

## ***What Could They Be Thinking?***

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*“She wore a really short skirt and sat really close to me. She winked and smiled at me as she talked. She clearly she liked me. I mean... she was really coming on to me the whole time.”*

This conversation sounds like an ordinary guy talking about an encounter with a date or a woman he is interested in. He could even be telling his buddies about a new conquest. The problem is that the “she” this adult male is talking about is a five-year-old girl.

This quote is from a taped police interview with an accused child molester. He was arrested for molesting the girl he is talking about. During the interview he blamed the victim, a five-year-old girl, for the whole thing. He said she led him on. At no time during the interview did he acknowledge that this was his fault, his problem, or his bad actions. In fact, he could not understand why anyone thought this was a problem.

If this were the plot of a popular TV series, we would find it surreal and relate to it as if this could only happen in a fictional world. The problem is, this was a real interview, with real police detectives, involving a real case, in a real midwestern town within the last few years.

Now, our first instinct is to react strongly, become disgusted, and perhaps even threaten retaliation. While that may be a reasonable response and make us feel justified and righteous, it doesn't help us understand the traits of offenders that can lead us to ways to protect children. It doesn't help us learn how offenders go to extraordinary lengths to groom potential victims and their families. If we step back, listen, and use what this molester said as an opportunity to understand what makes a child molester tick, we can begin to understand how important it is for us to learn how to recognize and interrupt the behaviors of potential predators.

Sometimes we can distance ourselves from the problem and use what he said to help us prevent abuse. Listening to this interview and knowing that this offender was an attractive, white male and the victim was a blond, blue-eyed kindergarten girl can help us realize how important it is for us to know the warning signs of potential abusers and interrupt the behavior when we observe it.

Child molesters think they love the children they molest. Somehow we forget that they really mean that. We can't imagine how that could be true so we relate to those statements as if they can't possibly be true, but they are for the molester!

We wonder how they can do what they do and have the attitude they have. They can do that because they don't believe what they are doing is wrong. Knowing that child molesters are usually motivated by what they believe are genuine emotions can help us better understand the grooming process and how to interrupt it in order to prevent abuse.

When we realize that they consider their emotional attachment to children as genuine care, we start to understand why it is so difficult to prevent sexual abuse and how important it is to have our attention on the behavior of adults who interact with our children.

Pay attention to the behavior of all adults who interact with children in our environment. That is our best chance to interrupt the grooming process, save our children from molesters, and create a safe environment for children and young people.

*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.*