



## Characteristics and Behavioral Indicators of Adults Who Molest Children



When most people imagine a child molester, they envision an ugly man in a trench coat coaxing children with candy. They don't picture Uncle Joe or Aunt Lorraine, the neighbor next door, the friendly parishioner, or a trusted co-worker. They don't think of mom or dad.

The notion that a child will be seized from the street and forcibly molested has been effectively dispelled through information obtained in thousands of child sexual abuse investigations over the years. Although these incidents do occur, the vast majority of child molesters are adults who seduce children through subtle intimidation and persuasion, and are known to the child or the parents.

Child molesters come from all walks of life. They can be male or female, rich or poor, employed or unemployed, religious or non-religious, or from any race.

Adults who molest children can generally be divided into two groups. A small percentage may have a **lifelong, exclusive attraction** to children, and have little or no emotional interest in adult partners. The majority are **not exclusively attracted to children**, have adult emotional relationships, and have not molested multiple child victims. Further, adults who molest children of their same gender (i.e., an adult male who molests a boy) are not necessarily homosexual.

In cases where the child molester **is not known** by the victim, he or she may use a variety of methods to gain access including force, fear, bribery or tricks. He/she may pretend to be friendly and trustworthy.

Through the experience of law enforcement investigators, treatment providers, and research, some characteristics have been identified.

*CAUTION: Some people who have molested or plan to molest a child exhibit no observable behavior pattern that would be a clue to their future actions.*

## Some Characteristics and Behaviors of Adults Who Molest Children

1. Is usually married. A small number never marry and maintain a lifelong interest in children.
2. Most often an adult male; however, adolescents and women also molest children.
3. May relate better to children and feel more comfortable with their interests.
4. May have few adult friends.
5. May talk with children as one would talk to an adult in order to equalize the relationship.
6. Usually prefers children in a specific age group and one gender over the other.
7. May work or volunteer with programs involving children in the preferred age group.
8. Pursues children for sexual purposes but may attempt to form emotional connections; for example, a mom's boyfriend spending time with a child and talking at length about his feelings for the child and his own loneliness in order to gain the child's sympathy.
9. May take photographs of victims: dressed, nude, or in sexual acts.
10. May collect child erotica and child-adult pornography to lower the inhibitions of victims; fantasize when no victim is available; relive past sexual activities; justify inappropriate sexual behavior; or blackmail victims to keep them from telling.
11. May give alcohol or drugs to potential victims to lower inhibitions or gain favor.
12. May seek out organizations that support sexual beliefs and practices.
13. May offer to babysit or take children on trips in order to manipulate situations to be near or molest children.

## Intrafamilial Child Abuse

The incestuous or intrafamilial molester is usually an adult male (father, stepfather, grandfather or live-in boyfriend of the mother); however, mothers or other female caregivers also sexually abuse children. The molestation is usually secretive and is sometimes accomplished through misuse of power, mental duress, bribes, tricks or misuse of the parental role under the guise of sex education and threats.

Common threats may include: the child will be removed from the family if they do not succumb to the offender's wishes; they will be blamed for hurting the family if the offender is arrested; or a sibling will be sexually abused if the victim does not consent.

The molestation usually occurs over an extended period of time, occasionally into the victim's adulthood. Through intimidation, the child is made to feel responsible for the molestation and for keeping the acts secret. This secret is normally kept between the offender and the victim, or within the immediate family.

Children from all types of families are vulnerable to child molesters. It is important to remember that because adults have power over children, any child can be at risk.

## Talking to Your Children

Because offenders get their power through secrecy, the single most effective means of protecting your child is communication. They have to feel comfortable discussing sensitive matters. If they know they can talk about their true feelings, they will be more likely to reveal that they have been in an uncomfortable situation.

More information is available from the following organizations:

Jacob Wetterling Resource Center 800-325-HOPE or 800-325-4673  
or 651-714-4673 [www.jwrc.org](http://www.jwrc.org)

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children 800-THE-LOST  
or 800-843-5678 [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

Stop It Now! Minnesota [www.stopitnow.com/mn](http://www.stopitnow.com/mn)  
651-644-8515 [stopitnowmn@projectpathfinder.org](mailto:stopitnowmn@projectpathfinder.org)



For additional information about the Minnesota Department of Corrections, visit [www.doc.state.mn.us](http://www.doc.state.mn.us) or phone 651-361-7200, TTY 800-627-3529. This information will be provided in an alternative format upon request.  
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