

Why Your Children Don't Tell You and What To Do About It

by Jerry McMullin

Parents can consider themselves lucky when their children confide in them that someone – a friend, a relative, a teacher, or a church leader has touched them inappropriately or otherwise abused them. Obviously, they are not lucky because the abuse happened, but rather because they found out about it and can therefore take action to protect their child from further assault and facilitate the healing process. Unfortunately, children often do not tell their parents – or anyone – what has been (or is being) done to them. Because they don't tell the abuse may continue for years unabated. Even those parents who focus on developing close relationships with their children, who make a whole-hearted effort to keep the lines of communication open, may never hear about the abuse their children are experiencing on a regular basis.

Parents make certain assumptions about what is happening in the lives of their children when they are under someone else's care or are playing with friends under their own recognizance. They think they know what is going on and have reassuring images in their minds. For example, when parents send an eight year old on a two week vacation to visit a favorite cousin they may imagine the two playing happily together the whole time. Upon return the child may report having had a lot of fun and family life may go on as if all were well. But appearances can be deceiving.

The reality is that many child predators commonly utilize a wide variety of methods to dissuade children from telling what was done to them. They know how to cover their crimes by exploiting children's vulnerabilities. Much child abuse is systematic, planned, and deliberate rather than the result of a spontaneous loss of control. The predator's plans often include determining which techniques and strategies will be implemented to make sure – absolutely sure – that the child never tells on them.

When determining which techniques to use, predators are not left to their own imagination and ingenuity. For decades, abuse victims have been reporting to mental health professionals that groups, rather than individuals, participated in the abuse. Some therapists have euphemistically called such groups "sex rings." Initially law enforcement professionals considered many of these reports to be merely unproven conspiracy theories. However, as the use of the internet has become more widespread, a predator subculture has become visible. While law enforcement watches, the predators interact online - sharing information, encouragement, validation, and images.

The widespread reports by abuse survivors of specific techniques lends further credibility to the assertion that information about how to silence children is shared throughout a predator subculture. These techniques, which often involve the use of terror, torture (that leaves no visible wounds), drugs, and hypnosis are carefully crafted and assiduously applied on victims. The techniques typically include verbal threats of serious consequences to the victim and the victim's family if anyone were to find out. The victim may also be convinced that painful consequences would result if the abuse is even remembered.

In other words, many predators have both the skills and the callous disregard for their victims needed to carry off what they may consider to be the perfect crime. No amount of training given to children about boundaries and inappropriate touch can prepare them for what these predators have in mind.

Although such training is helpful in some situations, the primary responsibility for making sure that children are safe must rest with adults. Although most parents do not have the resources needed to watch over and safeguard their children 24/7, they can take precautions that significantly reduce the likelihood that predators will be able to be alone with them.

Such precautions would involve a substantial decline in the trust given to relatives, friends, neighbors and others who might otherwise have been given access to their children. Here are a few examples of such precautions that parents may wish to consider:

- 1) Establish and consistently enforce a family rule that children may not participate in sleep overs or slumber parties in other people's homes.
- 2) Do not allow relatives or others to sleep overnight in situations that would allow them to be alone with the children during the night.

3) Do not allow relatives or others to transport children long distances or take them on vacations alone.

4) Participate with children in outdoor camping rather than leave them under the care of others,

At first glance such precautions may seem overprotective, unnecessary, or even paranoid. However, when deciding how much to limit other people's access to their children, parents would do well to remember three fundamental realities. The first is that a lot more predators are out there than law enforcement has identified. The second is that these predators ply their trade by exploiting the naivete and courting the trust of relatives, neighbors and friends who might give them time alone with their children. The third is that many predators are emboldened by confidence in their ability to ensure that their victims won't tell anyone – not even their parents.

It is difficult to consistently discriminate between good friends of the family and committed predators who are seeking trust to gain access to victims. Given the three realities above, a common sense way to deal with the threat posed by the predator subculture is to put family rules in place that protect children, such as the four suggested. With those rules no one need be accused or necessarily even suspected, and the children are safer.