taken as a guarantee that the relationship is a healthy one.

How Activities Are Organized

Just as there are *behaviors* that put kids at risk, there are *activities* that put kids at risk and offer an opportunity for sex offenders to target victims. Games or pastimes that involve a great deal of physical contact, like touch football, mud wrestling or stuffing lots of kids into a confined space can increase risk. Avoiding these types of activities limits opportunities for sexual abuse and also limits civil liability for injuries. Where there are athletic activities like wrestling involving physical contact, professionals who have training in appropriate behaviors are best used.

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In the same way, an organization's secret rituals and ceremonies are a concern because when they exclude parents, they force kids to keep secrets, which is one component for sex crimes against kids. It is wise to include parents in the secret rituals so the secret will involve the parents as well as the children.

The structure of programs also makes a difference because when teens and elementary-aged children are mixed together, there is a greater risk of exploitation of younger kids. In a sleepover situation, the arrangements and the availability of help to a child during the night are important. This is not to suggest that given the opportunity, any teen would molest a child if he could. Instead, the premise is that a small proportion of kids and adults are sex offenders; so by controlling the circumstances of kids' lives, we can reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior.

This is not much different from our attitude toward pickpockets. They are known to exist in large public gatherings, so people follow protective practices. Women don't leave a handbag unattended nor do men leave a wallet, cell phone, or PDA alone or unwatched in public. Similarly, people don't count cash in public, out of fear that this may make them targets for criminals in the vicinity. These behaviors probably originated as ways to avoid crime, but they have become accepted social behavior so that nobody who practices them is seen as paranoid, and a person who fails to take such measures is considered foolish. Similarly, we can change the social climate to make it more protective of children.

One important structural component of recreational organizations is the number of links to parents when children participate in activities. A child has a direct link to his parent when mom accompanies the group on the museum trip. Things are very different for another child on the same trip whose mother is not along. If this child goes to a fast food place for lunch with three of the older kids he meets at the museum, and then the four of them stop off to see a friend on the way back, there are many links from the child back to his parent. In these circumstances, parents have less control and less ability to help a child if a risky situation develops.

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Oftentimes, the types of arrangements that separate kids from parental help in recreational programs occur spontaneously so that a parent cannot be informed. These situations are far more likely to happen where the organization's structure of activities is loose and kids can make up their own plans. In programs where everybody sticks to the prearranged agenda, there are fewer openings for predators to target kids.

This is particularly a concern with trips to entertaining locations, which recreational organizations sometimes arrange as a special outing for kids. There is an assumption of safety by association, so that if the Police Benevolent League is sponsoring a trip to the big ball game, it may automatically be seen as safe. But there are issues that can put kids at risk that need to be anticipated.

It is important to determine whether a child will be supervised on the trip by one adult or by all the adults who come along. If children are allowed to roam freely in the ballpark, it will be important if the exits are blocked so youngsters can't leave or spend their time in the parking lot. It is important to know if chaperones can bring along additional kids, and whether these kids can bring along their friends. People who work with and care about kids often want to be inclusive and open to whatever kids prefer, but planning is important.

Children on recreational trips need to use a buddy system so that they are aware of each other's activities. This arrangement may seem unnecessary, but when a child turns up missing, everything changes. For recreational staff, there is nothing more sickening than being responsible for a missing child. Outdoor activities are a source of major concern. A large proportion of children disappear in wooded settings, which include campgrounds, parks, and play facilities. In 1999, this number was over 200,000, and often the reason is that kids wander off or get injured. But for parents, these are horrible situations, with enormous fear of the outcome. It is important to include training for children so that if they become isolated or lost, they have resources for coping with the situation.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE FUTURE FOR CHILDREN

How many more laws will be named after murdered children? Laws are passed in the hope that child victims will not have died in vain, but the awful fate of their families has not improved the outlook for children in general. How many more children will be sacrificed before we recognize that our strategies for protecting kids don't work very well?

The majority of children who survive sexual brutalization never make the headlines, and they suffer in silence and solitude. It may seem reassuring to believe that those who molest children are not likely to abduct and murder them, but the criminal careers of sexual predators often involve a progression to increasingly serious crimes. In the cases of kids who are “merely” the victims of sexual victimization and have not been murdered, there is little consolation to a loving parent trying to raise a healthy child. Perhaps we have grown accustomed to accepting a lesser crime as a way to avoid a bigger crime, but in fact, we get both.

It doesn't have to be this way. With relatively small changes in our attitudes and behavior, the context of children's lives can change so that they can grow up safely. Fatalism about child security can give way to optimism that parental efforts will result in happy, healthy, human beings who grow up without secret terrors.

