

Sheriffs Points

By your Sheriff Byron Nogelmeier

Do you know your neighbor?

This week I am writing about people in your neighborhood. Do you know who they are and where they came from? Now most of us do know who lives in our neighborhood- maybe they are lifelong residents, a family member or friend of ours. But what about the ones we don't know. Could they be a sex offender? The odds of you having a sex offender living in your neighborhood are slim. However, I will tell you that we do have sex offenders living in Turner County, 15 to be exact. These individuals are required to register at the Sheriff's Office. We then forward the information to the Division of Criminal Investigation where a database is kept. Also, we post the list on a bulletin board outside the Sheriff's Office and at the front entrance of the Courthouse.

Some people may ask why we keep track of the sex offenders. Sex offenders have a propensity to re-offend and it gives parents and people a way to protect themselves and their children if they know that a sex offender is living close by.

There are some simple rules for parents to follow in order to protect their children.

- Inform children that it is wrong for adults to engage children in sexual activity.
- Stress to your child that he or she should feel comfortable telling you anything, especially if it involves another adult. If your child does not feel comfortable being completely honest with you, then together you should find another trusted adult your child can talk to in confidence.
- Make an effort to know the people with whom your child is spending time.
- Knowledge is power. This is especially true for protecting children from sexual assault. Teach your children about their bodies; give them the correct language to use when describing their private parts. Emphasize that those parts are private.
- Make sure you know where each of your children are at all times. Know your children's friends and be clear with your children about the places and homes they may visit. Make it a rule that your children check in with you when they arrive at or depart from a particular location and when there is a change in plans. You should also let them know when YOU are running late or if your plans have changed so that they can see the rule is for safety purposes and not being used to "check up" on them.
- Be involved in your children's activities. As an active participant, you will have a better opportunity to observe how the adults in charge interact with your children. If you are concerned about anyone's behavior, take it up with the sponsoring organization.
- Teach your children that they have the right to say NO to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touch or actions by others. Teach them to tell you immediately if this happens. Reassure them that you are there to help and it is okay to tell you anything.
- Be sensitive to any changes in your children's behavior or attitude. Encourage open communication and learn how to be an active listener. Look and listen to small cues and clues that something may be troubling your children, because children are not always comfortable disclosing disturbing events or feelings. This may be because they are concerned about your reaction to their problems. If your children do confide problems to you, strive to remain calm, non-critical, and nonjudgmental. Listen compassionately to their concern and work with them to get the help they need to resolve the problem.
- Be sure to screen babysitters and caregivers. Many states now have public registries that allow parents to screen individuals for prior criminal records and sex offenses. Check references with other families who have used the caregiver or babysitter. Once you have chosen the caregiver, drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask your children how the experience with the caregiver was, and listen carefully to their responses.
- Practice basic safety skills with your children. Make an outing to a mall or a park a "teachable" experience in which your children can practice checking with you, using pay phones, going to the restroom with a friend, and locating the adults who can help if they need assistance. Remember that allowing your children to wear clothing or carry items in public on which their name is displayed can bring about unwelcome attention from inappropriate people who may be looking for a way to start a conversation with your children.
- Remember that there is no substitute for your attention and supervision. Being available and taking time to really know and listen to your children helps build feelings of safety and security.

- Also remember that in the vast majority of cases (up to 90%); children are molested by someone they know. Your efforts at keeping your child safe must be informed by this fact and not focused exclusively on the danger that strangers may present.

Facts about Sex Offenders

Most men who commit sexual offenses do not know their victim.

False. 90% of child victims know their offender, with almost half of the offenders being a family member. Of sexual assaults against people age 12 and up, approximately 80% of the victims know the offender.

Most child sexual abusers use physical force or threat to gain compliance from their victims.

False. In the majority of cases, abusers gain access to their victims through deception and enticement, seldom using force. Abuse typically occurs within a long-term, ongoing relationship between the offender and victim and escalates over time.

Only men commit sexual assault.

False. While most sex offenders are male, sometimes sex offenses are committed by female offenders.

It helps the victim to talk about the abuse.

True. The victim's recovery will be enhanced if she or he feels believed, supported, protected, and receives counseling following the disclosure that s/he was assaulted. However, sexual assault victims should always have the choice about when, with whom, and under what conditions they wish to discuss their experiences.

If you want more information about sex offenders you can go to <http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov/protect.htm> on the internet.

If you have been a victim of a sexual assault please tell someone. Many of these cases go unreported and the offender may and most likely offend again. We are not immune from sexual assault cases. In the 23 years that I have been working at the Turner County Sheriff's Office, I have investigated several cases and many of the offenders have been found guilty or plead guilty. Thanks for taking the time to read this column and I hope to hear from you soon. Keep your family safe. Sheriff Byron Nogelmeier.