

5 Things You Can Do to Protect Your Kids From Sexual Predators

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By Investigative Sergeant Patrick Crough

I. **Communicate. Communicate. Communicate!**

We must make it a point to communicate with our children every day to learn what is going on in their lives and who they are having daily contact with. Our children are exposed to school staff, counsellors, coaches, day care providers, summer camp staff, and/or babysitters every day. Their social horizons have been expanded at a far too rapid pace. Many of us parents enjoyed a more relaxed childhood in the 1950s and 1960s when it was common to have our mothers home all day with us.

Like the faithful shepherd who checks each and every one of his sheep for parasites, diseases, and injuries, we must physically hold and hug our children and communicate with them every day. We need to reach out and make that connection, and we must listen to them carefully. I constantly made the mistake of using the little time I was around the house to tell my children what I wanted them to do. I rarely took the time to ask them what was going on in their daily lives. Under the pressure of making a living and supporting a family, I would spend the time talking at my children rather than with them. Our two-way discussions were few and far between. Fortunately, for our children, their mother did not make the same mistake. My wife always knew the who, what, when, where, and how of their daily lives. Through her patient guidance, I eventually learned this very important principle. As I became more experienced in investigating sexual crimes against children, I realized just how important daily two-way conversations really are.

As soon as a child possesses the ability to carry on a conversation, there are two absolutely necessary questions every parent or guardian should ask their child every day: What bad things happened to you today? And, what good things happened to you today? Another way to phrase these questions is: Who treated you badly today? And, who was nice to you and made you feel special today? Even if your children were with you all day, still ask them these questions as a matter of routine. This way, from a young age they will be programmed to have this discussion with you. Based on the numerous interviews I have

conducted with child victims and their parents, I believe it will prove invaluable to your efforts to keep them safe from predators who desire to seduce and abuse them. Remember that during the trust and courtship phases of the grooming process, the child is unaware of the real reason why the predator is treating him with such favour. Therefore, at this point in the relationship the child has no reason to hide anything from his or her parents. If the parents are communicating with their children daily about who they are interacting with and what they are doing with them, the children should still be willing to share everything. While any conscientious parent would like to know what bad things happened or who may have mistreated them, I believe the more important question to ask is, “What good things happened to you today?” My reason is simple: The child has not yet made a secret pact with a predator that comes with the seduction phase, so he should be willing to share all of the great things this person is doing for him because he is happy and excited about it. Because the child’s morals have yet to be compromised, he is most likely going to remain open and honest with his parents when questioned about his relationship with the undetected predator.

II. Debriefing and Gathering Intelligence: Sharing A Meal

Feed my lambs. (John 21:15)

Most cultures make sharing a meal a special occasion. Whether it is a holiday, a special celebration, a date, a family gathering, or a business luncheon, we share meals with people as an act of social acceptance and personal intimacy. It allows us to interchange our thoughts and feelings, as barriers to open and honest conversation melt away in a festive, inviting atmosphere. In the Bible, we can see how God used the acts of animal sacrifice and sharing a meal to fellowship with His people around the temple. Jesus communed with His disciples over meals and dined with anyone who invited Him. Consuming food with another person has a way of putting us on the same social plane.

In the police detective world, we employ a technique known as “debriefing and gathering intelligence.” In essence, that is what we need to do as parents to learn about what goes on in our children’s daily lives when they are not with us. I urge you to share a special meal with your children—not to gather intelligence for disciplinary action but to assist you in keeping them safe. It should prove helpful to take your child out to a restaurant, for it will be much easier for him to open up to you in a neutral setting. Your authority as a parent is the greatest in the home; eating there may hinder your ability to make your child feel comfortable enough to speak openly about matters he would consider more personal in nature. It doesn’t have to be an expensive or fancy place. Most children and teenagers enjoy pizza, burgers, chicken wings, chicken fingers, tacos, and ice cream. My daughters enjoyed going to cafés in the Park Avenue area of Rochester.

I used this tactic with great success while raising my daughters through their teenage years. I would take them out to lunch separately to their favourite café. It was amazing how chatty either one would become as we sipped our sodas or iced teas, awaiting our meal. By the time we were buttering our bread and starting our soup and salad, she would be revealing everything about herself, her sister, and her friends. It usually kept me a step ahead of my daughters, and I truly believe that several tragedies were avoided because of these intimate meals with both of them.

