



Keeping Kids Safe from Sexual Offenders

The most recent statistics* (10/24/13) state there are **11,368** registered sex offenders residing in Los Angeles County. The Los Angeles County Probation Department supervises approximately **1,200** under regular adult probation supervision and approximately **225** sex offender registrants under Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS or AB 109).

Los Angeles County Probation is urging parents to empower themselves by being informed and prepared. According to our research, the predator most likely to target children is someone you already know.

Know the facts. Protect your children

Here are some common myths and facts regarding sexual assaults on children.

Myth #1: *Most sexual assaults on children are committed by strangers; most child sexual abusers find their victims by frequenting such places as school yards and playgrounds.*

Fact: **Most child sexual abusers offend against children whom they know and with whom they have established a relationship. Most sexual assaults (90%) are committed by someone known to the victim or the victim's family.**

Approximately 60% of boys and 80% of girls who are sexually victimized are abused by someone known to the child or the child's family (Lieb, Quinsey, and Berliner, 1998). Relatives, friends, baby-sitters, persons in positions of authority over the child, or persons who supervise children are more likely than strangers to commit a sexual assault.

(Source: Center for Sex Offender Management, <http://www.csom.org> and <http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov>)



Myth #2: "Most child sexual abusers use physical force or threat to gain compliance from their victims."

Fact: In the majority of cases, abusers gain access to their victims through deception and enticement, seldom using force. Abuse typically occurs within a long-term, ongoing relationship between the offender and victim and escalates over time. (Source: <http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov>)

Myth #3: All Sex Offenders are "Pedophiles" or "Predators". Child sexual abusers are only attracted to children and are not capable of appropriate sexual relationships.

Fact: Generally speaking, "pedophile" is a clinical term to describe someone who is sexually attracted to prepubescent children; "Sex Offender" is a legal term. While there is a small subset of child sexual abusers who are exclusively attracted to children, the majority of the individuals who sexually abuse children are (or have previously been) attracted to adults.

Myth #4: "Most sex offenders reoffend."

Fact: Reconviction data suggest that this is not the case. Re-offense rates vary among different types of sex offenders and are related to specific characteristics of the offender and the offense. Furthermore, recidivism rates for sex offenders are lower than for the general criminal population. (Source: Center for Sex Offender Management, <http://www.csom.org>)

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), most mental health and child protection professionals agree that child sexual abuse is not uncommon and is a serious problem in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that approximately 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18.



The American Psychological Association defines child sexual abuse as the following touching and non-touching behaviors:

- sexual kissing
 - inappropriate touching or fondling of the child's genitals, breasts, or buttocks
 - masturbation
 - oral-genital contact
 - sexual or digital (with fingers) penetration
 - pornography (forcing the child to view or use of the child in)
 - child prostitution
 - exposure or "flashing" of body parts to the child
 - voyeurism (ogling of the child's body)
 - verbal pressure for sex
- (Source: <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/child-sexual-abuse.aspx>)

Create a "Family Safety Plan"

Parents should teach children the following tips on staying safe:

- **DO tell a safe adult if anyone acts inappropriately towards them (e.g. creepy, too friendly, threatening, offering gifts in a secret way, or touching them)**
- **DO** talk with a safe adult about any interactions that make them feel weird, bad, or confused.
- **DON'T** promise to keep secrets
- **DON'T** help strangers and people you don't know. Instead run and get a safe adult.
- **DON'T** enter the houses of people you do not know very well.
- **DON'T** enter the cars of people you do not know very well.

Help your child create a list of trusted adults with contact information that they can use if they need help. Parents should encourage their children to feel free to ask questions and talk about their experiences; make it clear that they should feel free to report abuse to you or any other trusted adult; if there is concern about possible sexual abuse, ask questions.



Furthermore, parents should make sure to teach children:

- that if inappropriate touching is never their fault and that you will not be mad
- Basic sexual education - a health professional can provide basic sexual education to your children if you feel uncomfortable doing so.
- That sexual advances from adults are *always* wrong.
- The difference between good secrets (those that are not kept secret for long) and bad secrets (those that must stay secret forever).
- The difference between “okay” and “not okay” touches.
- Accurate names for their private parts and how to take care of them (i.e., bathing, wiping after bathroom use) so they don’t have to rely on adults or older children for help.
- That adults and older children never need help with their own private parts.
- That they can make decisions about their own bodies and say “no” when they do not want to be touched or do not want to touch others (even refusing to give hugs).
- To use a “Family Code Word”. Children should be asked to choose a Family Code Word that will be used in the event of an emergency. This code word should never be shared. A common tactic is for someone to tell a child that someone terrible happened to their parent or there has been some kind of emergency and the child must go with them. The use of a “Family Code Word” allows the child to be certain that the emergency is real. Also, keeping a list of names and numbers of trusted adults available to your children can be helpful as well. (Source: <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/child-sexual-abuse.aspx?item=3>)



L.A. County Probation Department recommends:

Parents use the State's *sex offender registry* (available at www.meganslaw.ca.gov). However parents should not solely depend on the registry. Information from the registry should be used to identify areas/people that you or your children may need to avoid. Remember, not all registered sex offenders present the same risk and the registry only has people that have been convicted. In addition, harassing anyone on the offender registry is a punishable crime.

Polly Klaas Foundation

What to teach your kids: "Dangerous Adult Behaviors"
<http://www.pollyklaas.org/safe/talk-to-strangers.html>

Stop it Now! (Survivors of Sexual Abuse)

Prevention Tip Sheets: "Talking to Children and Teens"
http://www.stopitnow.org/talking_to_kids

Probation Department is committed to enhancing public safety and protecting children from those who might wish to harm them. We must do this with parents and the community. For more information contact: The California Department of Justice Meagan's Law website (<http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov>), the Center for Sex Offender website (<http://www.csom.org>), and Family Watchdog (www.familywatchdog.us).

* www.meganslaw.ca.gov