

### **The Stranger Isn't The Danger- Child Abuse Begins At Home**

When I was speaking at a conference last week, one of the women in the audience bemoaned the fact that "Stranger Danger" is no longer the focus of child safety education, training and publicity, as it was previously. I explained to her that the reason for this is that the entire focus on strangers was a mistake! The real danger to children rarely comes in the form of abduction or molestation by a stranger. Statistics regularly show that in 85-90% of the cases the victimizer is an adult who is known to the child. Often it is a trusted member of the family- the uncle, cousin, step-father and even the natural parents. Other times it is the teacher, coach or minister. These are people who have close and repeated access to the child. These are the people who children (and parents) need to watch closely.

It also is true that children who have not been abused rarely report abuse. It is difficult for them to come forward and talk about what happened because it does involve a person with whom they have a relationship. Often they are faced with disbelief and lack of support from their own family! When they do make a report, they need to be evaluated by an expert in the field and given the assistance that they require in dealing with the situation, even if it disrupts the family unit.

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