

WHAT IS A PEDOPHILE?

What does one look like? How can we spot one? Some think a typical child molester is a man in a raincoat who hangs around playgrounds trying to lure a child with candy. Not so.

A child molester is anyone who sexually touches a child in a sexual manner. Not all child molesters are pedophiles and not all pedophiles are child molesters. However, according to the [Mayo Clinic*](#), approximately 95% of child sexual abuse incidents are committed by the 88% of child molestation offenders who meet the diagnostic criteria for pedophilia. A pedophile is someone who has a primary or exclusive sexual attraction to prepubescent children of either sex. Not every adult who is attracted to children acts on their attraction. There are pedophilic offenders and there are situational offenders. Some situational causes may include curiosity, stress, marital problems, unavailability of an adult partner, mental or medical conditions and/or being unsociable.

DEFINITION:

Pedophilia is a psychosexual disorder in which the fantasy or actual act of engaging in sexual activity with prepubescent children is the preferred or exclusive means of achieving sexual excitement and gratification. It may be directed toward children of the same sex or children of the other sex. Some pedophiles are attracted to both boys and girls. Some are attracted only to children, while others are attracted to adults as well as to children. (Source: <http://www.minddisorders.com/>)

Pedophilia is defined by mental health professionals as a mental disorder, but the American legal system defines acting on a pedophilic urge as a criminal act. (Source: <http://www.minddisorders.com/>)

More importantly, an individual who has been diagnosed with pedophilia is a person who either has acted on intense sexual urges towards children, or who experiences persistent sexual urges and fantasies about children, which in turn cause distress and/or interpersonal difficulty.

The condition of being a pedophile is called “pedophilia,” and it covers a wide range of sexual activities which may or may not involve force. Sexual acts may include: exposing themselves; masturbating in front of a child; rubbing, fondling or undressing a child with or without genital contact; touching a child’s genitalia or asking the child to touch another’s genitals; exposing them to pornography; talking or teasing a child in sexual ways, oral sex and penetration.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th

Ed. Rev., the following criteria must be met to establish a diagnosis of pedophilia:

- Over a period of at least 6 months, the affected person experiences recurrent, intense and sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges or actual behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child.
- The fantasies, sexual urges or behaviors cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of daily functioning.
- The affected person must be at least age 16 and be at least 5 years older than the child or children who are the objects or targets of attention or sexual activity.

PROFILE OF A PEDOPHILE:

Child sex offenders don't stand out and don't usually appear scary or weird. A child would not normally become afraid when meeting one. They are often someone the child knows; a neighbor, relative, family friend; or someone in a position of authority; i.e. minister, healthcare worker, teacher, coach, leader of children's activities. Most pedophiles are males.

Pedophiles come from all social classes and all walks of life. They may be young or old; male or female. Their intelligence varies. Most sex offenders are not psychotic or crazy. Their common feature is an abnormal sexual interest in children, although they may not desire children exclusively. About 50% are married and some are also attracted to other age-appropriate adults.

Many pedophiles begin with fantasizing and progress to "acting out." Wondering if they can make their fantasies come true in real life, they begin to experiment. Their attempts may meet varied degrees of success. Sexual gratification, with the intoxicating feeling of being powerful and in total control adds a new high to their disturbed world, along with a heightened appetite for more.

HOW THEY ENTICE and ENSNARE:

Some volunteer their services to groups serving youth. Often, they relate well to children, easily gaining their trust and friendship and may also befriend their parents. Children have an insatiable need for care and attention and pedophiles use it to abuse them. They are masters at verbal manipulation. Most offences against children are premeditated and it is rare that a pedophilic offender spontaneously molests a child.

GROOMING THEIR TARGETS:

When hunting prospective children to abuse, they tend to choose vulnerable children; i.e. those from divorced homes and children who are emotionally needy or unhappy; the quiet ones. They also target children from certain types of families; i.e. single parents, homes where parents are often absent,

and who are less educated.

First, they usually test the child's ability to keep secrets and reward them for doing so. They subtly grow closer to the child. They may attempt to change the way the child views his parents; i.e. as infringing on the child's personal freedom. They may give the child liberties his parents would not approve of; i.e. smoking, drinking, watching pornography. They attempt to create a mental environment where the child sees the pedophile as the person who trusts and cares for him the most. The grooming process may take up to a year.

