

## What Kinds of People Molest Children? - Part 2

One of the biggest challenges that adults face when dealing with child sexual abuse is keeping an open mind about the kinds of people who create a risk for our children. We have a tendency to compartmentalize and label issues and people, and to look for simple explanations and simple solutions.

This oversimplification, labeling, and stereotyping can actually increase the risk to children. If we isolate on a particular issue, we begin to focus on eliminating *that* problem or *those* people. Meanwhile, the abuse continues unabated.

To protect children, it is important that we dispel the myths about any one issue being “the” cause of child sexual abuse. Below are some common false assumptions:

### **False Assumption #1—Parents are the problem. If parents did a better job, a child molester could not get access to a child.**

Most, if not all, children are vulnerable to abuse at some time in their lives. If you listen to closely to the abusers in the video, *A Time to Protect God's Children*, it is clear that children with good parents, bad parents, one parent, or no parents are at equal risk.

If we are honest, many of us can find examples of this vulnerability in our own lives. Perhaps there was a time in your life when you wanted to do something and your parents said “No.” It might have sounded something like “I don’t care if Suzie’s mother said she could do that, I said ‘No.’ If Suzie wanted to jump off a building, would you want to do that, too?”

In that moment, a child molester has an opening. He or she can agree with the child—that the parents are wrong—and, in a flash, the child molester creates a powerful bond and makes dramatic strides forward in the grooming process.

An assumption that bad things cannot happen to the children of good parents places those children—children of good parents—at risk of harm. Child molesters are effective at grooming children and their parents and working their way into all of our lives.

### **False Assumption #2—Homosexuality is the problem.**

Homosexuality is a complicated and controversial issue. Regardless of our individual opinions or concerns, however, studies repeatedly show that most child sexual abusers are heterosexual. Focusing on homosexuality as *the* issue merely casts a blind eye to all those heterosexuals who are inclined to abuse children. The fact is that if we removed each and every homosexual from our society, there would still be people who sexually abuse children.

### **False Assumption #3—Celibacy is the problem.**

A vow or promise of celibacy does not *cause* or *prevent* child sexual abuse. Most child abusers are people who have never taken a vow of celibacy. And most people who take a vow of celibacy never abuse children. Those who promise a celibate lifestyle and then sexually abuse children do so for the same reasons as others who sexually abuse children.

### **False Assumption #4—Pornography is the problem.**

Child sexual abusers frequently use pornography as a tool to psychologically “hook” a child. But, pornography is not the *reason* a child molester abuses children. Eliminating pornography from our environment would not completely remove the risk of harm to children.

### **False Assumption #5—Moral decay in society is the problem.**

Ethics are missing in much of today’s society. The headlines are filled with stories of corporate executives who are willing to compromise their values for their own professional and financial benefit, as well as examples of public officials who are willing to violate the public trust.

However, child sexual abuse existed during the “good old days” as well. If anything, crumbling moral values may not have *created* more abuse, but have caused us to turn a blind eye to abuse in our own communities.

## **Conclusion**

Child sexual abuse is a complex issue. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions. In order to protect children, we must be aware of all the signs indicating that an adult could pose a risk to our children. Hanging our hats on any particular issue or set of issues as the answer to the child sexual abuse crisis makes us part of the problem rather than the solution. And, it makes our children vulnerable to the thousands of abusers who don't fit *our* stereotypes.

*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.*