

WHO ARE THE OFFENDERS?

When most people imagine a child molester, they picture some ugly, old man in a trench coat coaxing children to come to him in exchange for some candy. They don't picture Uncle Joe or Aunt Lorraine, their neighbor next door, the friendly parishioner, another family member, or trusted co-worker. They don't think of mom or dad, or in the case of single parents, their significant other. This misconception has been effectively dispelled through information obtained in thousands of child sexual abuse investigations over the years. Child molesters come from all walks of life and from all social economic groups. They can be male or female, rich or poor, employed or unemployed, religious or non-religious, or from any race. People unknown to them, relatives, friends, or caregivers can molest children.

Both men and women molest children, although the majority of those identified and prosecuted for sex offenses are men. Adults who molest children can generally be divided into two groups, according to their behaviors. A small percentage of sexual offenders have a lifelong exclusive attraction to children and have little or no emotional interest in adult partners. These offenders are classified as pedophiles. Most pedophiles have molested numerous children. However, the majority of sex offenders are not exclusively attracted to children. They generally have adult relationships, and generally have fewer child victims. Also, adults who molest children of their same gender (i.e. an adult male who molests a boy) are not necessarily homosexual.

The incestuous or intra-familial molester is usually an adult male (father, stepfather, grandfather or live-in boyfriend of the mother), however, mothers or other female caregivers also sexually abuse children. The molestation is usually secretive and is sometimes accomplished through misuse of power, mental duress, bribes, tricks or misuse of parental role under the guise of sex education and threats. The molestation usually occurs over an extended period of time, occasionally into the victim's adulthood.

Children are also molested by other children. A significant portion of children are molested by juvenile offenders. Juvenile offenders may offend against other children in their family, such as younger siblings or extended family members. They may also molest extra-familial children that they have regular access to, such as children in the neighborhood or children they babysit. Any sexual contact between juveniles, when one is over the age of sexual consent (16), and the other is under, is considered a criminal act. When both children are under the age of sexual consent, a criminal act is committed when one child is more than two years older than the other child (i.e. a 12

year old boy having sexual contact with a 7 year old boy), or there are forceful or coercive elements. Sexual exploration between peer age children which does not contain forceful or coercive elements is not considered a crime.