III. Network With Other Parents

Parents should work with each other and compare notes. Children, like adults, put their own spin on much of the information they share. Unfortunately, our children are not always as honest as we need them to be. Usually that is because they are trying to prevent their parents from finding out something about their past or future participation in a questionable activity. So, it would be fruitful for parents to set their pride aside and communicate with each other about what their children are sharing with them. This is an effective way to check the veracity of what your children are telling you, and this keeps them safe. A typical example is when a young teenage girl makes plans to meet the sexual predator she has been talking with over the Internet for the past two months. She lies to her parents, telling them she is going to stay overnight at a friend's house. Too many times in this scenario, for whatever reason, the parents never check with the friend's parents to confirm such arrangements, and the girl ends up raped or murdered.

If parents make a habit of networking with each other, these types of situations can be prevented. Likewise, law enforcement agencies are much more effective in their fight against crime when they share information with each other rather than harbouring secrets because of territorial pride, which is an unfortunate reality in many jurisdictions. If networking and sharing information works for the police, then it will be useful for parents as they attempt to protect and supervise their children. We hold back because we don't want to appear backward, paranoid, or overprotective. We also are afraid of appearing that we don't trust our children. Satan's best weapon against man is man's own pride. Don't let it get in the way of protecting your children.

IV. Monitoring the Internet & Cell Phones

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

I was investigating crimes against children long before the Internet became part of our daily lives. When I began my career, the Internet was still very much in the infant stages of its development, and its use was limited to the corporate world. But as it has evolved to its present state, the frequency of crimes against children has increased astronomically, and its use is beyond our ability to regulate. No longer is your child safe in the confines of your home under your close supervision. The Internet is the predator's Trojan horse into what is supposed to be your fortress and sanctuary from the outside world. It makes the predator both invisible and insidious as your child willingly invites him into his or her life via cyberspace. I have met child victims who communicated with their offender over the Internet right under their parents' noses. Because chat room language is cryptic and hard to decipher, it allows the child victim to become involved, and eventually seduced, online by a predator. Many times the child will be lured out of the safety of his or her home to be sexually offended, or even kidnapped and murdered.

There is no possible way to accurately determine just how many encounters occur between children and predators over the Internet daily throughout this nation. While law enforcement is making a gallant effort to police the dangerous and illegal aspects of cyberspace, it will be ill equipped to even scratch the surface for many years to come. Therefore, parents must shoulder the burden of monitoring their children's Internet activity. This task has become even more difficult within the past two to three years as cell phones have been manufactured with the technology to access the Internet and to send and receive e-mail and text messages. Nearly every cell phone manufactured today also includes a camera or video and audio recording capabilities. While I understand that parents give their children cell phones in the hopes of

keeping them safer, I view a cell phone in the hands of an unsupervised child or young teenager as a grave liability. A predator will use the cell phone to seduce and lure a child away from safety. When parents ask me my opinion on children and cell phones, I tell them to seriously consider not allowing their children to possess one until they are old enough to drive. It is my feeling that children should not be unsupervised until then. At that point, owning a cell phone would be a matter of safety in case they break down or get lost while driving alone. But until then, a cell phone would only increase their child's risk of crossing the path of a sexual predator. If you feel that your child needs one, I highly encourage you to buy one without Internet capability and that you can limit to give and receive calls only from specific phone numbers. You should monitor your child's phone activity to make sure he or she did not override your security controls.

I have labelled the children of today as the "Internet Generation" due to their highly advanced computer skills and propensity to seek out and use websites such as YouTube and MySpace. Websites such as these motivate and enable children to promote themselves to the rest of the world and provide personal biographical information for anyone to read. They also allow children to display seductive photographs of themselves and share their sexual fantasies. These websites are feeding grounds for predators, arming them with all of the information they need to choose and pursue multiple potential victims. Jesus told us that in the last days men would acquire great knowledge and become lovers of themselves. He obviously foresaw the future. Satan is brilliantly orchestrating man's own lustful desires and the technological advances of today into an apocalyptic outcome.

Pre-teens and early teenagers are the most common victims of those who roam cyberspace. These age groups are beginning to experience the development of their own sexuality, so they are curious and open for erotic conversation. The predator is all too ready to satisfy and enhance that child's curiosity. This leads the child to be secretive and lie to her parents about her newfound friend. I have found that most children will share this kind of activity with at least one close friend. Because it is exciting to them, they feel the need to tell someone about it. This is why I always try to interview the child victim's friends if they make themselves available. Many times the victim will share things with a close friend about her experiences with the predator that she would not share with any adult, let alone the police.

