

Safe Environment



Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

Fall 2017



The Sleepover – Questions Parents Should Ask

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First it's playdates, next thing you know, it's sleepovers. For those of us who have been there, the thought of your child spending the night at someone else's home can produce some anxiety. As parents,

we won't be there to watch over them, make sure they're safe, and help them if they wake up in the middle of the night with a stomachache. To ease your mind and ensure your child's safety when attending a sleepover, questions to ask include:

- 1. Do you know them well enough to trust them with your child's safety?** Make sure you are completely comfortable with the parents.
- 2. Are there going to be adults and teenagers that you don't know in the home?** Make sure you and your child feel comfortable with any extended family or additional visitors that are present.
- 3. Will the children be home alone at any time during the sleepover?**
- 4. What are the sleeping arrangements?** Will the kids be by themselves in a bedroom? Sharing a room with a sibling?
- 5. Will the sleepover include other children?** If so, who are the other kids who will be at the sleepover?
- 6. What is the agenda?** Will the kids spend most of the time watching movies and playing video games? Also, share with the parent any restrictions that you have with your children regarding maturity level of movies and video games.
- 7. Are the kids going to be leaving the home?** If so, will they be supervised? Are the proper car restraints available?
- 8. Is there a gun in the home?** According to a Rand report, 34 percent of children in the United States live in a home with at least one firearm; in 69 percent of homes with firearms and children, more than one firearm is present. In 9 percent of homes with guns and children, at least one weapon is stored unlocked and loaded.
- 9. Is someone keeping an eye on the internet, making sure children are visiting age-appropriate sites, being good cyber citizens, and avoiding chat rooms?**
- 10. Are there drugs and alcohol within reach?** According to the Foundation for a Drug Free World, every day in the United States, 2,500 youth (12 to 17) abuse a prescription pain reliever for the first time.

The Language of Online Grooming

By Sharon Doty, J.D., M.H.R.

In previous articles we have looked at the similarities between online grooming and offline grooming. We can see correlations between some of the potentially risky behaviors that those with personal contact with potential victims exhibit and the behaviors and actions of those who contact children through the Internet. However, there is one area that is dramatically expanded in online



grooming and researchers in London have been doing some interesting research to discover just how different or similar it is.

The primary tool for online grooming is language. Research has been conducted into the language that is common among predators regardless of the environment. Some of that research has resulted in software development that seeks certain phrases and words to attempt to weed out predators from children's online contact. However, recent research is giving us a new insight into the skills, abilities and focus of online predators in the grooming process. The studies being conducted by three researchers at Swansea University in the UK are bringing together three different disciplines to look at the actual language being used in the online chats. In our efforts to find ways to prevent abuse, we hope to learn more about how predators lure and trap children.

A review of just one of their articles tells us a great deal about online predators and the way they gain access to our children. The study offered three propositions:



- 1) Online groomers are likely to be more direct in their solicitation of sexual behavior than offline groomers,
- 2) Online groomers use a variety of strategies to develop trust in their relationships with potential victims,
- 3) Online groomers use different methods of assessing the willingness of potential victims to take risks than offline groomers' use.

To study this issue, the researchers used chat

logs from 24 randomly-selected chats. The participants included adult volunteers from an organization formed to fight online predators, and online predators themselves. Although the volunteers were adults, the online groomers were convinced they were interacting with children.

There are many valuable findings in the research. However, for the purposes of this article, we will focus on the unique aspects of the way predators develop trust online using only language. Deceptive trust development is a phrase used to describe a process whereby groomers disguise their primary intention to engage a child in sexual behavior by appearing to be cultivating a personal, friendly relationship with the child. The researchers found that there are unique aspects of online grooming that are important to note. First, there is a much greater use of explicit sexual language earlier in the online conversation versus an in-person conversation. This is, in part, to desensitize the potential victim, but also serves as sexual gratification for the predator during the grooming process in a way that offline predators do not experience.

Second, there is a great deal more of complimenting potential victims and reinforcing their self-image as a way of strengthening the sociability of the interactions. Compliments were used to build trust, desensitize the children, and mentally or emotionally isolate them from others.

Third, throughout the conversation there is an emphasis on gauging the potential victim's seeming compliance. This means that throughout the interaction, groomers are saying things to learn about the level of trust they are achieving—rather than waiting, as offline groomers do, to establish a level of trust before stepping over the line. One particular way that was often employed was language that seemed to leave decision making to the child. A predator might say, for example, "just an idea, it's up to you" or let's "meet somewhere public where it's safe." All these techniques are designed to ensure that victims do not tell anyone about the relationship with the groomer/predator. In the offline situation, the potential predator is working in a more linear fashion—waiting to make sure there is trust and secrecy before moving forward and relying on visual cues as well as language. Online the strategies are more complex and difficult to distinguish one from another, but taken together they move the process

forward with greater velocity and all the while the predator is experiencing sexual gratification as the grooming continues.

There is a great deal more for us to learn from this research. It is important to remember that monitoring the online communication of children via chats, apps, gaming websites, etc., is very important. Research has demonstrated that although young people know what to do and not to do online, they pay little attention to the risks. Learning all we can about how predators groom children through online contact is key to keeping them safe at all times. Language is an online groomer's valuable tool for grooming online. The more we know the more we can put a stop to them.

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Why Is There An Office Of Safe Environment?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) requires that all Dioceses/Eparchies have in place a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. The “*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*” was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 as a response to sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons, particularly from the time period of 1950 to 2002. The USCCB established an **Office of Child and Youth Protection** to oversee the application of the Charter’s principles and to create the means for accountability for ensuring implementation of standards.

Reporting

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse please contact **your local law enforcement agency** or call the **West Virginia Adult / Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.352.6513**

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact one of the Bishop’s designees at: **304.233.0880 or 1.888.434.6237:**

- Sr. Ellen F. Dunn, O.P., ext. 264
- Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263
- Rev. Msgr. Frederick P. Annie, V.G., ext. 267
- Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati, STD, V.E., ext. 270

You may also fill out and return a confidential **Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor** by printing one from the Diocese’s web site at www.dwc.org, then clicking Diocese › Offices › Office of Safe Environment › Download Files and Forms or by calling 304.230.1504 to request a form via U.S. mail from the Office of Safe Environment.

The Three Components of Compliance

The Safe Environment Program by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston consists of the following three components:

- ✓ Background Check
- ✓ Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children (Summer 2014)
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components are mandated by the Diocese for persons seeking employment or seeking to volunteer directly or indirectly with children. A person is considered in compliance with the Diocese’s Safe Environment Policy upon successful completion of all three components. Every year, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston - as well as all other dioceses in the United States - is audited by the USCCB for compliance with its “*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.*”

Touching Safety

A Student Awareness Program has been implemented since the fall of 2005 to give children information (appropriate for their age levels) and skills to help recognize acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and how to effectively deal with those behaviors. This is a VIRTUS program called “**Touching Safety**”. The program is taught in Catholic schools and as part of Parish Schools of Religion. This program offers lesson plans for children in grades Kindergarten through 12.

The “Touching Safety” lesson cycle for this year is:

School Year **2017-18** - **CYCLE ONE** - Lesson One (by the end of October) and Lesson Two by the end of the school year

A PROGRAM AND SERVICE OF
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RISK RETENTION GROUP, INC.

 **VIRTUS**[®] *Online*

Do you remember your VIRTUS awareness training? There are five steps to follow in the Protecting God’s Children awareness program.

They are:

Step 1: Know the warning signs

Step 2: Control access

Step 3: Monitor all programs

Step 4: Be aware

Step 5: Communicate your concerns

Prayer for Healing for Victims of Sex Abuse

**God of endless love,
ever caring, ever strong,
always present, always just:
You gave your only Son
to save us by the blood of his cross.**

**Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,
join to your own suffering
the pain of all who have been hurt
in body, mind, and spirit
by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.**

**Hear our cries as we agonize
over the harm done to our brothers and sisters.
Breathe wisdom into our prayers,
soothe restless hearts with hope,
steady shaken spirits with faith:
Show us the way to justice and wholeness,
enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.**

**Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people’s wounds
and transform our brokenness.
Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace,
so that we may act with justice
and find peace in you.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

