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Are Your Children Ready for School?

By Dorothy M Neddermeyer

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Spiral bound note book, 3-ring binder, 3-hole lined paper, pencils, pens, erasers, crayons, stapler, scissors, paste, book bag, pencil case, shoes, socks, underwear, shirts, pants, skirts, jacket, uniforms.... Check, Check, Check..., everything is ready. Or is it?

I head a report on the radio yesterday, "School supply sales are down from last year." I am perplexed. What benefit does that fact make in anyone's life? What is the purpose of reporting this? How will that information help me or anyone else? As I mused about this inane topic, I realized the most important information for children returning to school is not reported. The most important information parents and children need when going to school is how to protect children from sexual abuse perpetrators. Every year throughout the world several hundred children are sexually abused (sexually assaulted) by teachers, bus drivers, janitors, or other adults associated with your child's school experience. To adequately prepare your child for school you need to prepare your child to protect him/herself from cunning sexual abuse perpetrators.

How can children protect themselves? First and foremost we need to accept the fact that sexual abuse perpetrators may seem very average and ordinary to the world. In spite of all the reports of sexual abuse by pillars of the community—teachers, clergy, coaches, we still want to cling to the belief that a sexual abuse perpetrator is the disheveled man with a scraggly beard and wearing a dirty trench coat. We find it very difficult to believe the people we like, admire, trust and work with would do such a heinous thing.

The frightening truth about sexual abuse perpetrators is that within their belief system they do not hold beliefs reflecting society's moral and ethical values. Sexual abuse perpetrators frequently pass lie detector tests because their moral and ethical values do not reflect the standards on which the test is based. They feel no inner conflict with what they have done, therefore in their belief system they are not lying when they state, "Never ever. I could never harm a child or anyone. It's not in my heart. That is not who I am." Most perpetrators go to great lengths to present themselves as exemplary people; the teacher, who frequently stays after school to help a child having academic difficulties or the gym teacher/coach, who takes special interest in a budding athlete.

I am not suggesting that everyone who does these things is a sexual abuse perpetrator. Insidiously, perpetrators demonstrate the right, moral, and exemplary behavior to develop credibility and establish proof of their love of children, thus thwarting any suspicion of wrong doing; and to have access to lure

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the innocent, trusting child. Perpetrators frequently take jobs which afford easy access to children—child care workers, teachers, coaches, etc.

Second, we need to know the definition of sexual abuse.

"Traditionally, incest [sexual abuse] was defined as: sexual intercourse between two persons too closely related to marry legally—sex between siblings, first cousins, the seduction by fathers of their daughters. This dysfunctional blood relationship, however, does not describe what children are experiencing. We need to look beyond the blood bond and include the emotional bond between the victim and his or her perpetrator.

The new definition relies less on the blood bond between the victim and the perpetrator and more on the experience of the child. Incest is both sexual abuse and an abuse of power. It is violence that does not require force. Another is using the victim, treating them in a way that they do not want or in a way

that is not appropriate by a person with whom a different relationship is required. It is abuse because it does not take into consideration the needs or wishes of the child; rather, it meets the needs of the other person at the child's expense. If the experience has sexual meaning for another person, in lieu of a nurturing purpose for the benefit of the child, it is abuse. If it is unwanted or inappropriate for her age or the relationship, it is abuse. Incest [sexual abuse] can occur through words, sounds, or even exposure of the child to sights or acts that are sexual but do not involve her. If she is forced to see what she does not want to see, for instance, by an exhibitionist, it is abuse. If a child is forced into an experience that is sexual in content or overtone that is abuse. As long as the child is induced into sexual activity with someone who is in a position of greater power, whether that power is derived through the perpetrator's age, size, status, or relationship, the act is abusive. A child who cannot refuse, or who believes she or he cannot refuse, is a child who has been violated." —E. Sue Blume, *Secret Survivors*

Third, a child needs to have specific information, tools and techniques to know what to do.

Self-protection offers a direct and effective way for children to help themselves. Who, other than the child, is in a better position to protect him/herself? Perpetrators say they can sense a child to victimize. They can tell by the child's demeanor, body language, and facial expression. They sense the fear, the helplessness, the passivity. They chose a child who is easily intimidated or controlled so hopefully the child won't tell. Secrecy, needless-to-say, is paramount for the perpetrator. Whenever a person is traumatized, he or she resorts to familiar behavior; for girls this behavior is usually passivity, while boys usually 'tough it out;—thinking if they are strong and unemotional, no harm can occur. Sexual crimes against children can only be committed if the perpetrator finds someone who will hopefully keep the secret. No child needs to fall prey to these cunning predators.

