



Protecting God's Children for Adults

They Think the Rules Don't Apply to Them

In the *Protecting God's Children*® program, we say that one of the warning signs of a potential child molester is that they think the rules don't apply to them. What "rules" are we talking about, anyway? And, how can our awareness of this warning sign make a difference?

This warning sign is one that, perhaps, shows up in more areas and situations than any other warning sign of sexual abuse. Because child molesters view the world differently than the rest of us, we have to set aside some of our own assumptions in order to be continuously alert to the ways that this warning sign can show up.

For example, one of the *Protecting God's Children* videos mentions people who don't follow established policies and procedures as an illustration of the concept that "the rules don't apply to them." However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are many other situations that demonstrate this same point.

For us to apply this rule in a meaningful way, it is important that we begin to think about how *our* thought processes and logic could inadvertently benefit a child molester in his or her effort to get access to children and young people. We also need to understand how knowing this warning sign can make a difference.

Ignores Standard Policies and Procedures

People who are a risk to children typically think that the standard policies and operating procedures are meant for someone else—not them. They may try to justify the failure to follow policies and procedures by using such excuses as:

- "I've always done it this way."
- "I don't mind staying late and, anyway, the other religious education teachers need to get their children home."
- "I have a great relationship with these boys. Their parents don't mind them riding alone with me."

The fact that someone tries to go around standard operating policies and procedures does NOT mean that the person is a child molester. Ignoring policies and procedures is a common pattern in some communities. So, how will knowing this warning sign make any difference at all?

One way that knowing this warning sign can impact a potential molester's ability to get access to children is for a community of adults to begin rigorously following the rules. When the rest of those working with children and young people are adhering to the policies and following the established procedures, the behavior of the one who ignores these things becomes quite noticeable. When something is noticeable, it draws the attention of others. And, attention and appropriate action are the keys to intervening before a child is molested.

Ignores the "Rules" of Society

In the video *A Plan to Protect God's Children*, the younger offender demonstrates that he doesn't think the rules of society apply to him. He talks about taking pictures of young naked neighborhood boys at his house—not posed still photos, but action photos of the boys "jumping on the bed, and the like." He thought the photos were okay because the boys "weren't doing anything sexual," so he took them to a local photo developer to have prints made.

Responsible adults know that it is a violation of the rules of our society to photograph naked children—particularly 10-year-old boys from the neighborhood. However, this is an example of how a potential child molester thinks—and how his or her thought process is different from the rest of society. This failure to recognize the inappropriateness of his behavior was the key to his being arrested. Noticing these types of incidents can heighten our awareness of potentially risky adults

in our own communities.

Thinks that they can get away with things.

We can see that there are elements of this attitude in many of the warning signs in the *Protecting God's Children* program. The fact that potential abusers allow children to do things their parents wouldn't permit or that they structure time alone with children in areas where their activities cannot be monitored are examples of this kind of thinking.

However, molesters also think that they can use our "logic system" against us in order to get away with things. For example, it seems logical to assume that anyone who willingly signs an authorization for a criminal background check or allows fingerprinting for that purpose is certain that his or her own record is "clean." In the past, some supervisors have used that logic to forgo the time and expense of actually conducting the background check.

So, many molesters don't believe anyone will actually conduct a background check. One organization demonstrated that notion through its own experience. The Civil Air Patrol started conducting annual criminal background checks on approximately 31,000 adult volunteers in 1988. In the first four years of the background checks, the Civil Air Patrol found 70 convicted sex offenders applying to work with the young people in their program—more than 15 convicted child molesters a year.^[i]

Our view of "references" is another example of how our own logic gets in the way. We normally expect people to provide only those references who will say good things about them. After all, that's what we would do! However, many times the people on a potential child molester's list of references will tell the truth when asked whether the person is safe to be working with children at a church or school.

Child molesters think you won't follow through with the references because they think the rules don't apply to them.

Conclusion

It is important for us to remember that the thinking of a potential child molester is just distorted enough to give us an edge if we pay attention. We must look for the indications that someone thinks that the rules—both written and assumed—don't apply to them. We must also avoid buying into the logic that convinces us of such things as "no one in their right mind would sign and authorization for a criminal background check if they knew they were on a sex offender registry."

Remember—perpetrators of child sexual abuse are *not* in their right mind. And, if we pay attention to the behavior of those around us, this can really work to our advantage in helping to prevent sexual abuse.

[i] Boyle, P., (1994) *Scout's Honor: Sexual abuse in America's most trusted institution*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing.