

# A Misuse of Trust

By Jeri Evans

*Trust.*

You may not realize it, but trust is a tool we rely on in nearly every waking moment of our life. It is responsible for, in part, keeping us functioning from the moment we wake up in the morning, until the time we fall asleep at night. With every step we take, we trust that the ground below us will support our weight and not give-in. With the toothpaste we put on our toothbrush, we trust that the company that produced it has used proven ingredients that have passed high standards for safety. And as we fasten the seatbelt in our car, we trust that the mechanism is sound and will not lose its grip on us if it is suddenly stressed.

We apply this same natural application of trust to the *people* we have allowed in our lives. Through positive observations and interactions, we trust that they will do us no harm. And once we trust our interactions with a person, we *logically* trust that our children are safe in their hands as well. This application and *transfer of trust* comes very naturally.

But trust can also be misused. In a number of instances, blindly relying on trust alone to protect us and those we love may be putting us in increased danger. Protecting our children from child sexual abuse is one such example of where trust alone is not an adequate tool to rely on.

The following are descriptions of “trusted” people. As you will see, some of them appeared to be *extraordinarily* trusted people. But the descriptions are also about people who were committing acts of sexual abuse on children, hiding behind the *gained trust* of those around them. It is my hope that by highlighting descriptions of and quotes describing “trusted” individuals you will realize that trust can be intentionally misused. It can be *the most important tool* offenders use to fool you, manipulate you and mold you into their ardent supporter.

## 1. Personality Traits:

- Very respectful
- Understanding
- The person who solved problems for people
- Was always there for us
- A friend
- Friendly w/families
- Funny
- Offered help
- Part of the game (with us children)
- Charismatic, charming
- Worked well w/kids
- Mr. Cool
- Passed a background check
- He was our babysitter’s son
- People liked being around him
- A grandfather type
- An upstanding individual, the best in society
- A natural leader
- He was from my community
- He worked with children all his life

***These are descriptions of perpetrators used by the survivors featured in the Darkness to Light’s Stewards of Children® child sexual abuse prevention training video.***

2. “... The very qualities we admire in a person - a passion for nurturing children, for enriching their lives....”

***\*From Catherine Townsend in the article "Portrait of a Perpetrator."***

3. "... Living a life of honor and service, dedicated teacher and coach."

***\* Description of Dennis Hastert, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, who pleaded guilty in 2015 to evading federal banking laws for paying to keep his sexual abuse quiet of at least four high school wrestling team members while their coach.***

4. "... A legend... an American icon across multiple mediums for upwards of 50 years." Winner of over 50 industry awards and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a U.S. Navy Honorary CPO (Chief Petty Officer), and recipient of nearly 60 honorary degrees. "He's a genius. He is generous. He's kind. He's inclusive."

***\* Describing well-known actor and comedian Bill Cosby, accused by nearly 60 women of either rape, drug-facilitated sexual assault, sexual battery, child sexual abuse, and/or other sexual misconduct over many years.***

5. "... He's helped thousands of kids..." Was revered as the altruistic founder of a statewide nonprofit organization that helped at-risk children. Praised by President George W. Bush as a shining example of charity work, Angels in Adoption Award winner in 2002, a "pillar of the community," and a hero to the largest alumni network in the world.

***\* Former Penn State Assistant Football Coach Jerry Sandusky, convicted in 2012 of 45 counts of child sexual abuse with 10 boys over 15 years. He is currently serving 30-60 years in prison (as a serial abuser).***

6. "... The quintessential 'boy next door' - an affable, bespectacled, young charmer.

As the official \*\*\*\*\* pitchman, he maintained the wholesome, unassuming, innocent, and even shy air that embodied his persona - one [so] aligned with healthy choices and such neighborly familiarity that we only needed to know his first name..."

***\* Regarding longtime advertising spokesman (the "Subway Guy") Jared Fogel, who pleaded guilty in 2015 to multiple charges of child pornography and crossing state lines to have sex (with at least 14 teenage girls). He is serving up to 15 years in a Colorado prison.***

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I hope that these examples illuminate for you that blindly relying on trust alone is not, was not, and never will be a reliable method for protecting children from sexual abuse. It cannot be. It is also one of the primary tools that predators use to fool you and everyone around them.

***Does this mean I cannot trust anyone with my child?***

No, it does not. Trust is a natural human instinct and need and still plays a very important role in your life. What we are suggesting is to move away from trust as your primary method of child protection. Instead, implement the use of effective tools and intelligent, proven techniques into your daily life.

***What should I do instead? What are those "tools?"***

You can learn more from our Restore Hope website (see [How to Protection Children from Abuse](#) on the Resources page) and by taking the Stewards of Children® child sexual abuse awareness and prevention training. At that training, we cover a number of helpful topics, including developing safe boundaries, what to teach children, unsupervised "one-on-one time," what grooming is, plus much more. Together, we can create an environment where offenders can no longer hide behind your trust and where they no longer have unrestricted access to and the ability to harm our children! Contact Pam Congdon at 503-667-1189 for more information.