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## Toolbox

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### **The Rationale of Warning Signs**

There's an old military axiom we've all heard: know your enemy. With twenty-twenty hindsight, the wisdom of this statement is obvious. When it comes to child sexual predators, we as a faith community— indeed we as a nation—did not have a firm grasp of what or whom we were dealing with. And this lack of understanding led to very ineffective efforts to control their behavior. But in the last ten years or so, the profile of these perpetrators has been substantially, and more realistically, updated. We now realize that there are patterns to their behaviors that we can use to devise more successful therapy. And from the viewpoint of the common person, we now recognize that there are behavior patterns that we can exploit and manipulate in order to build safer environments for our children and ourselves.



As the case files have grown, professionals in law enforcement and medical disciplines were able to identify numerous behavioral signals that are often indicative of the grooming process. Professionals, as well as others, seized upon the notion that people who were properly instructed to notice these behaviors could effectively place obstacles in a potential predator's path that inhibited their ability to spend adequate time with their marks. These have come to be known as warning signs of predatory behaviors.

The most significant aspect to this awareness is that caring adults do not need to understand the underlying psychology or legalities to recognize a potential sign. Hence, new policies can be implemented within astonishingly short timeframes. Coincidentally, this is also another common military practice. In order to move quickly, the front lines need not know the rationale because the need to move is too immediate. Long-term education will fill in the blanks over time. But in the meantime, it's "Forward March."

When it comes to child sexual abuse, the victim knows the offender in 8 out of 10 reported cases. Offenders go to incredible lengths to ensure that they are not strangers. They can spend months and often years grooming entire communities to accept them as trustworthy and upright. Knowing this, it's easy to understand why we need to be aware of the warning signs that a sexual predator may be lurking about. In the

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interest of brevity, let's use a bullet list. But bear in mind that these can be discussed in detail at a Protecting God's Children® for Adults session.

Some signs are **more obvious** than others. They are behaviors such as:

- Using bad language around children
- Telling children dirty jokes
- Showing children pornography

Other signs are a little **more subtle**:

- Always wanting to wrestle or tickle
- Always wanting to be alone with children
- Preferring to be with children instead of adults
- Discouraging the involvement of other adults

Some signs can be **hidden entirely**:

- Giving gifts to children without permission
- Allowing kids to do things they are not normally allowed to do (e.g., drink alcohol)
- Encouraging the children to keep secrets

Remember, most predators look like everyday people, parishioners, teachers, coaches, volunteers, pastors, or anyone else in our community. They go to incredible lengths to integrate into a community and present themselves as "good" or "wonderful" people. The policies that have been put in place based on these warning signs provide clear guidelines by which to monitor activities. We must enforce our policies and rules without fail. This forces anyone who does not play by the rules to make themselves more conspicuous and effectively removes his or her ability to hide among us. For these reasons, no one can afford to make exceptions for any of the policies and procedures designed to create safer spaces for our children.

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