

Pursuing the innocent

How to safeguard our children against sexual predators

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PAEDOPHILES are predators who sexually abuse children and are hard to detect. But there is a lot you can do to protect your child from falling prey to these monsters, so that you can protect their innocence which is the right of every young person.

Police in the Durban area are conducting an intensive hunt for a man of Indian origin who is suspected of sexually abusing a schoolboy, and trying to lure several others away with the promise of expensive cellphones and toys.

This is not an isolated case. Many children are abused by adults each year. Some go on to repeat the cycle of abuse in adulthood, focusing their sex-

ual needs on children just as vulnerable as they once were.

Sexual attention paid to children is not condoned in any civilised society.

Our Constitution enshrines the rights of minors and our judiciary takes an unequivocal stand when prosecuting these cases. A child who is sexually abused by a person in authority suffers long-lasting emotional after-effects.

What is a paedophile?

A paedophile can be female, although this is far less common than the incidence of male paedophilia. Paedophiles abuse children of a single sex or both sexes. They generally behave in a premeditated way, seeking out children for their own sexual gratification. Some paedophiles rationalise that if

they are not violent towards the child, they are not being abusive.

They often convince themselves that if the child doesn't actively resist, then he or she is condoning the sexual activity.

While most know what they are doing is against the law, they don't consider their actions morally wrong. A paedophile may molest many children in the course of a lifetime.

The sooner he or she is stopped, the fewer children's lives will be damaged.

Sexual abuse of a child includes: sexual suggestions, showing the child pornography, fondling or touching their private parts, sexual kissing, masturbation, oral sex and the penetration of either the genital or anal areas with an object, a penis or any other part

of the molester's body.

The 'invisible' criminals

Paedophiles look like anyone else. They are often respectable members of the community, neighbours or family. Typically they seek out contact with children and may work at schools, in youth groups or sporting associations.

There is always a power imbalance between a child and an adult. Paedophiles will abuse this dynamic, threatening, among other things, that the child will be harmed if he or she reports the abuse, or no one will believe them.

Children who are not given affection and attention in their homes are particularly vulnerable to the attentions of paedophiles, who will cultivate a false bond of caring with the af-

fection-starved child.

They will frequently stake out areas where children are left unattended or their parents' attention may be distracted.

How do I shield my child?

All caring parents want to wrap their children in cotton wool to keep them from harm. They will face many challenges when they are out of our care, however. These are some of the ways you can help protect them from an adult with sexual intentions:

Be wary of adults who want to spend a lot of time with your children alone or lavish gifts on them. They may have good intentions, but the situation must be monitored.

If you leave your child in the care of others, make sure you

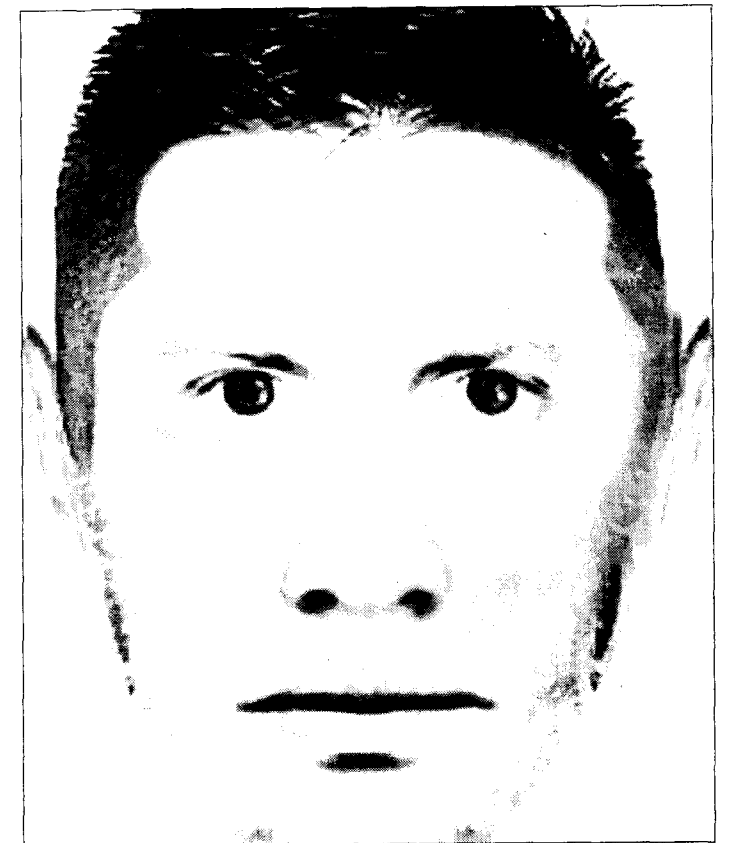
know their background, and ask your child how he or she feels about the individual. Even if very young, the child's behaviour will be an indicator.

From the time they can speak, teach your children the names of body parts, and which areas are not okay for others to touch. Tell them to say "no" to any behaviour that makes them uncomfortable, and report it to an adult.

Reassure your child that whatever he or she shares with you, you will take it seriously.

Teach your children that they must not agree to keep secrets that make them feel bad or ashamed.

Encourage your children to always let you know where they are going, and to ask for either you or the police to be called if they are afraid.



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PICTURE: SUPPLIED

