

A Profile of the Child Molester

by Ken Wooden *(with Rosemary Webb & Jennifer Mitchell)*

During my two decades of work as an investigative reporter, I interviewed hundreds of convicted child molesters in prisons across America. My objective was to uncover how they had lured children and teens into abuse and worse. My intention was also to generate a criminal profile that could be shared with parents and law enforcement. Instead, I found child molesters and abductors to be a diverse group that possesses no tidy criminal profile and does not discriminate by race, gender, class or age.

So who are these sexual offenders?

- Males and Females
- Young Adults, Middle-Aged Adults, and Seniors
- Upper Class, Middle Class, and Disadvantaged
- All Races & Ethnicities
- Vocationally Diverse

One child pornography sting operation by the U.S. Justice Department and Customs Postal Inspectors resulted in well over two hundred arrests. The occupations of those arrested was a virtual rainbow of American life, representing 44% of all occupations listed by the U.S. Department of Labor.

How many child molesters live in the United States?

Approximately 400,000 convicted pedophiles currently reside in the United States, according to Department of Justice estimates.*

Are there really female child molesters?

Yes. A 2000 statistical report by the US Department of Justice* found that female offenders victimized:

- 12% of victims under the age of 6
- 6% of victims ages 6 - 12
- 3% of victims ages 12 - 17

How many victims does a child molester average?

Interviews guaranteeing complete confidentiality and immunity from prosecution, conducted by Emory University psychiatrist Dr. Gene Abel, uncovered that:

- Male offenders who abused girls had an average of 52 victims each.
- Men who molested boys had an astonishing average of 150 victims each.
- Only 3% of these crimes had ever been detected.

*Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics, by Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D.; National Center for Juvenile Justice, July 2000, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

How do child molesters get into situations where they can exploit children?

Few child molesters are able to resist their powerful urges to initiate contact with children and will go to great lengths to do so. Common strategies include:

- Befriending parents, particularly single parents, to gain access to their children.
- Offering babysitting services to overextended parents or caregivers.
- Taking jobs and participating in community events that involve children.
- Attending sporting events for children and/or offering to chaperone overnight trips.
- Volunteering in youth organizations, offering to chaperone overnight trips.
- Loitering in places children frequent - playgrounds, malls, game arcades, etc.
- Spending time in Internet gaming and social communities, learning the online interests and lingo of youngsters.
- Becoming foster parents.

What is the most common method used by child molesters?

The Affection Lure. (See Think First & Stay Safe™ Parent Guide) Most victims of abuse are groomed over a period of weeks, months, or years. The Affection Lure is used both offline and online to seduce unsuspecting youngsters in need of love and attention. Child molesters have repeatedly told me: When there's a physically or emotionally absent parent in the picture, it makes the child more vulnerable than ever.

Which age group is most often targeted by child molesters?

In the interviews I conducted, the majority of molesters cited a preference for children on the brink of puberty. This is the age of sexual awakening, making it easy for molesters to prey on the sexual curiosity and ignorance of youngsters. To quote one of the sexual offenders I interviewed, "Give me a kid who knows nothing about sex, and you've given me my next victim."

While we as parents are inclined to give pre-teens and teens more freedom and less supervision, this age group is actually the most vulnerable to abuse and abduction. We must talk frankly and often to our children about "the birds and the bees" and not allow sex offenders to educate our children for us.

Wouldn't a vigilant parent be able to detect a child molester, just by their actions?

Not necessarily. Remember, sex offenders who prey on children:

- are notoriously friendly, nice, kind, engaging and likeable.
- target their victims, often insinuating themselves into that child's life - their family, school, house of worship, sports, and hobbies.
- are professional con artists and are expert at getting children and families to trust them.
- will smile at you, look you right in the eye and make you believe they are trustworthy.

Do kids and teens ever sexually abuse other children?

Sadly, yes - and many of these juvenile offenders are victims of sexual abuse themselves. A United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics report* found that:

*Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics, by Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D.; National Center for Juvenile Justice, July 2000, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

- 23% of all sexual offenders were under the age of 18.
- 40% of offenders of victims under age 6 were themselves juveniles
- 13% were 7-11 years old; 27% were 12-17 years old.
- 39% of the offenders of victims ages 7-11 were juveniles.
- 27% of the offenders of victims ages 12-17 were juveniles.

What types of assaults were these?

Juvenile offenders under the age of 12 were responsible for:

- 23% of forcible sodomies
- 19% of forcible fondlings
- 17% of sexual assaults with an object
- 7% of forcible rapes

Juvenile offenders ages 12 - 18 were responsible for:

- 36% of forcible sodomies
- 27% of forcible fondlings
- 23% of sexual assaults with an object
- 17% of forcible rapes

When and where did these assaults usually happen?

The peak time for juvenile assaults was 3 pm, after school. Other spikes in the number of incidents were at the traditional meal times of 8 am, noon and 6 pm. Most of these assaults happened in the home of the victim, the home of the offender, or another residence.*

How many of these assaults were by family members?

- 49% of offenders of victims under age 6 were family members.
- 42% of offenders of victims ages 7-11 were family members.
- 24% of offenders of victims ages 12 - 17 were family members.*

Are there groups of organized child molesters that prey on children?

Yes. Small groups of militant and highly organized child molesters operate worldwide, and many claim genuine concern for the welfare of children. The actual number of members in these organizations is unknown, though their power is evident. One pedophile organization's newsletter correctly identified ten sting operations in five different states. Another exposed and compromised four federal sting operations. Clearly, these organizations have connections.

What are their beliefs and goals?

In general, these groups believe that sex with children is harmless; some even claim that sexual relations are healthy for children. Their goals include decriminalizing child molestation and lowering the age of consent.

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Where do they meet?

In addition to attending conferences and conventions, members now meet primarily via the Internet where they may swap methods, success stories, even names, descriptions, and images of children. Since the early 1980's, they have exploited the Internet to communicate with one another, spreading their propaganda to anyone who will listen.

Aren't their activities illegal?

Most of these groups and members are careful to keep their public activities within the realm of protected civil liberties.

In 2006, a new political party (PNVD) was established in the Netherlands. Commonly referred to as "the Pedophile Party," it seeks to lower the age of consent from 16 to 12. Opponents had asked The Hague District Court to bar the party from registering for national elections, but Judge H. Hofhuis ruled: "Freedom of expression, freedom ... of association, including the freedom to set up a political party, can be seen as the basis for a democratic society."

Are these groups a real threat?

While the average child molester does not belong to an organized group, we would be foolish not to take seriously any group whose members are committed to sexual activity with children.

Final Thoughts:

While there are sexual predators who are organized and whose activities cause public ire, it is the millions of individual sexual offenders worldwide whose day-to-day actions and steadfast determination are a far greater threat to the safety of our children and teens. Knowing this - and knowing that we cannot be with our children every moment of every day - it is essential that we teach them how to recognize and evade the lures used for generations by sexual predators of every kind. As I posed to President Bush during the 2002 White House Conference on Missing, Exploited and Runaway Children, "If predators are using lures, shouldn't we be teaching our children these lures?"

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