



Sexual Abuse: Perpetrators, Grooming, and Prevention

Who are the perpetrators of child sexual abuse?

- Most children who are sexually abused are victimized by someone they know (9 of 10); this includes relatives (25%), family friends, clergy, teachers, and babysitters. No valid profile of a perpetrator exists – it can be anyone.
- Some children and adolescents sexually abuse other children (40%).
- Perpetrators can be of any race, religious belief or sexual orientation.
- Many perpetrators are well-educated and respected members of the community.

How do they gain access to and “groom” children?

- Work to gain trust and friendship of child and often of the entire family; they are patient.
- Appear to be someone the entire family can trust and turn to for help.
- Often prey on single parents and exploit mother's fear that their child(ren) don't have a father figure or stable home life.
- Once trust is established with the child and the family – find ways to be alone with child.
- Pay attention to what children like and dislike.
- Often begin abuse by “testing” child's ability to protect himself/herself by telling sexual jokes, horseplay, back rubs, kissing, etc.
- Take advantage of child's natural curiosity - if child seems comfortable and/or curious about touching, the perpetrator will slowly increase the sexual contact.
- When the perpetrator is a parent, he/she may isolate children from the other parent by blocking communication and acting like the good guy.

Only 16% of victims tell: why?

- Many child victims don't understand that what is happening to them is sexual or wrong.
- Most perpetrators do not physically harm children. They use touches that feel good to the child; therefore, the victim is less likely to tell because it “didn't hurt.”
- They make the child feel guilty and responsible for the abuse.
- Perpetrator may manipulate youth by giving them access to alcohol, drugs, and pornography. Later, he/she threatens to expose the child's use of the above if s/he tells anyone about the abuse.
- Sometimes threatens to hurt the child, the child's family members, or pets if s/he tells.

Prevention

- Talk with children early and often throughout their development about sexual abuse and inappropriate touching. Use the correct names for body parts. Be sure to tell them that inappropriate touching is NEVER the child's fault.
- ALSO talk with children early and often throughout their development about healthy sexuality.
- Listen and believe your children if they are trying to tell. Children RARELY lie about sexual abuse.
- If something is not right about a child's relationship with an adult or another child, act on it.

Adapted from *Protecting Your Children: Advice from Child Molesters* (created by The Center for Behavioral Intervention, Beaverton Oregon).

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