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How Offenders Can Mislead

People often talk about sex offenders in the abstract, believing that they are just “out there” somewhere. The reality is sex offenders are not living on some deserted island. Sex offenders live among us, travel among us, study, work, and worship among us. How, then, do we so often believe that the sex offender is the other guy and not the guy next to us on the train, in the cafeteria, or in the next office cubicle? One word: deception.



Perhaps we are guilty of deceiving ourselves for the sake of our own comfort. We don't like to think that there are people who we know that could be capable of harming children. Our disbelief is one thing the offender counts on. Who wants to believe that a trusted teacher could be child abuser? Who wants to consider that a woman could be a sex offender? That charming guy down the street, the one who is always there to help neighbors in need, surely he couldn't be a sex offender. The reality is that offenders don't fall into any age, race, or job category. They run the gamut.

Part of the deception is the deception of position. Offenders are able to administer community grooming by holding a position of esteem. We might assume that someone who holds a respected position in the community is someone who will act in a reasonable way. It is no accident that we read headlines where someone is arrested for sexual abuse after they have placed themselves in a trusted position where they also have access to victims, authority over them, and often the misplaced trust of truly caring adults.

Sex offenders deceive us most directly by first taking power over their victims. A victim who won't tell is a silent victim. We believe that if a child is being abused there will be physical signs. The truth is there are usually no physical signs. So for many, part of the deception is that “there is no harm to the child”. But the psychological harm is often more damaging and long lasting than the physical. Other children don't tell because the offender has deceived them into thinking that it is the child's fault, or that if the child tells, the child's loved ones will be in legal trouble or they will be harmed by the offender. Often the offender will mislead a child making the child to believe he or she caused the abuse. The offender manipulates the child into believing that he or she

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actually loves the child and what “they are doing together” is a good thing. There are many offenders who are so disturbed that they believe that they are truly in love with the child and that the child is in love with them. They deceive themselves into believing that this is a normal and appropriate relationship.

Sex offenders are the most practiced and skilled liars that many of us will ever meet. They can spend most of their lives seeming to be no different than the next guy. They have learned that playing the role of “the next guy” gains them access to victims. They understand that revealing their true selves means they would no longer be able to act on their sexual impulses, so they continue to live lives of deceit and deviancy.

We might be tempted to hide our children away from the world, or worse yet to simply hide our heads in the sand. Neither is necessary. What we must do is to accept reality and let go of the stereotype of what a sex offender looks like or how he or she acts. We must no longer participate in the deception. The most important thing we can do is to improve our relationships with our children—to maintain open lines of communications, to reassure them of our love and of our desire to protect them from harm. We must pay attention to our children and, no matter what, we must talk to them.

Article Posted on: 2007-03-26 12:38:07.0 - It has been viewed 442 times

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