Doing things his parents would not approve of virtually insures that the victim will not go home and tell, enabling the pedophile to feel safe in acting out his fantasies. This keeps the victim captive to the pedophile's sick desires, and leads to the initial undressing and fondling attack. Once the child voluntarily engages in oral sex (usually for a bribe), s/he will most likely be in a position where telling is almost impossible. When the child can't tell without incriminating himself, he often gives up any resistance, his spirit is broken, and he becomes mentally resigned to doing whatever his pedophile friend asks. Some learn to disassociate themselves from the "crazy acts" his pedophile "friend" wants him to do. Some abusers are liars, angry and physically abusive...so that the children are controlled by the anger and the pain of physical abuse. Some photograph the children and may market the photos.

PEDOPHILE'S GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS:

- experience feelings of inferiority, isolation, loneliness, low self-esteem and emotional immaturity.
- their attraction to children usually began when they were adolescents, but may develop later in life.
- are impulsive, have difficulty controlling their behavior and resisting their urges.
- have poor communication skills, lack empathy, may be socially retarded; have difficulty forming close relationships.
- feel they are inherently "different," by fate, default or circumstances out of their control and responsibility.
- maintain a façade or "front" for the world to see; divide the world into me and them.

JUSTIFYING THEIR ACTIONS:

They live in a distorted mental world. Most pedophiles view their actions as being totally involuntary--something over which they exercise no control. They cling to this self-serving concept because it allows them to continue

their acts and still view themselves as an unwilling participant in the process; something they are forced to endure. By seeing themselves as being victimized, they are able to justify not setting any personal limits on themselves, which allows them to do anything they want without feeling guilty or responsible. They manipulate the facts and use their delusions as permission or justification to do what they want to do. Some distorted reasoning they use:

- That the behavior is not harmful or is less serious than claimed.
- That the child was sexually provocative and encouraged/initiated the act
- That they are being helpful to the child and are contributing to the child's development
- That the acts had educational value
- That they are teaching the child about the "facts of life" or "love"
- That the child enjoyed the acts or attention

CAUSES:

Much research has been done on the cause/s of pedophilia. Many medical theories exist. Some evidence suggests genetic factors may be responsible. Abnormalities in male sexual hormone or the brain chemical serotonin have not been proven as causes. Some believe it is an orientation they were born with. A relatively high number of pedophiles were sexually abused when they were children, but there is no conclusive research that this causes an individual to become a sex offender.

Do people choose to be pedophiles or are they born that way? Are pedophiles "sick" or are they evil? Many Christians define pedophilia as evil. Andrew Vachss wrote: "Sickness is a condition. Evil is a behavior. Evil is always a matter of choice. Evil is not thought; it is conduct. And that conduct is always volitional. And just as evil is always a choice, sickness is always the absence of choice. Sickness happens. Evil is inflicted...sickness should be treated. Evil must be fought...if a person has desires or fantasies about sexually exploiting children, that individual may be sick...But if the individual chooses to act upon those feelings, that conduct is evil. People are not what they think; they are what they do." (The Difference Between "Sick" and "Evil." [May 2, 1999 Parade Magazine](#))

TREATMENT:

In 2008, the medical opinion is that pedophilia cannot be cured, but there is treatment that can be successful, depending on how cooperative the patient is during therapy. They must admit they have a problem. The treatment available is therapy primarily focused on the prevention of reoccurrence, rather than changing thought patterns and feelings. The goal is for the predator to learn self-control and change his behavior. Pedophilia may also be treated with medications, along with cognitive/behavioral therapy.

RECIDIVISM:

Pedophiles have a high rate of recidivism (the frequency of additional sexual crimes committed after being caught. .) Some treatments are effective in lowering recidivism. The typical child sex offender molests an average of 117 children, most of who do not report the offence. [Source: National Institute of Mental Health, 1988]

*Source: · HALL, MD, RYAN C. W.; AND RICHARD C. W. HALL, MD, PA.. "[A Profile of Pedophilia: Definition, Characteristics of Offenders, Recidivism, Treatment Outcomes, and Forensic Issues](#)". MAYO CLIN PROC **82:457-471** 2007. MAYO FOUNDATION FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH.