



washingtonpost.com

## Predators Who Can Lurk Anywhere

Sunday, July 13, 2008; B08

On June 25, The Post published a disturbing Metro story about a third-grade teacher in a D.C. private school who was placed on leave after "inappropriate photos" of an unidentified young boy were found on a camera in the teacher's possession.

The school was identified as the "prestigious Beauvoir elementary school, located on the grounds of the [Washington National Cathedral](#)." As a parent of Beauvoir students, I was saddened and concerned about this discovery. But as someone who works on behalf of child victims of sexual and physical abuse and with professionals who conduct abuse investigations, I was glad that this incident was reported -- and I only wish I could be more surprised.

According to national statistics, one in four girls and one in six boys in the United States will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old. These staggering numbers should tell us that not just poor kids or "other people's children" are targets of this heinous crime. Child sexual abuse doesn't discriminate on the basis of socioeconomic status or race. Further, most child victims are hurt by people they know, not by strangers. Child sexual abuse is a crime of opportunity that thrives on people's erroneous belief that it can't happen to their child or in their school, community, faith institution, camp, sports team, etc.

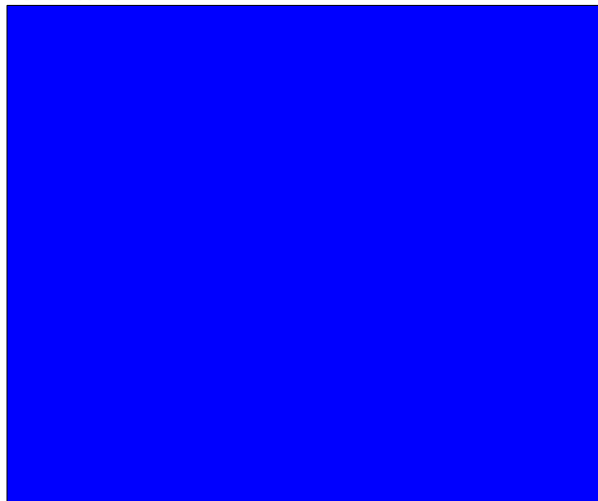
The first time I attended Beauvoir's Christmas Chapel at the cathedral, I cried. I was overwhelmed by the glaring disparity between the resources provided to the children at Beauvoir and schools like it, compared with the children my colleagues and I serve through our work at Safe Shores -- the D.C. Children's Advocacy Center. The children we see at Safe Shores are often painfully neglected and in dire need of compassionate, responsible adult care and supervision. But the great equalizer among all children is the danger of child sexual abuse. When adults deny the possibility of this crime, they only escalate the risk.

As a mother who works outside the home, I know it's often not realistic to expect parents to be with their children during every waking hour. Neither do my husband and I want to raise our children in an environment of fear and distrust. What we all can and must do, however, is be vigilant about where we leave our children when we're apart from them and whom we choose to watch over them.

We must demand accountability from adults and be unabashed in asking questions that may make some uncomfortable:

- Who will be with the children?
- What activities are planned for them?
- Has the staff been trained in child sexual abuse prevention?
- What kinds of background checks are conducted?

Advertisement



Adults need to learn how to recognize and prevent abuse. We must work toward building a community where child sexual abuse is brought out of the darkness of denial and where secrets can't thrive.

Good parenting requires that we take the time to stop, look and listen to children and pay attention to their surroundings, mindful that good and the possibility of evil are all around us. Not calling all the possibilities out by name and confronting them, including the child sexual abuse that can strike anywhere, only keeps our children in harm's way.

-- **Michele Booth Cole**

*Washington*

*The writer is executive director of Safe Shores -- the D.C. Children's Advocacy Center, a nonprofit organization for victims of child abuse.*

**Post a Comment**

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

Comments that include profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material will be removed from the site. Additionally, entries that are unsigned or contain "signatures" by someone other than the actual author will be removed. Finally, we will take steps to block users who violate any of our posting standards, terms of use or privacy policies or any other policies governing this site. Please review the [full rules](#) governing commentaries and discussions. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.

© 2008 The Washington Post Company