



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

“Grooming” behavior puts children at risk

By Mark Hare

Julie was just 13 when she started talking online to Tom. She may have met him first at her church, but their relationship grew through emails and texts. “He didn’t act or even sound like a 56-year-old man on the computer,” Julie says. She knew it was wrong to spend so much time—between three and six hours every day—texting a man she didn’t know. “But I did it out of retaliation to my parents. It felt nice to have somebody who wasn’t always trying to tell you what to do.” Julie says she would get very anxious when she wasn’t able to go online. She knew Tom would send her emails asking what she was doing, and she would feel guilty. And besides, she felt she had built a close relationship to him, and he became “very important to me.”

It seemed like such a good idea to her when he suggested running away together. So one night, she kissed her younger brothers and snuck out of the house and into his waiting truck. Three weeks later, they were stopped by police near Reno, Nevada. Tom was convicted on multiple counts and

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What Parents Can Do About Bullying

Whether at school or on the playground, bullying can be an issue. Here is some good advice for parents.

Article courtesy of the National Crime Prevention Council | www.ncpc.org

A big, tough kid stops a smaller kid on his way to school and threatens to hurt him unless he hands over his homework. The popular girls at school won’t let anyone sit at their lunch table except their friends. These two bullying scenarios and others happen more often than most adults realize. Seventy-four percent of 8- to 11-year-olds say teasing and bullying happen at their school. But what exactly is bullying?

Bullying is

- Fighting, threatening, name-calling, teasing, or excluding someone repeatedly and over time
- An imbalance of power, such as size or popularity
- Physical, social, and emotional harm
- Hurting another person to get something

Many parents don’t think that bullying is as big a problem as bringing a weapon to school or drug use but its effects can

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be severe and long lasting. Every day, nearly 160,000 children miss school because they are scared of bullying, according to the National Education Association. Bullying doesn't only negatively affect its victims, but also the bullies themselves.

Kids who are bullied are more likely to

- Do poorly in school
- Have low self-esteem
- Be depressed
- Turn to violent behavior to protect themselves or get revenge on their bullies

Kids who bully are more likely to

- Do poorly in school
- Smoke and drink alcohol
- Commit crimes in the future

Parents can play a central role to preventing bullying and stopping it when it happens. Here are a few things you can do.

- Teach kids to solve problems without using violence and praise them when they do.
- Give children positive feedback when they behave well to help their build self-esteem. Help give them the self-confidence to stand up for what they believe in.
- Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about school, social events, their classmates, and any problems they have.
- Take bullying seriously. Many kids are embarrassed to say they have been bullied. You may only have one chance to step in

and help.

- If you see any bullying, stop it right away, even if your child is the one doing the bullying.
- Encourage your child to help others who need it.
- Don't bully your children or bully others in front of them. Many times kids who are bullied at home react by bullying other kids. If your children see you hit, ridicule, or gossip about someone else, they are also more likely to do so themselves.
- Support bully prevention programs in your child's school. If your school doesn't have one, consider starting one with other parents, teachers, and concerned adults.

When Your Child Is Bullied

Many kids are embarrassed to be bullied and may not tell their parents or another adult right away. If your child comes to you and asks for help with a bully, take it seriously. Many times, if kids aren't taken seriously the first time they ask for help, they don't ask again.

Even if your child doesn't turn to you for help, you can watch for these warning signs that he or she is being bullied.

Kids who are bullied often experience

- Withdrawal
- A loss of friends
- A drop in grades
- A loss of interest in activities he or she previously enjoyed
- Torn clothing
- Bruises
- A need for extra money or supplies

If you think your child is being bullied or if your child has told you that he or she is being bullied, you can help. Parents are often the best resource to build a child's self-confidence and teach him or her how to best solve problems.

Here are a few ways you can help

- Talk to your child's teacher about it instead of confronting the bully's parents. If

the teacher doesn't act to stop the bullying, talk to the principal.

- Teach your child nonviolent ways to deal with bullies, like walking away, playing with friends, or talking it out.

- Help your child act with self-confidence. With him or her, practice walking upright, looking people in the eye, and speaking clearly.

- Don't encourage your child to fight. This could lead to him or her getting hurt, getting in trouble, and beginning more serious problems with the bully.

- Involve your child in activities outside of school. This way he or she can make friends in a different social circle.

Some children seem to be bullied all the time, while others rarely get picked on. Why do some kids seem to attract all of the bullies?

Kids who are bullied often

- Are different from other kids, whether by size, race, sexually, or have different interests
- Seem weak, either physically or emotionally
- Are insecure
- Want approval
- Won't tell on their bullies

When Your Child Is a Bully

It's hard for any parent to believe that their child is a bully, but sometimes it happens. But just because your child bullies doesn't mean that he or she will bully forever. Parents are one of the best resources to help their child stop bullying and start interacting positively with their classmates.

Your child may bully if, he or she

- Lacks empathy and doesn't sympathize with others
- Values aggression



- Likes to be in charge
- Is an arrogant winner and a sore loser
- Often fights with brothers and sisters
- Is impulsive

What you can do to stop your child from bullying

- Take it seriously. Don't treat bullying as a passing phase. Even if you're not worried about long-lasting effects on your child, another child is being hurt.

- Talk to your child to find out why he or she is bullying. Often, children bully when they feel sad, angry, lonely, or insecure and many times major changes at home or school may bring on these feelings.

- Help build empathy for others and talk to your child about how it feels to be bullied.

- Ask a teacher or a school counselor if your child is facing any problems at school, such as if your child is struggling with a particular subject or has difficulty making friends. Ask them for advice on how you and your child can work through the problem.