What will it take to do this? First and foremost, parents need to take charge of kids' safety. They will do this by creating sex crime education programs for *themselves*. No longer relying on the traditional child abuse prevention programs to protect kids, they will instead take charge of children's safety and become their children's sentinels.

This is not difficult to do, and some parents already do so—most often those in law enforcement. Trusting one's instincts, teaching children how to act safely, talking with kids, and taking stock of the varying contexts of their lives put parents in the forefront of child protection. Anyone who seeks to be alone or unclothed with a child will have his access to that child blocked. Some parents already take this stance with very little children,

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because nobody assumes that kids under the age of two can protect themselves, and we can extend this to childhood and adolescence

Preventing adults and teens from being alone or unclothed with kids would substantially reduce the risk of sex crimes against children. Clever criminals would still attempt to target youngsters, but this would become increasingly difficult. Alone and unclothed are not states of mind but observable physical conditions adults and children can see. Although predators will no doubt try to blur the edges and confuse kids, it's easier to see alone and unclothed rather than bad touch and inappropriate behavior.

Ironically, the area that will pose the most difficulty for adult supervision is the Internet. Online predators can arrange to be alone with children relatively easily through this medium, providing that a child is naïve about Internet risks.

The second most important change is for adults to report concerns about sex crimes to mandated reporters or to the police. This interrupts the careers of child molesters who learn from their experience and become more proficient and harder to detect as they cycle through victims. Reporting to law enforcement disrupts the synchronized dance of social influence that skilled predators have used so successfully to seduce parents into trusting them.

An immediate change that will begin to tip the situation in favor of kids' safety is to change the way we speak about sexual victimization of children. *Child abuse* is a confusing term, and people often have to ask for clarification as to whether physical abuse or sexual abuse is the issue when it comes up. Even when this is clarified, abuse can cover a lot of different things. *Abuse* can mean that we misuse something, as when alcohol is abused and a person drinks too much. It doesn't mean that alcohol is bad, just that certain ways of using it are bad. But sex between adults and kids is always bad, and there is no way to use it properly. *Abuse* also refers to mistreating or injuring a person, and this certainly happens when there is sex with kids, but it is criminal treatment.

The term *abuse* is a gross understatement of what happens to kids when they are involved in sex with adults. Adult crimes are never characterized so casually, and an adult would not complain that somebody took his credit card and "abused" it. Sex between

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adults and children is far more than abusive, for it is literally criminal, and we need to speak of it that way. This opens the way to new responses: it may be confusing to figure out how to deal with abuse, but it is much clearer what we should do about crime. It also becomes clearer to predators what is likely to happen to those who commit crimes.

Many current efforts at child protection are focused on passing harsher laws with longer prison sentences and no parole for sex offenders. There may be merit in these approaches as a long-term solution, although it probably will have the greatest effect on the less capable criminals, and those who are bright enough to avoid getting caught will not be affected. It will work much better if we prevent sex crimes by immediate efforts to change the climate in which these crimes occur.

Why are there so many sex criminals? Is our modern age so sexualized that it inevitably produces this type of crime? It is hard to draw causal connections and much simpler to look at behavior and consequences to understand the contingencies. When accused sexual predator Dale Schwarzmiller can allegedly molest thousands of children without consequences, his behavior is obviously driven only by his own fantasies and calculations, with little concern about legal consequences.

In short, the reason that there are so many sex crimes is that arrest, conviction, and penalties are very rare for sexual predators. This is a relatively safe crime to commit, because children can be seduced and confused so that an adult criminal can avoid exposure. If he is exposed, and the only consequence is that a parent discourages a child from spending time with him, that's hardly a disaster for the predator.

Most child molesters operate freely in American society. The FBI projects that fifteen percent of children will be sexually victimized in their youth, and only a third of these will tell an adult what happened. Of those who tell, only a fifth will be reported to authorities. This means that for every thirty children who are sexually exploited, only one incident will come to the attention of law enforcement. The number of offenders who will be arrested and incarcerated as a result of a police report is much smaller. In

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effect, this is currently a crime without consequences, and predators can operate with little concern about their risk.

Are there more dysfunctional adults in American society, or does a fertile climate for sex crimes trigger aberrant behavior? There are obviously plenty of adults who have difficulty finding healthy ways to deal with their sexuality in nonexploitative ways with other adults. The compulsive character of many sexual crimes against children suggests that predators' behaviors may become increasingly pathological over the course of their careers. The relatively easy access to kids and the absence of real penalties may allow the pathology to worsen.

Sexual predators have attempted to obscure their crimes by softening the language of child exploitation. They characterize sexual victimization of a child by a parent as no longer incest but, instead, *cross-generational love*, and child molesters are to be referred to as *youth-attracted adults*. Their goal is to remove these terms' pejorative tone and release child-adult sex from social condemnation. To do so, however, is the ultimate exploitation of children, for the adult's sexual gratification overrides concerns about a child's welfare. Sexual predators have no interest in their crimes' effect on children, for they simply don't care.

In trying to protect children, adults are in the habit of calling criminal behavior *inappropriate* behavior, which is an understatement of the power of sex crimes to injure children. Inappropriate behavior is most often forced sex for children, inflicted on them by an adult who expects them to submit to him for his own gratification.

The current terminology trivializes what happens to a child who is sexually dominated and forced into activity that gratifies a sexually aroused adult. This is a bad experience, as bad as what happens to adults in the same circumstances. But our way of speaking of it makes it seem that since kids don't understand sex, we can shield them by deceiving them about the magnitude of the transgression. But kids don't forget forced sex, any more than an adult does, and the experience becomes a form of sex education for kids. They learn about what's involved in sexual relations between people by being used by another and then shamed and threatened.

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This is traumatic sexualization, and it is the way fifteen percent of children learn about sexuality.

Accepting Human Immaturity

Can we accept children as they are, or will we force them to act spuriously mature? Current approaches to child protection are based on the premise that children can be taught to protect themselves. While in television sitcoms and the occasional real-life story of heroism, children sometimes do remarkably mature things, this is not the norm. Nonetheless, child-protection education programs demand that kids demonstrate maturity in making judgments and decisions when they are plainly unable to do so, which is reflected in crime statistics.

We expect children to understand normal sexuality and to make distinctions between legal and illegal behavior when even adults have difficulty doing so. This seems to be the result of the American do-it-yourself attitude and the self-help movement, where adults learned how to take care of their own problems. Self-reliance is a wonderful thing in a mature human, but children are adult-reliant, and they need grownups to guard them. Child abuse prevention programs are based on the premise that children, even very young children, can be taught to recognize and report sex crimes, and we keep hammering away at this approach even though it has failed. Society is spared the knowledge that it has failed because children don't tell.

We need to change the culture and its practices to create a climate of safety for kids. There are no safe places in this culture, no safe schools, no safe houses of worship, or safe recreational organizations; for there is no way to insure that sexual predators will not find new ways to approach kids. Those institutions that have already suffered from sex crimes are likely to be better prepared than those as yet untouched, but all are open to attack.

Given the number of child victims, a substantial proportion of adults in this society see kids as predatory targets to be exploited for sexual gain. Child vulnerability is brought to the public's attention when there is a widely publicized abduction of a child,

but a much greater number of hidden crimes against children are perpetrated without public awareness. These crimes exist on a continuum, and there is no way to guarantee that a predator will not resort to murder to further his aims. There are no reliable child molesters.

The Every-Changing Face of Sexual Crime

While we overestimate the abilities of immature humans, we vastly underestimate the resourcefulness of sexual predators. Many adults still believe that kids are safe if they don't talk to strangers, but even this limited protection disintegrates in the face of clever solicitation. When an adult says to a child, "*Hi, I teach at your school. Aren't you in first grade?*" how many children can recognize a stranger speaking? How many adults would be able to recognize a stranger speaking if the same person said, "*Hi, I teach at your child's school. Isn't he in first grade?*"

Stranger is a relative term, for who among us could testify that we had *never* seen another person before? The same applies to the rule that children shouldn't take things from strangers. A child notices that a stranger gives him back his ticket stub at the movie, or a stranger gives him a free sample at the fair, which seems safe. Rules about strangers, even simple rules, require judgment and maturity from kids, which they don't develop until later adolescence or by about age sixteen. In those instances where children successfully evade sexual predators, it is probably because of circumstances or luck, but rarely is it the result of mature judgment.

Even if it were possible to empower children by imparting enough wisdom to them, career predators customize their tactics to new approaches in teaching child abuse prevention, effectively neutralizing it. We teach kids code words or a funny-feeling-in-your-tummy, and predators take note and tailor their seductions.

Sex Crimes Against Children Are an Extension of the Social Influence Process

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Most sex crimes against kids are nonviolent and are perpetrated by familiar adults who pressure kids to keep them secret. It can seem puzzling that this process continues, but there are underlying forces that determine how communities develop equilibrium where all can live in peace.

The forces of social influence usually operate to harmonize disparate elements of a society, keeping individuals in check so that everybody is satisfied. This is a complex balancing process governed by the values that people share and the ability of any one person or group to influence the community. Sexual predators are able to influence adults in making decisions about child safety. They arrange to have easy access to children and few restraints on their behavior, and they are adept at manipulating parents. There are few effective challenges to their hegemony, so the wheels are greased and the process goes on. Children suffer in silence, and adults cannot see their pain. When the kids get older, the damage surfaces; but by then the opportunities to recalibrate the whole process are gone.

