

# How Not to Detect a Child Molester

by Jerry McMullin

Parents have good reason to be concerned for the safety of their families. The mainstream media regularly report crimes against children. The child predator community, energized by pornography and emboldened by internet chat rooms, have found a niche in society from which they can launch their assault. So today's parents are on the lookout -- although many have no idea how to recognize a molester if they met one.

If you are a concerned parent, take a moment to write down the characteristics of typical child molesters as you understand them in each of the following categories: marital status, social skills, education, personal cleanliness, professional competence, age, gender, financial success, religiosity, community service, and relationship to you. Then compare your description with the information that follows.

**Marital Status:** You may have believed that their sexual interest in children prohibits molesters from marrying other adults. Actually, many child molesters are married and have children of their own. With beautiful homes, immaculate yards, and charming children, they can present themselves as responsible caring people -- people you could trust your children with (e.g., for a sleep over at their home or on a camping trip).

**Social Skills:** You may have assumed that child molesters are loners with limited social skills. The truth is that they can be very friendly and well liked by people in general. Child molesters can be warm, sensitive, and kind -- though they will show children a side of themselves that parents never see. They may also use their social skills to befriend other predators so they can work together to outwit those who rely on the principle of "safety in numbers" (e.g., husband/wife team or two camp counselors on the same outing).

**Education:** Perhaps you thought that extensive formal education raises people to such a high level of intellectual competence that they would not lower themselves to harm a child. Wrong again. Child molesters know that education builds trust and use that to their advantage. For example, searching on the internet with terms such as "child psychiatrist" and "molest" will retrieve examples of highly educated professionals convicted or accused of child molestation.

**Personal Cleanliness:** The common stereotype of a child molester -- the unkempt man in a trench coat -- has little basis in reality. Remember that the modus operandi of most molesters is to access children by building the trust of their care givers. They know the importance of appearances.

**Professional Competence.** Many child molesters hold high positions in their professions. They may be school teachers, principals, doctors, lawyers, judges, psychiatrists, social workers, congressmen, financial consultants, business managers, university professors, policemen, scouting professionals, youth workers, etc. They may have many people reporting to them and be widely respected in the workplace. They may be so highly respected that no one would believe the rare child who is strong enough to remember the abuse and courageous enough to tell on them.

**Age:** Most reported offenders are 30 or under, but molesters can be any age.

**Gender:** More men than women are child molesters -- but women molest as well.

**Financial Success:** Prosperity or the lack of prosperity is not an indicator of sexual preference. Some child molesters are elitist, living in the top echelons of society looking down on humanity with disdain.

**Religiosity:** Child molesters may have an air of intense religiosity and may be active members of their church. They may serve very faithfully, even expressing their devotion and loyalty while decrying the slothfulness and negligence of others. They know that religious people predisposed to look for the good in other members of the church are not likely to suspect their hidden purposes.

**Community Service:** One or more members of the local anti-pornography task force may actually be child molesters. The man who takes time out of his busy schedule to deliver Sub for Santa packages in his community may also be finding time to assault a child or teenager.

**Relationship to You:** Most molestations are perpetrated by someone known to the parents of the child. Children are frequently molested by grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, visitors who stay overnight in the home, neighbors, friends, and others whom parents may trust.

The bottom line is that, with the exception of the fact that they abuse children, most molesters appear quite normal. Even mental health professionals can be deceived. There is no single profile that parents can use to detect who is legitimately interested in helping children and who has a hidden agenda. The one thing all molesters have in common is that they are looking for situations where they can be trusted with access to victims. For example, they may seek professions that involve being with children or teenagers. Some baby sitters, day care workers, camp counselors, tutors, school teachers, pediatrician, scout leaders, and others who work with children may be watching child pornography on the side -- and may be very dangerous.

It's easy to become nostalgic for the "good old days" when almost everyone was trusted. Back then children played for hours in the neighborhood -- in other people's homes and yards -- unsupervised. Back then children walked to school, went gleefully to sleep overs, and participated in overnight camps without an ounce of parental concern. But those times are past now. We are a sadder but wiser society. The knowledge we have about child molesters has come at a heavy cost and is often shared by people out of the pain of their personal experiences. It's time we heeded this information and do all we can to protect children.

For more information, see:

Salter, A. C. (2003). *Predators, Pedophiles, Rapists, & Other Sex Offenders*.

Hammar, R. R., Klipowicz, S. W., & Cobble, J. F. Jr. (1993) *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*.