

Community Education:

Identifying GROOMING Behaviors

Grooming: Actions deliberately undertaken with the goal of befriending a child in order to lower a child's sexual inhibitions or establish an intimate friendship in preparation for the eventual act of sexual intercourse with the child.

- Grooming behaviors begin with seemingly appropriate acts towards children, such as showing interest in their hobbies.
- Grooming behaviors may evolve to include actions that lead the child to feel obligated to the adult, such as using his or her influence to help the child do things like skip school or avoid punishments.
- Grooming may also include illegal behaviors, such as showing pornography to the child to persuade the child that sexual activity between adults and children is normal.
- Grooming can occur on the Internet; offenders may pose as children in online message-sharing forums while learning details about potential victims and attempting to gain their trust. Sex offenders' ultimate goals typically include online sexual activity (in chat rooms, for instance) or meeting the child in person to engage in sexual activity.
- Some offenders seduce children through intimidation and persuasion to gain compliance.
- Some offenders seek out the children of single mothers for the purpose of victimization.
- Offenders may provide superficial care and attention to children who may be lacking this interest at home.
- Some offenders will strive to gain the trust of families and communities in order to gain access to victims.
- Offenders can be respected community members in positions of authority.

Sources:

Texas Police Central, "Child Sexual Abuse," <http://www.texaspolicecentral.com/childsex.html>
Seattle Police Department, "Characteristics and Behavioral Indicators of a Pedophile," http://www.scn.org/www/bw/ped_char.pdf.

Other Resources for Law Enforcement

American Probation and Parole Association
www.appa-net.org

Center for Sex Offender Management
www.csom.org

International Association of Chiefs of Police
www.theiacp.org

Interpol
www.usdoj.gov/usncb

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
www.ncmec.org

Project Safe Childhood
www.projectsafefchildhood.gov

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registration and Tracking
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/smart

U.S. Marshals Service
www.usmarshals.gov



This project is supported by grant number 2006-WP-BX-K005 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and do not represent the official position or policies of the Department of Justice.

Framing a Law Enforcement Response:

Addressing Community Concerns About Sex Offenders



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

515 N. Washington Street Alexandria, VA 22314 703.836.6767

www.theiacp.org

TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS POSED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

To better prepare law enforcement officers to respond to questions from the public about sex offenders and their crimes, this pamphlet provides talking points designed to help officers frame a response to 10 frequently asked questions.

1 Why is a sex offender moving into my community?

- State that unless court-ordered restrictions exist, the offender is constitutionally allowed to live wherever he or she chooses.
- Explain that law enforcement agencies do not have the legal authority to dictate where sex offenders can live.
- If applicable, discuss existing residency restrictions that prevent sex offenders from living in close proximity to parks, schools, playgrounds, and other places children gather.

2 What is law enforcement doing to keep my community safe from sex offenders?

- If applicable, describe the address verification process.
- Describe existing partnerships with other public safety and community agencies.
- Discuss the use of sex offender registries to track and monitor sex offenders in your jurisdiction.
- Notify citizens of upcoming community education meetings, discuss the importance of community education, and encourage citizens to attend.

3 What is community notification, how is it done, and for which offenders?

- Describe the purpose and goals of community notification.
- Describe the methods of community notification used by your agency.
- Explain the information released to the public and highlight the type of critical public safety information that is released (the type of offense, certain victim information, and so on).

4 Which offenders are required to register and for how long?

- Describe your local registration process (where offenders register, how often, for how long, and through what methods.)
- Describe the importance of registration, including the purpose and goals.
- Educate residents about what they can and cannot do with information found on the public registry.

5 Why don't I know about every sex offender living in my community?

- Explain that not all sex offenders are alike and do not represent an equal risk to the community.
- Inform community members that only information deemed necessary and relevant to public safety is released, and refer residents to the relevant state or local Web site.
- If applicable, describe the process through which risk levels are assigned to offenders upon release.

6 If the offender is dangerous, why is he or she being released into the community?

- Explain that sex offenders and other criminals have lived and always will live in our communities.
- Describe the partnership between corrections and law enforcement to monitor the offender after release.
- Outline state sentencing guidelines.
- Describe the process of an offender's release.

7 What can I do to protect my family?

- Caution parents and guardians to be aware of behaviors exhibited by known or unknown sex offenders to groom a child for abuse (see back panel of this pamphlet for details about grooming behaviors).
- Urge parents and guardians to maintain open communication lines with their children.
- Tell parents to be aware of behavioral changes in their children.
- Share basic safety tips with parents, including Internet safety tips, and advise them to share those tips with their children.
- Remind residents that 90 percent of all sex crimes are committed by someone known to the victim, such as a family member or an acquaintance.

8 What resources are available to victims of sexual assault?

- If applicable, describe notification options for victims when an offender is released from incarceration and completes registration or updates information.

- Describe applicable conditions of release (such as no contact with victim).
- Describe orders of protection.
- Refer individuals to local victim advocacy organizations.
- Describe the importance of the victim impact statements that are included in the sex offender's permanent file.
- Refer residents to your state's bill of rights for victims of crime.

9 The sex offender in my neighborhood stands in his front yard when the students get off the school bus. What can I do?

- Describe the difference between lawful and unlawful actions.
- Encourage residents to report suspect behavior to police.

10 Aren't all sex offenders the same?

- Explain that there is no established profile for sex offenders.
- State that sex offenders are a heterogeneous group. Sex offenders come from all walks of life and from all socioeconomic groups.
- Explain that the likelihood of recidivism varies for each offender and is dependent on certain factors (the type of offense, the victim, and so on).
- Explain that a sex offense is any sexual behavior with a child, a nonconsenting adult, or anyone who is unable to give consent due to physical condition or mental capacity.

IACP Efforts

Since November 2005, the IACP has been working in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to research law enforcement's role in sex offender management and to identify the key policy and operational challenges of monitoring and tracking sex offenders in the community. The IACP is developing multiple products and resources to enhance law enforcement's response to sex offenders in the community with the goals of increasing offender accountability and preventing future victimization.

For more information on sex offender management related projects or resources, please contact Alissa Huntoon at 1-800-843-4227 Ext. 812 or huntoon@theiacp.org, or Christina Horst at 1-800-843-4227 Ext. 830 or horstc@theiacp.org.