What level of sex crimes will we tolerate in the culture? Very harsh repression can probably eliminate the vast majority of these crimes, but then we pay a high price in individual freedom. Right now, predators have free rein, so we pay a price for that with our children. If we reclassify a group of behaviors that mark intimacy, including touching, secrets, and nudity, we interfere with free expression in the culture, but not much.

Society has learned to accommodate and absorb sex crimes against kids, correcting the damage and reacting to only the most dramatic of incidents, but the everyday victimization goes by unnoticed. Children deal with this alone, and most kids will never know that their predator has other victims as well. Because a child very rarely discloses what has happened to him, the only person likely to know is the predator who assaulted him, so he is bound with a special pathological bond to an adult criminal. A family may seem to function well and parents may believe that they are reaching their goals without knowing that a brother-in-law or a neighbor is a monster who haunts their children's dreams. The private and intimate integrity of a family has been pierced by an

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aggressive intruder who quietly diminishes the bonds of trust that bind children to their parents.

In some areas of children's lives, adults have become largely irrelevant because they offer kids so little help. The Internet is a separate country for kids, one in which most parents have no place. Kids are true innovators, and they use technology in new and unforeseen ways. Youngsters generally ignore their parents' cautions about the Internet because they believe they know more, which is often true. The generation gap in cyberspace is so wide that the two sides can't even see each other, and kids orphaned on the Internet by their parents' ignorance learn by trial and error. They will continue to do so unless adults learn how to guide them and watch over them to keep them safe. In the meantime, people other than parents will be guiding them, for the time that kids are using the medium is time that somebody outside the family is influencing them.

Sexual crimes against kids separate them from their parents. A mother loses the intimate bond with her child because his shameful secret makes it impossible for him to trust her love for him. All of his dealings with parents may seem superficial to him because a mother and a father don't know about his hidden life. A large number of children will grow up with this secret burden, and it will separate them from those who would provide them psychological security.

Children are not the only ones who are harmed by sex crimes, because without real protection strategies, everyone becomes suspect and untrustworthy. Men suffer because even the best of fathers and grandfathers, uncles and brothers, become suspect when a family is targeted. The vast majority of sexual predators are males who prey on kids in secret while gulling parents into cooperation. The result is that all males can seem dangerous to kids, and there is no way to prove them innocent. Do men become self-protective and withdraw from children as a result of this? It is likely, because the risk of being wrongly accused can seem very large. This state of affairs is inherently degrading to adult men because it gives the impression that this is a common dysfunction. But this is not so, for the vast majority of males are

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concerned fathers, loving grandfathers, caring brothers, and good uncles, although in this climate, nobody can be sure.

Life can be better for kids. They can live a good life, free of fear until they are ready to launch themselves into adulthood. Some will argue that to achieve this requires a remaking of American society and the elimination of adult psychopathology, but this is not so. Cultures change quickly when attitudes change and people see it in their best interests to alter their behaviors. Just as social influence processes have made it possible for predators to drive the rhythms of society to target kids, the same social forces can be used by parents to watch over children.

To create a culture where children are safe and free, where they can operate without fear or threat, is not so hard to do. Where the habits and patterns of a culture are not receptive to sex crimes, kids have greater freedom of movement and the chance to express themselves and explore their surroundings. Adults, too, have more freedom, because the practices of the culture help them raise their children in safety.

Change must begin with hearing children's unspoken pain and its echoes throughout their adult lives. Without genuine compassion for the silent suffering of the most vulnerable, we run the risk of becoming as heartless as the criminal hunters who track our children. In understanding children's lives, we open ourselves to the forces of creativity and empowerment, and we begin to end their lonely plight. The future for children is the future for all of us.

Endnotes

In order to avoid disrupting the flow of the main text, footnotes and citations are presented here. Professionals in the field may find this unusual, but it may serve to make it easier for those outside the field to explore the issues of child safety without distraction.

CHAPTER ONE: Empty Streets

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It is very difficult to predict the likelihood of sex crimes against children, and our preference would be for no crimes at all. But projections must be made to find ways to protect kids. It is particularly difficult to determine the incidence of sex crimes, since the vast majority are never reported in childhood, and many never at all. Of those that are reported, only a small number of reports lead to convictions, further complicating the incidence measures. We have quoted the most conservative estimate here, and one that may be an underestimate. It would appear that sex crimes have decreased from the earlier figures which estimated that 25 percent of kids will be sex crime targets, although this may merely indicate that predators have become more skilled at evading arrest, and so the number of *reports* has decreased. In studies of adults, one third report having been sexually abused as children, which suggests that there may be higher numbers. Taking any of these estimates as accurate, most would agree that the numbers are far too high.

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