

What Kinds of People Molest Children? - Part I

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a three-part series describing the different types of child molesters and discussing how we can eliminate them from our environments. This first article will identify the various types of molesters and describe how the *Protecting God's Children*™ program for Adults is designed to help us remove certain types of abusers from our environments.

The types of people who have sexual contact with children can be grouped into three basic categories: preferential offenders, situational offenders, and indiscriminate offenders.

Preferential offenders:

A preferential offender is someone who prefers children—instead of adults—as sexual, romantic, and social partners. These sexually dysfunctional people are correctly referred to as pedophiles and ephebophiles. These people are suffering from severe psychological and developmental impairments.

Pedophilia and ephebophilia are psychological diagnoses for people with the following sexual orientations:

- *Pedophiles*—Individuals with a primary sexual, romantic, and social attraction for pre-pubescent children (ages 1 to 13). The victim is at least five years younger than the molester and the molester is usually not interested in adult sexual contact.
- *Ephebophile*—Individuals with a primary sexual desire for children between the ages of 14 and 17 years. The victim is also at least five years younger than the molester.

The factors that influence whether someone is a pedophile or ephebophile are neither simple nor easily explained. An investigation of the sources of these disorders requires a thorough investigation of many factors including psychological, familial, environmental, social, genetic, organic, hormonal, and biological issues.

Knowing what causes someone to have this desire will not impact the safety of a child. We are, however, empowered by knowing the behavioral characteristics of a preferential offender—so we are aware of the warning signs that should put us on notice that someone is a risk of harm to children.

Situational offenders:

The fact is that most people who abuse children are not preferential offenders. They are family members and other trusted adults who abuse children in certain situations. The abuse is most often accompanied by some other factors such as depression, alcohol and drug abuse, etc. These offenders are more amenable to treatment, their behavior can often be altered, and they frequently return to active participation in society—with appropriate safeguards for children.

Although the situational offender is difficult to identify through common behavioral characteristics or traits, the safeguards implemented to keep children safe from preferential offenders will also substantially thwart a situational offender's ability to commit his or her crime. Monitoring all programs, communicating concerns, controlling access, and being aware of what's happening in the lives of our children helps create an environment where the opportunity to offend is all but eliminated for most potential offenders. The child who is victimized by a member of the family is still at risk of harm; but, many of these same concepts, if implemented in the family environment, can prevent abuse by the situational offender.

Indiscriminate offenders:

There is a small segment of the population that seeks out children with the intent of doing physical harm. They are the type of offender that indiscriminately snatches a child off the street, then rapes and murders the child in a particularly gruesome manner. This type of offender will find their way into a hospital or other type of facility for disabled children and minors and rape, maim, and/or even kill a child.

Although preventing an indiscriminate offender is difficult, creating safe physical environments and establishing protocols for visitors and others can do a great deal to help manage this problem.

Conclusion—Part I

As adults in the community, our best opportunity for creating safe environments is by learning about preferential offenders. By studying their methods, we can learn how offenders integrate themselves into our lives and our programs and into the lives of our children. We can learn about their characteristic behaviors—the warning signs that someone is a risk of harm to children.

We can learn the warning signs, implement screening and selection protocols, adhere to policies and procedures, assess the physical characteristics of our facilities, and greatly minimize the opportunity for abusers to access our children. This is the goal of *Protecting God's Children for Adults*—creating safe environments for our children and for the adults who minister to them in our parishes, schools, programs, and communities.

Brought to you through the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. and its VIRTUS® programs with the goal to help prevent, address, and mitigate wrongdoing in the community of faith and to help adults become protectors of children and to help communities become safe havens for children.