

Boys' Life[®]

Protect Yourself From Child Abuse

By John C. Patterson

Say, "No!" and most abusers will leave you alone.

Mark played football in high school. One day Mark's coach offered to drive him home from practice. Along the way, the coach rested his hand on Mark's leg. It made Mark feel very uncomfortable.

In a firm steady voice, Mark said, "I don't like that. Take your hand away. Stop the car and let me out." The coach stopped the car and begged Mark not to tell anyone what had happened. He told Mark he was sorry and it would never happen again.

As Mark walked home, he had mixed feelings about his coach. He felt loyal to this man who had spent time helping him and being his friend. But he also felt hurt that the coach had tried to abuse him.

After he got home, Mark summoned every ounce of courage and told his parents what the coach had done. Mark's parents praised him for telling. Then they reported the coach to the police.

The police checked the man's record and discovered that he had been found guilty of child abuse before. They said that if Mark had not resisted the coach's advances, Mark might have become another victim.

There is a name for people like Mark's coach. They are called child molesters. For reasons we don't understand, child molesters like to abuse children sexually.

Usually, child molesters are known by their victims. Often they are family members—a stepparent, older brother or sister, uncle, or sometimes a grandparent. A child molester can be anyone.

Most child molesters are afraid of being discovered. They will ask you to keep secret the things that they try to do with you. If a child molester believes that you will tell someone about him,

he will usually leave you alone.

Child molesters want willing victims and will avoid children who resist them. So you should refuse—firmly—any action that you feel is wrong. Do this even when the person approaching you is an adult.

You can say something like, "I don't want to do that. I know it is wrong. I am leaving." This shows the child molester that you will not cooperate.

Very few child molesters kidnap their victims or force them to obey. Most seem friendly. They entice their victims with extra attention, gifts, money, and special favors.

If you ever do feel threatened, you have the right to protect yourself. Usually this means resisting, trying to get away, and, if other people are nearby, yelling and calling attention to yourself.

Thousands of children, like Mark, successfully resist sexual abuse each year. Mark did two things that were very important. First, he exercised his right not to be touched in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. And second, he told his parents what had happened. That made Mark feel better and it also caused the molester to get caught.

Child molesters may try to take advantage of the normal interest that you have in learning about sex. You need to be careful about anyone who tells you about sex in a way that makes it seem dirty or secret. (If you have questions about sex, discuss them with an adult you can trust—perhaps your parents, a teacher, minister, or doctor.)

Let's suppose that you have done everything you can to prevent becoming a victim of child abuse and you are still abused. Perhaps you were abused before reading this article. If this happens, or has already happened, you need to know that *you are not to blame*.

Anytime a child is abused, it is the abuser's fault. You need to tell an adult you trust. By telling someone, you will stop the abuser from abusing you again, and you will help protect other children from the abuser as well.

Unfortunately, a lot of abused children never report the abuse. Some are afraid that they will be blamed. Some do not want to get the child molester in trouble. And others are afraid their friends will think them "queer." In the long run, children who report abuse can overcome the abuse better than those who do not report.

If you need help talking with your parents about child abuse, you might want to show them this article.

In addition, the Boy Scouts of America has produced a booklet, "How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse and Drug Abuse: A Parent's Guide." This booklet is available from your local BSA council service center.

If you believe there is no one you can talk to, call CHILDHELP USA, an organization that helps abused children and their families. The toll-free number that you can call to report abuse and talk with a counselor is (800) 422-4453.

Remember, if anyone—stranger, friend, or family member—attempts to abuse you, you must yell or do anything necessary to resist the abuser and get away from him. Afterward, tell a trusted adult about it.

Now that you know more about child abuse, you do not need to start being afraid. But you do need to be careful.

The Boy Scouts of America  <http://www.scouting.org>