

PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN FROM GROOMING

*** Disclaimer**

This article discusses the topic of child sexual abuse and may be triggering to those who have experienced sexual abuse.



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by **Jamie Leslie**

It was a typical Saturday afternoon, when I found myself streaming the show “Leaving Neverland” on HBO. After the show, I looked over at my daughter and felt a sense of panic. Thoughts were racing through my head of “how can I protect her from this” and “how will I know if she is being groomed”. This is what led me to dig more into grooming and what parents can do to protect their children from being groomed.

For those of you who have not viewed the documentary “Leaving Neverland”, it focuses on two men, Wade Robson and James Safecruck, who allege they were sexually abused by the pop singer Michael Jackson. The documentary looks into how sexual predators utilize “grooming” to sexually abuse their victims. This article’s focus is not to go into the documentary or to take any particular side. It is to inform parents about grooming and to provide information on how parents can utilize preventive measures to help protect their children from this sadly common technique of sexual abuse.

If you haven’t heard of the term grooming, you may initially think that it refers to personal hygiene. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, grooming is described as the process that sexual predators use to prepare their victims for sexual abuse or assault. There is a psychological aspect that predators use with their victims as a way to increase their attachment and bond to the child and increase the opportunity of sexual abuse.

The statistics point out that it is not “stranger danger” that is often the cause
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When Good Men Behave Badly

by David B. Wexler
Book review by Charles McBride

Michael, a man who felt profoundly injured when his wife turned him down for sex, yelled at his wife and became mercilessly sarcastic with her. He told the author about his propensity for shame.

"I never knew my father. He left when I was one, then occasionally reappeared but never followed through on anything. My mother remarried a jerk. My older brother, a half-brother, he always made me feel worthless. He was a put-down artist. Now it's so easy for me to feel put down by my wife. And now I feel even more shamed for what I have done to her. I can't look her in the eye sometimes. I go to church and can't walk in the building because I have done so many things so wrong."

This is just one of many stories shared by David B. Wexler, Ph.D., in his book *When Good Men Behave Badly*. Using research, stories from his career as a therapist, and examples from television and movies, Dr. Wexler helps to explain why men who have moral codes and yearn for meaningful, mutual, and lasting connection, too often allow their inner fears to push them to lose these opportunities for genuine relationship or to go astray.

If we want more men to become empathic to themselves and others, we must first become empathic to men's emotional pain, in a manner that neither excuses the responsibility for certain "bad" action, nor vilifies a man who is struggling to come out of the emotional cold—back into the fold of human connection and kindness—after he slips from grace.

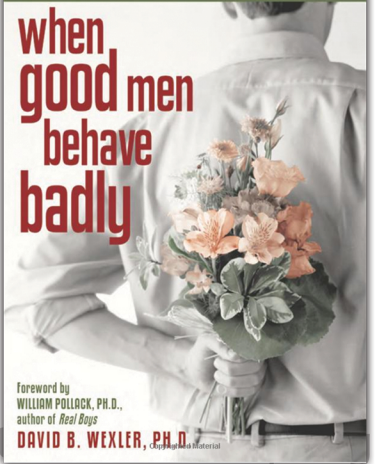
Wexler explains that good men look at the people in their lives as mirrors, reflecting back who they want to be. If what they see (the response they get from these people) is not the image they expect, then the mirror must be broken and it is the fault of those other people. This broken image can be caused by an abusive childhood, a prior toxic relationship, or unattainable expectations from their parents. And unfortunately, this can be the basis for unhealthy relationships with partners, significant others and their own children.

Wexler does a good job of explaining the different issues and then providing the reader with exercises to practice changing maladaptive behaviors into healthy ones. This may be the best feature of the book. He ends with a chapter for the women who are in the lives of these good men behaving badly, and gives them tips for how to help the men in their lives.

For any man who recognizes these behaviors or who has caught himself saying, "This is not the man I want to be", I strongly recommend this book.



Change Your Behavior,
Change Your Relationship



About Three Trails . . .

Three Trails Employee and Family Assistance Program

is a counseling agency designed to respond to the needs of employees, spouses, life partners and dependent family members (ages 4 up to 21) of participating businesses and organizations.

Our Mission

is to provide professional assistance early and in a timely manner so that problems do not worsen. Such concerns may include workplace stress, marriage and family tensions, alcohol and drug abuse, and other difficulties. Counselors at Three Trails assess the scope and nature of the presenting concerns and will provide counseling or refer the individuals to specialized services if appropriate.



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Counting your Sheep: Tips on Improving Sleep

By Jamie Leslie

Has the Sandman forgotten to visit your house? The following are some tips that help improve on that much coveted "Good Night's Sleep".

1. Reduce exposure to Cell Phones, iPods, computer use & watching television before bed time.

Studies are showing that the blue light that emanates from certain electronics can mess with your much needed circadian rhythm. It can actually trick your brain into thinking that it is daytime. So

consider not using electronics at least an hour before you go to bed or utilize electronics that have a setting on it that blocks the blue light after a certain time.

2. Stop drinking caffeine after 5:00pm.

A single dose of caffeine stimulates your nervous system and may stop you from the natural relaxing process that your body needs to sleep at night.

