

## **An Adult Who Would Rather Spend Time Alone with Kids than be with Adults**

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“He is just so generous with his time. It seems he is always willing to have kids over to his house and to sponsor or chaperone youth events at the church. I don’t know him very well, but I appreciate his commitment to kids.”

Have you ever heard someone say something like this or thought it yourself about someone in the Church or the community—someone who seems like a nice person, someone who “just wants to help?” Do you recall a time when you had a concern about another adult’s relationship with children, but the suspect adult was so nice and such a willing volunteer that you overlooked your discomfort with the situation? It is possible that you were the victim of one of the most effective tools that child molesters have—their ability to “groom” victims, families, and other people within the community.

Child sexual abusers use their power and influence to gain access to children, to maintain contact, and to control their victims. This power is obtained from the abuser’s standing in society, the community, a family, the Church, or another organization. Many abusers are caretakers of one sort or another. Child molesters groom children both physically and psychologically. They are skilled at developing loving, trusting, powerful relationships with children and sometimes filling emotional voids in a child’s home life.

In addition, the molester will often develop close rapport with one or both of a child’s parents—to gain their confidence and to overcome any barriers to having access to the child. Molesters present themselves to parents, supervisors, and other adults as kind, generous people who genuinely care about children. A molester can convince the adults in a child’s life that he or she is primarily interested in “what is best for the child.” Adults that are drawn in by the grooming tactics of a child molester are not *bad* or *stupid* people; rather, they are also victims of the abuser.

When we realize that molesters are masters of manipulation and control, we can begin to train ourselves to watch for some specific indicators that an adult’s behavior is suspicious or, at least, questionable. One of the indicators of a potentially risky situation is an adult who prefers to be alone with children or young people rather than to interact with adults.

Be aware of people who repeatedly invite children to their homes while never inviting the parents. Take note of adults who hang around with kids all the time. For examples, at parties or events, they are with the kids all of the time rather than spending some of their time with the adults. They seem to prefer the company of children. Notice if an adult is always volunteering to help out—with babysitting, homework, school or church projects, and special events.

Does this mean that all people who love to work with kids are abusers? No. It means that when an adult repeatedly excludes himself or herself from the company of adults and seems to prefer to always be with children, other adults should notice the behavior and take appropriate action. If you notice someone who fits this description, keep your eyes open. If the adult’s behavior raises concerns about the appropriateness of their interactions with children—tell someone in a position of authority. If you have a suspicion that a child is at risk of abuse from this adult, report your concerns to civil authorities.

Preventing child sexual abuse requires that caring adults in the faith community begin to observe potentially risky situations and take action to intervene. Eliminating the potential risks will protect children. All of the awareness in the world may not protect a child from being abused, but by consciously ignoring or failing to pay attention to the warning signs, unsuspecting adults send an

open invitation to abusers. By using our eyes and our powers of reasoning, we have a real opportunity to stop abuse before it occurs.

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