

Information for Queensland families about paedophiles

We cannot always stop bad things happening to our children, but we can do a lot to prepare them for some of the dangers in life.

Parents are becoming more alarmed as they read and hear the word “paedophile” and learn about people who sexually abuse children. Adults who behave in a sexual way to children not only break the law but cause pain that can last a lifetime.

We are now openly talking about something that many find hard to believe and something that causes great suffering to children.

Children are more likely to be abused by someone they know than by a stranger. It is understandable for parents to look for ways to protect their children. Parents need to keep a healthy balance and not lose sight of the fact that there are many caring adults who can contribute to their children’s lives in a healthy and responsible manner.

Who are paedophiles?

Paedophiles are people who sexually abuse children of either or of both sexes. They are usually men who are sexually attracted to children and who often abuse a large number of them over a lifetime. Sometimes paedophiles are called child molesters. The word molest is used to mean all forms of sexual activity and includes fondling and touching private parts of the body, masturbating and sexual kissing, as well as sexual intercourse.

What are paedophiles like?

It would be easy if paedophiles walked around with a certain “look” that could help children avoid such people, but there isn’t any one way to describe what they look like. Child molesters can be the respectable member of the community or the ‘nice person’ in the street.

Some things we do know:

- They often choose to work at, or hang around places where there is easy access to children, such as schools, youth groups, fun places, or the internet.
- Paedophiles also look for children in places where they are likely to be unsupervised such as parks, playgrounds, the beach and near schools. They go where parents may be distracted, such as sporting events, fetes and auctions.
- They often have hobbies and interests that appeal to and usually “hook in” children, by showing a keen interest in what they like or by giving material “goodies” such as money or gifts.
- They may win the child’s or parents’ trust over a period of time before they abuse.
- They often tell a child that theirs is a special relationship and what they do together should be a secret.



- They are often in a position of power or authority, which can make it almost too difficult for children to disobey. What does a child do when a teacher suggests they will be given low marks and kept in, or a coach won't give them a game, or a babysitter says that their pet might be killed?
- They can make a child feel "special". This means that children who feel unloved, who feel they are hopeless or bad, or who have been abused at home are especially at risk. They are the children who are more likely to respond to someone who shows them attention and affection.

How can you protect your child?

We cannot always stop bad things happening to our children, but we can do a lot to prepare them for some of the dangers in life. We try to protect our children from being hit by a car. We teach them road safety without scaring them with all the gory details and making them so frightened that they won't cross a road. In the same way we can try to protect our children from the dangers of paedophiles.

- Be suspicious if an adult seems more interested in spending time with your child than with you. It might be that they offer to look after your child, or want to be alone with your child or take your child on a holiday.
- Be wary of people who are overly affectionate or overly loving towards your child or who give your child lots of gifts. Remember, most people have good intentions, so don't jump to conclusions.
- Be very choosy about leaving your children with others. Ask them how they feel about being cared for by that person. Try to work out what they are saying with their behaviour. This is how very young children can tell us if they are afraid.
- Teach your children about different parts of the body. Teach them which are their own private parts. Advise them to tell someone they trust if anyone, even a relative, tries to touch their private parts or suggests something they don't want to do which makes them feel scared or bad.
- Teach your children to try and get away as quickly as possible from any person who makes them feel uncomfortable or frightened and to tell people they trust.
- Teach your children never to keep secrets that make them feel uncomfortable or bad. Always listen to your children and trust what they say even if you are shocked by it.
- Teach your children that adults are not always right. This will help them if a child molester tells them the abuse is okay and not to tell anyone.
- Children should always go to and from school with other children if possible.



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- Teach children to always tell you where they are going. If they are followed or frightened they should knock on the nearest door and ask for the police to be called.
- Always answer your children's questions honestly and at a level that they can understand, even if you are embarrassed.

Things you teach your child will help, but they will not guarantee your child's protection. Children are not old enough to totally protect themselves. It is up to adults to do this.

Special note: For parents of country children. It is easy to think that children are safe in the country. However, paedophiles come from all areas, not just the city. People who molest children look for them in places where they are likely to be unsupervised.

How do you know if your child has been sexually abused?

Sometimes it is very difficult to know and parents can blame themselves for not knowing. It does not necessarily mean that you are not a good parent or that there is something wrong with your relationship with your child. There are some behaviour patterns that can give parents an indication, but it is important to remember that some of these behaviours can also be caused by something else that is happening in your child's life.

Some pointers can be:

- Children may show unusual sexual behaviour or a knowledge of sexual behaviour that you would not expect for their age. They may be more interested in sexual activities than other children and want to touch others in sexual ways - seek professional advice.
- They may have unexplained redness or soreness around the genital areas - seek professional advice.
- Younger children who have been sexually abused may become unusually withdrawn or unusually aggressive, have nightmares or start wetting the bed, acting out of character with their normal behaviour.

Older children may become aggressive, have difficulty at school and even run away from home. Some children may become withdrawn and feel suicidal or mutilate themselves or take unusual life threatening risks. Keep in mind that these behaviours are not necessarily connected to sexual abuse, but they do mean that something is going wrong for your child and that they need help.

- All children need support and help if they are abused. It is important for you to provide love and reassurance to your child but also to get support from someone who specialises in helping sexually abused children.

Reminders

- When children are molested it is usually by a relative or somebody known to their family. Not a stranger.
- Work on your relationship with your children so they find it easy to talk to you about their worries.
- Try to teach about being safe in a way that does not frighten your children.
- Teach children the names of their sexual body parts so they know how to talk about them and feel okay talking about them to you.
- It does not mean there is something wrong with your relationship if your children do not tell you of the abuse.
- Paedophiles are most likely to look for children in places where children are unsupervised or parents are likely to be distracted.
- Children who are abused need support and help.
- Children who are abused are never to blame.

To report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, contact the nearest office of the Department of Child Safety – listed in the white pages under Child Safety or detailed on the website www.childsafety.qld.gov.au, or telephone Crisis Care (07) 3235 9999, freecall 1800 177 135, or contact the Queensland Police Service.



Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
 - Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
 - Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
 - Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
 - Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
 - *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
 - *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information
- Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



Queensland Government
Department of **Communities**