- Ask yourself if someone at home is bullying your child. Often, kids who bully are bullied themselves by a parent, family member, or another adult.



given a long prison term. Julie says he sent her a letter blaming her for everything and promising to kill her if he ever gets out. She realizes now how much danger she put herself in "because of this huge emptiness inside of me."

Her life might have been different, "if I could have talked to people."

The story comes from "Julie's Journey," one of several videos for children and adults found on an education website (<http://www.nsteens.org>) developed by the Rochester-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The National Center, and the Bivona Child Advocacy Center are just two of the Rochester area agencies that provide training and resources to help parents, educators, faith leaders, coaches and others prevent child abuse by recognizing the ways would-be predators can "groom" a child, just as Tom groomed Julie.

"Grooming is preparing a child for abuse," says Lindsey Macaluso, program manager at Bivona. There are longer, more layered definitions, but that's it in a nutshell, she says. The problem "is not a stranger in the bush jumping out. Ninety percent of abuse is committed by people a child, knows, loves and trusts."

Predators are "very skilled at building a relationship so that they can take advantage," says Pam Weaver, the National Center's deputy executive director for New York. Predators are manipulative and astute at determining the needs of a particular child, says the National Center's executive director, Ed Suk. "Grooming can take weeks, months or even years," Suk says.

The grooming process forges a close relationship between predator and victim,



and can lay the foundation for the secrecy that one day will be necessary to cover the abusive behavior. All children and teens are potentially vulnerable, but some are more vulnerable than others. Those who are lonely, for example, or have low self-esteem, or who are experiencing some family or personal crisis such as divorce, or death of a loved one, even a long-distance move that leaves the child temporarily without friends.

What are warning signs that a child may be in an abusive situation?

- Is the child suddenly secretive?
- Is the child pulling away from family and friends, becoming more isolated?
- Is there an adult who seems to have "too much interest" in the child, always looking for alone time or a chance to take the child on an outing?

Sometimes a child who is abused retreats,

sometimes a child becomes aggressive or overtly sexualized, or reverts to bed-wetting or infantile behavior, Macaluso says.

But none of these warning signs necessarily means there is an abusive situation. Kids sometimes withdraw or act out or regress for other reasons.

And not every adult who is solicitous is a predator. Kids need uncles, older cousins, neighbors or family friends to be a part of their lives.

The most important thing a parent can do, Weaver says, is to "foster open communication with the child." Make sure your child knows that they can come to you with anything that seems or feels funny. Don't try to take away computers or cell phones, she says. Better to embrace the technology and help young children steer clear of dangerous online conversations.

"Think about every situation," Weaver says, "and try to avoid having your child in one-on-one" encounters with others.

"Empower children to know themselves, to know their body parts, to know their bodies belong to them," Macaluso says. Many children, she says, do not have the language they need to talk about body parts or what has happened to them. Even from an early age, she says, children should be given the language that can empower them to speak.

"It's important that a child has a voice. Contrary to what our culture says—that children should be seen, not heard—children should have a voice and should know they can have personal space. You want to instill respect for others, but let them know they are allowed control over their own bodies."

Mark Hare is a Rochester-based freelance writer.

Learn More

AGENCIES:

Bivona Child Advocacy Center

1 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, NY 14620
585-935-7800

www.BivonaCAC.org

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

275 Lake Avenue
Rochester, NY 14608
585-242-0900

www.missingkids.com

TRAINING:

Darkness to Light

2-hour workshop that teaches adults to better protect children from sexual abuse.

Who: educators, coaches, childcare providers, youth service organizations, the faith-based community, adult family members and more. **Cost:** \$20

Where: Bivona Child Advocacy Center.

Upcoming sessions:

Thursday, July 14 (11 a.m. to 1 p.m.),
Tuesday, July 26 (9 a.m. to 11 a.m.),
Thursday, August 18 (11 a.m. to 1 p.m.)

More information:

<http://www.bivonacac.org/darkness-2-light/>

VIDEOS AND OTHER MATERIALS FOR CHILDREN 5-17

NetSmartzKids, for children 5-10. Focus on online safety with age-appropriate videos, games, e-books, and tips.

<http://www.netsmartzkids.org/LearnWithClicky>

NetSmartzTeens, for young people 8-12. Animated videos explain Internet safety for tweens who use cell phones and social media.

<http://www.nsteens.org>

Real-Life Stories for ages 11-17. Videos teach teens to think critically about online safety and how to recognize risky behavior.

<http://www.nsteens.org/Videos>

Summer Safety Tips



It's that time of year again when the kids are out of school enjoying summer. Though there are no worries about homework, there can be worries about the safety of your children during these summer months.

Here are some links to help keep your kids cool and safe this summer:

<http://www.safekids.org/tip/swimming-safety-tips>

http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/children.htm

<http://www.cdc.gov/family/kids/summer/>

<http://www.healthline.com/health/summer-health/beat-the-heat>

<http://www.safekids.org/tip/playground-safety-tips>



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:

Karen Rinefield,

Diocesan Coordinator
of Safe Environment Education
and Compliance,
585-328-3228, ext. 1255
or krineferd@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
or dhousel@dor.org.

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ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>
PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens: <http://www.nsteens.org/>

A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.common Sense Media.org/parent-concerns>

A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe: <http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>
Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety: <http://www.faithandsafety.org>
Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
BivonaCAC.org / 585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8479 / chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795 / cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
cacfingerlakes.org / 315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization: d2l.org

Steuben County:
Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org / 716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
nyscarcc.org / 866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team: 585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6