

## Protecting God's Children for Adults



I Love Working with Kids - How do I Keep People from Thinking I'm a Child Molester?

Media attention on the problem of child sexual abuse continues to rise. News stories highlight children abused repeatedly and apparently abandoned by the child protection system. Television shows and movies based on a story “ripped from the headlines,” remind us that child molesters are very clever. They possess the ability to gain access to children and the skill to continue their crimes against children. They convince others that they *truly* care about children and love working with and being with children. This ability of a molester to convince others of his or her commitment to children may result in a general suspicion and anxiety about *anyone* who loves working with children.

Those who love working with children and are committed to children’s ministry may wonder how to continue with this ministry while simultaneously protecting themselves from unwarranted suspicions and false allegations. How does someone who loves working with children keep people from thinking he or she is a child molester?

The video *A Plan to Protect God’s Children*™ identifies behavioral warning signs between adults and children that should give rise to concern. Being clear about the warning signs and making sure that your behavior does not cross boundaries is the best way to ensure that people will continue to trust your commitment to children.

Monitor your own behavior. Be sure that you are not acting in ways that may cause concern.

For example, one of the warning signs is someone who always wants to be alone with children. This does not mean that adults who work with children should *never* be alone with children. It means that anyone who notices an adult who *always* wants to be alone with children—who discourages others from participating and creates environments where activities with minors cannot be monitored—should intervene in the situation and raise their concerns with the person’s supervisors.

To ensure that people do not think you are a child molester, make sure that you encourage other adults to participate in activities with children and create an atmosphere of openness in your interactions with children. When you must meet alone with a child, make sure others are aware of the meeting and invite others to drop in, unannounced, during the time you and the child are alone.

Another warning sign addresses those who go overboard in touching children—particularly wrestling and tickling children who are not their own. Does this mean that you should *never* touch a child who comes to you crying and needs to be comforted? No. Touching children is not the problem. Going overboard in touching children *is* the problem.

Monitoring your own behavior requires that you take stock of the activities you create with children to determine whether games or exercises involve touching that could be construed as intimate. For example, youth ministers in the past have employed games or exercises intended to build trust and confidence among their young participants. However, the level of touching involved in those games may condition children to accept intimate touches from an adult. If you need to create exercises to help children and young people learn team skills and gain individual and group confidence, it is crucial that you find activities that produce the desired results without involving any intimate touching.

Be creative and inventive. Look for other activities that build trust and confidence without compromising your commitment to the well-being of children. Ask yourself, “What is this exercise’s intended benefit?” Then find another way to produce the same result without going overboard in touching children.

Avoid putting yourself in harm's way. Make yourself aware of the warning signs of adults who are a risk of harm to children and monitor your own behavior in order to avoid activities and actions that give rise to concerns. Ask those around you to tell you if they notice something that provokes concern. Use the eyes and ears of those you work and volunteer with to create a proactive environment that is safe for everyone involved.

A love of children and a commitment to them is a prerequisite for anyone involved in activities and ministry with children. Loving children does not make you an abuse suspect. Inappropriate behavior makes you a suspect. By learning about the warning signs of abuse and the rules of appropriate touching, you have the power to protect yourself from false accusations by making sure your own interaction with children is above reproach.

---