

Myths about Female Molesters

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By definition, a myth is “an unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution.” Since the beginning of the VIRTUS® programs, we have dealt with myths about sexual predators, priest molesters, parents of children who were molested, and others. Today, the subject is female offenders with a look at some of the myths about women who molest children.

Although there are myths about child molesters that are well known in the general population, relatively little has been said about the myths regarding female offenders. Some myths about female offenders are similar to myths about male offenders. However, most are unique to the role that women play in most of our lives.

Remembering that myths are “unproved or false collective belief(s)” and that pronouncement and reliance on these myths is used to “justify a social institution,” demands of us that we pay attention to how women are referred to when child abuse is considered. We need to interrupt the pronouncement of myths as “truth” and call attention to the nature of the problem.

The first myth to dispel is that women do not sexually abuse children—of course they do. The fact that they are female does not mean children are automatically safe with them. Some other myths about female molesters include:

- Women only abuse if coerced by a man or another woman or as part of an abusing couple (male and female).
- When women do sexually abuse, it is more like gentle, loving, or misguided "motherly" love.
- Women only molest boys and only when they are adolescents.
- Just as with males who abuse male children, if you are female and you were abused by a female, the myth is that you will be lesbian.
- People who accuse females as molesters are fantasizing or lying. If the accuser is a male child, he is said to be having sexual fantasies. If the perpetrator was the mother, boys are accused of having incestuous wishes. If you are a female victim of a female molester, you are “muddled” and confused. It was really a man who abused you.
- The age of the victim determines whether the sexual interaction was abusive if the perpetrator is a woman (the older the male victim, the less likely society is to call the interaction “abusive”).

Behavior is the real key to whether a woman or a man is molesting a child. Recognizing myths as what they are and dispelling them so that we can deal with the reality of a situation is the best chance we have of protecting our children from any sexual predator in the environment.

Remember that women *can* be child molesters. The determination of whether someone is a potential risk to children is not based on gender. Behavior is the measuring stick. To protect children, we must pay attention to all potential warning signs, regardless of the gender of the people in question.

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