There is no foolproof method of preventing perpetrators from abusing a child. They are cunning predators, who have perfected their predatory skills to get what they want. Therefore, you need to heed and investigate any warning signals. Warning signals might be:

- an aversion to a teacher.
- sudden outbursts of anger and there is no apparent reason known for such anger.
- any unusual or unexplained behavior change.
- not wanting to go to school on a particular day of the week—the day gym or music class is held for instance.
- not wanting to ride the bus or be around a particular person.
- the gym teacher says your child is athletically 'gifted' and he or she wants to develop your child's athletic abilities if your child practiced one-on-one after school.

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·a teacher gives your child a gift. A gift is sometimes an overture to win your trust and groom your child for seduction.

What to do:

·Teach your child Good/Appropriate Touch.

·Teach your child Appropriate Body Boundaries

·Foster Self-Esteem and Good Body Image

·Teach your child "Tell Mommy and Daddy Everything—No Secrets.

·Allow your child to command respect regarding dislikes and touch with family members, friends or authority figures.

·Talk with and listen to your child until you are satisfied the aversion is unrelated to improper behavior by the teacher.

·Make a habit of coming to school unannounced during the one-on-one practices or other times to become 'known' as an attentive parent.

·Be present at games and practice. If you can't be there, ask another parent to be the 'stand-in' parent.

Tell the coach who is 'standing-in.'

·Trust and honor your child's intuitive reactions. If your child feels uncomfortable with someone, respect

their intuitive sense.

·Teach your child to avoid going into a teacher's office alone—many children unwittingly go into a teacher's office at the teacher's request to help carry books or equipment—with the door closed and alone with the teacher, the child is abused.

Dorothy M. Neddermeyer, PhD, MSW, CSW, CCH, CRT specializes in sexual and physical abuse recovery and prevention. . She is Executive Director of Genesis Consultants, Inc. and 1-800-THERAPIST referral service and www.Gen-Assist.com Her book, "If I'd Only Known...Sexual Abuse in or out of the Family: A Guide to Prevention" is available in ebook or soft cover and can be ordered through <http://www.gen-assist.com> or any book store.

A New School Year

By Kimberly Chastain

Depending on where you live school will be starting this month or next month. A new school year is usually exciting and scary at the same time. Most children won't admit it, but they are ready to get back to school and see their friends. As much as I love not having a rigid schedule in the summer, I do miss the structure of the school year. We get up later in the summer and go to bed later as well.

When you think of a new School Year what are your first thoughts? Back to school shopping for clothes and school supplies. A big transition from elementary to middle school, or to high school, even college. A new teacher who you heard is strict or not strict enough? There can often be lots of anxiety with a new school year for parents as well as children.

Can I offer a few suggestions for your back to school list? Remember whose children they are. Yes they are our children, but they are God's children. He cares about them and loves them more than we

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ever could. Pray for your children. Pray for their academics, choice of friends, study habits, and wisdom to make Godly choices. Pray for their teachers. If their teachers are not Christians, pray that God can use you to be an example to their teachers. Pray for the administrators in your child's school. Pray for the safety of your child and all the children at their school. Pray that your children will see a Godly example in you, with how you handle school difficulties or problems with your children. Begin praying with other mothers for their children as well. We don't have to carry the burden alone. Above all remember God is in control. I often have a difficult time remembering that principle.

In closing, God is a mighty God and he cares about our concerns. I often pray on the way to taking my children to school. I pray when my children are having difficulties with friends. God cares about everything in our lives and He truly cares about our children. My mother is a prayer warrior for my children and myself. May we all become prayer warriors for our children. Take your problems to Him and leave them there.

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Kimberly M. Chastain, MS, LMFT is the Christian Working Mom Coach and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who specializes in helping Christian women make the most of their lives. She is the author of the on-line course, "I Can't Say No" and Pearls of Encouragement for Christian Working Moms, a free e-book. If you suffer from "I Can't Say `No" Syndrome, visit Kimberly's site today for the details on an exciting email course that's sure to set you free!

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