V. Protecting Your Child With Prayer & the Word

Raising a child has never been more treacherous than it is right now, and it is only getting worse. I grew up during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, when the youth turned the social system of this country upside-down. But back then, the country was being built by the generation of World War II. It was far from perfect, but they laid a rock-solid foundation of wholesome morals and religious beliefs that were by and large based upon biblical Christianity. As a result, God blessed this nation with an economy that was second to no other in the world.

While the past fifty years have seen unprecedented, incredible technological advances, the granite foundation built by our parents and grandparents has been reduced to shifting sand. Aside from being fleeced by greedy and unscrupulous high-level executives, much of corporate America appears to be downsizing and outsourcing many traditional and manufacturing jobs to other countries. Additionally, we've become a population that places a distortedly high value in entertainment, pouring billions into the sports and gambling, pornography, and drug industries. Personal debt is off the charts. We have evolved into a nation of pleasure-seeking people pursuing a "comfortable" lifestyle at the expense of our own eternal salvation.

This is the legacy we are leaving our children. As a result, our children's own morals and values are being corrupted. Tragically, many of the people they admire are nothing more than lovers of themselves, indifferent to the world around them. These so-called role models, whom we adults have placed on a pedestal and financially supported, are leading our children down the wide path of self-destruction. Satan, the master deceiver and manipulator, loves every bit of it.

Too many times, I have lain in bed during the desolate night hours worrying about my children. I worry about their health, their personal safety, and their future. When they were younger, I would think about my own mortality, wondering how they would cope without me to love and protect them. I have often stated in exasperation that being a parent feels like I have been sentenced to a life of worrying. As parents, we know that many dangers, both physical and spiritual, surround our children. It is for this very reason we should call upon God's Holy Spirit to protect our children, comfort us, and take away our needless worry. And we should bury deep within our hearts God's Word that is a "two-edged sword" that will give us discernment:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

I have learned that replacing worry with prayer is not only good for my children's sake but it comforts me and gives me a sense of peace that is beyond my ability to attain on my own or from another human being. It fills that void in me that nothing else seems to fill. Jesus instructed his apostles not to worry and stated that worrying doesn't help any situation (Matthew 6:27). Easier said than done, but it is true. I can't think of one instance where worrying assisted me in resolving any issue, especially one involving my children. We must learn to surrender our worries, failures, and lamentations to the Lord every day. This is especially true in the evening when the enemy likes to torment us as we try to rest. Jesus said:

Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Some of the heaviest burdens I have borne as an adult had to do with my children. The enemy will attack us through our children in an attempt to distract us, weaken our faith, and ultimately separate us from God. Therefore, we must pray unceasingly for strength, wisdom, and comfort. While God does not require us to pray on our knees, I suggest that praying parents take a knee whenever possible to pray for their children. A sincere act of respect and honour toward our Heavenly Father on behalf of our children demonstrates true humility.

The Bible teaches us that "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). For our children's sake, parents should pray fervently and daily before God. We will worry far less and sleep more soundly as a result.

Consider this Scripture from Colossians as a foundation of daily prayer for your children:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,[a] 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience (Colossians 1:9-11).

The Lord desires to protect you and your children. The Bible is so clear about this. If you do not have a relationship with Him or if you do not know whether He even exists, I suggest you begin simply to ask God to reveal Himself to you. The Bible says He will do that to the one who sincerely, with all of his or her heart, seeks after Him.

As for America, we need only look to the history of the Roman Empire to determine our pending fate as a nation. I believe the only way to change our country's Titanic course for the sake of our children is to pray unceasingly for parental guidance, repentance, and salvation. If we, as parents, repent from our own rebellion and sin and then call upon the Lord with a sincere and humble heart, He will answer (2 Chronicles 7:14). But we need to keep knocking on the Lord's door every day. Don't allow unclean spirits to convince you that you are not worthy or good enough to ask the Lord for help. Jesus tells us in the Gospels that He came to cure those who are sick and in need of Him, not the self-proclaimed healthy people (Matthew 9:11-13). We are in the midst of a universal spiritual war. And those who name the name of Jesus Christ can come to God boldly:

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Prayer, with a repentant and humble heart toward the Lord, and God's holy Word are our best weapons against the Devil and his demonic army. Come together as a married couple, as a family with your children, together with other believing parents, and with brothers and sisters in your church to pray and spend time together in His Word. Jesus told us that where two or more are gathered in His name, He will be present (Matthew 18:20).

This is an excerpt from Patrick Crough's book, **Seducers Among Our Children** and his booklet tract, 5 Things You Can Do to Protect Your Kids From Sexual Predators.

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