

Identifying a Safe Adult

We all want to keep the kids we know safe. We teach them to steer clear of unmarked vans and free candy. We call ahead to talk with the parents before dropping them off at a playdate or a sleepover with a new friend. We might even study our local sex offender registry map to see which nearby houses our children need to avoid.

Although these are all great practices for keeping youth safe from strangers, the tough reality is that 93% of children who experience childhood sexual abuse are victimized by someone they know.¹ In fact, many of those preying on vulnerable youth are people we'd never expect – people we trust to be caregivers, not predators:

- **A beloved coach of a youth sports team.**
- **An attentive teacher.**
- **A caring scout leader.**
- **A charismatic youth pastor.**
- **Even a dear family member.**

Unfortunately, children and parents alike feel as if they can trust the adults in these important, privileged roles. Many times, predators and traffickers will pretend to be exactly the type of caring adult with which you want your child to spend time. They use the trust they've built with you and with children to create a climate of isolation, control, and exploitation.

But if predators are so good at posing as someone who truly cares for children, **how can we tell who is who?**

First, let's look at some characteristics of a *Safe Adult*.



WHAT IS A SAFE ADULT? SOMEONE WHO:

- ➔ Genuinely cares for the well-being of a child.
- ➔ Does kind things for a child without the need or expectation that the child will reward them with attention for their kindness.
- ➔ Encourages a child to maintain and grow healthy relationships with friends, family, and peers.
- ➔ Motivates a child to achieve their goals, without being overbearing or forceful with advice.
- ➔ Makes a child feel safe and comfortable, respecting their boundaries.
- ➔ Will alert the proper authorities or seek outside help if a child needs help or is suffering in any way.

¹Child Sexual Abuse Statistics. (2015). Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse>

But how can you tell if someone is truly a Safe Adult? Here are some subtle but vital differences in behaviors that can be observed to differentiate between a **Safe Adult** and a **Sexual Predator**:

What does a Safe Adult look like?	What does a Sexual Predator look like?
Shows physical affection only when appropriate and/or initiated by the child.	Demonstrates excessive or unusual touching — especially near the legs, chest, stomach, or genital region.
Treats all of the children close to them equally. Although they might be closer to a certain child due to the child's personality or their relationship with the parent, they will not neglect other children present in order to pay attention to any one child in particular.	Singles out one “favorite” child with whom they spend significant time, giving them special attention or even gifts. This behavior can be especially evident while other children (including siblings) are present.
Spends time with the child around a parent, other adults, or in public. They won't seek out alone time with the child but might agree to do so if requested by a parent.	Searches for reasons to be alone with the child. This could include enthusiastically offering to babysit, give the child a ride, or host a sleepover.
Respects a child's right to privacy — especially concerning nudity.	Lacks modesty around children, sometimes undressing in front of them or walking in while a child is using the restroom or changing.
Contact on social media will be minimal and public, if at all. Any private conversations will be conducted with the knowledge and consent of a parent or guardian.	Privately contacts the child on social media. Conversation will be personal, frequent, and, in most cases, secret.
Avoids inappropriate conversation and keeps discussion centered on child-friendly content while children are present.	Discusses or mentions sex, sexual acts, or private body parts while a child is present.
Respects parents' rules and boundaries concerning their child's safety.	Questions parents' rules and decisions, accusing them of being overly protective — especially when those rules restrict the amount of time the child spends with the predator.

If you observe someone in your child's life displaying predatory behavior, immediately:

- ➔ Remove your child from this person's presence or care if possible.
- ➔ In a non-confrontational manner, gently ask your child about their relationship with this individual:
 - *Has this person ever done something or asked you to do something that made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?*
 - *Has this person ever touched or talked about your private parts? How about their private parts?*
 - *Has this person ever contacted you over text or social media without my knowledge?*
 - *Has this person ever asked you to keep a secret from me or other adults in your life?*
- ➔ Consult Shared Hope's Warning Signs Poster for more information on how children might act if they're being groomed or trafficked.
- ➔ If you are still feeling unsure about whether or not this person is a predator, reach out to the RAINN hotline (1-800-656-4673) or NCMEC hotline (1-800-843-5678) to speak with industry professionals for advice about your particular situation.
- ➔ If this person has clearly demonstrated predatory behavior, report their actions to the NCMEC hotline (1-800-843-5678), local law enforcement, and all other relevant authorities (like guidance counselors, head pastors, or supervisors).

Consulted Sources:
<https://www.d2l.org/how-to-be-a-safe-adult/>
<https://www.wikihow.com/Determine-if-Someone-Is-a-Child-Molester>
<https://themamabeareffect.org/red-flags-of-child-predators/>