3. Consider a Melatonin supplement.

Melatonin is a sleep hormone that tells your brain when it's time to relax. It is often used to treat insomnia. Another supplement to consider is Valerian Root. There are some teas (such as *Celestial Seasoning's Sleepy Time Tea*) that contain Valerian Root.

4. Change up your Bedroom Environment.

Adding a sound machine that utilizes white noise can help improve on your level of sleep. Also if the room itself is cool, you are more likely to sleep a deeper sleep.

5. Develop an evening routine.

Setting up a consistent night time routine that helps you relax and get ready for the night can help improve on your quality of sleep. Some things to consider could be: a relaxing bath with Epsom salts, meditating or using mindfulness before bed, listening to relaxing music, or a bedtime yoga routine.

6. Get some sunlight during the day.

Natural sunlight helps keep your circadian rhythm healthy. It can also reduce the time it takes for you to fall asleep. Without enough sunlight, your body doesn't produce enough serotonin and this can impact your melatonin production and increase chances of experiencing depression.



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of child sexual abuse/assault. Instead, the statistics point to the reality that the majority of child abuse occurs from within the family's inner circle of trust. Kavita Varma-White's article titled "7 Ways Parents Can Protect Kids from Child Sexual Abuse" notes that "90 percent of children who are victims of abuse know their abuser". Her article also notes that "60 percent of child victims are sexually abused by the people a family trusts."

A sexual predator will not generally use violence to achieve their goals if they are a part of the family's inner circle. Instead, they will utilize grooming techniques. They will not only groom their potential victims but they will also work to groom the parents/guardians in order to elicit their trust. Kristen Jenson the author of "#MeToo – 10 Ways Predators Are Grooming Kids" notes the following as the most common grooming behaviors:

1. The predator seeks out and pays extra special attention to a child
2. They act overly interested in the child
3. They may buy them gifts and treats
4. They will often touch or hug the child in front of trusted adults, which makes the child think that the touching is okay
5. Finds out what the child likes/interests are and then will claim they have the same likes/interests
6. Pretends to be good friends to the child, maybe even best friends, and will be an active listener when the child is upset.
7. They will seek out ways to be alone with the child – for example they may often offer to babysit even when the parent doesn't need a sitter.
8. The predator will often tell the child dirty jokes or show them pornography to introduce them to the concept of sex.
9. They will groom the parent by offering to help watch the child, be a listening ear for the parent, give the parent presents, or even involve themselves in family events.
10. The predator will also use social media or other forms of technology as a way to continue their grooming with their victim. They may be on the phone for hours talking to the child or consistently messaging them as a way to increase the child's attachment and bond with them.

There are things that parents can put in place with their children that help decrease the chance of sexual abuse at the hands of a groomer. One preventative measure to use is to start calling children's private body parts by their correct names. Often parents and caregivers will use nicknames when referring to genitalia. According to the article "Call Children's Private Body Parts What They Are" written by Dona Matthews, this helps kids feel comfortable using the standard terms for their private parts. If the child feels awkward about talking about certain body parts, they will be less likely to talk freely with their parents if someone is touching them inappropriately. Research taken from the American Academy of Pediatrics has shown that knowing the correct terms for body parts helps with body image and facilitates more self-confidence.

Another tip for parents is to start talking about sex and body safety as early as three years old. It is not uncommon for this to feel like a tough conversation to have and too many times it gets put off until the child has become a teen. By then, your child has most likely learned about sex and body safety from the wrong resources (such as the internet, friends from school, or worst case scenario a sexual predator). Start by talking about body parts and then discussing safe touch. Sometimes it helps to note that the parts of the body that their swimsuit covers are not okay for others to touch. Talk to them about the difference with a medical exam when mom or dad is present and inappropriate touch. It is also noted to talk to them about "keeping secrets". If someone touches them inappropriately and tells them to keep a secret that is not okay. Also discuss with them what they would do if they knew a friend who told them they were being touched inappropriately by an adult. This conversation may help them externalize their own problem solving solutions they would use if they were being groomed.

Other important talks to have with your children include discussing what inappropriate behaviors in relationships are. Talk about how it is inappropriate for a teacher, coach, family members, and spiritual leader to show them pornography or tell them dirty jokes. Teach your children about grooming behavior. Also consider checking in consistently with whom your child is spending time with. Don't assume that Jerry down the street is a child close to their age. Be the nosy parent that checks their social media account (I recommend weekly checks). It is helpful to be aware of what activities your child is involved in and if that specific activity or group utilizes any screening for their adult employees/volunteers. Certain organizations such as the 4-H Club, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts do screen their volunteers. Consider choosing the organizations or activities that have more than one adult leader present at events.

Creating a safe and open space for your child to share and ask vulnerable questions is also recommended. If you react with anger, suspicion or inattentiveness when they share something with you, they learn that they have to keep things from you. However, if you provide them with support and genuine positive regard when they talk to you about their daily concerns, then you create a safe space for them to share early on when they have concerns with a potential sexual predator.

Ultimately, we cannot lock our children in a tall tower or put them in a secure bubble. We cannot always protect them from the emotional and physical trauma that they may experience. But there are steps we can do to teach them skills on prevention and reporting to make them less of a growing statistic.

Remember, Three Trails EFAP, can be a resource to use with the roads you and your children travel and you may give us a call if you need additional resources or counseling services.

