

Why Some Adults Are Sexually Attracted To Children

This article was written by Dan Hitz, Director of Reconciliation Ministries. If you or someone you know needs help, please call 586.739.5114. Help is available through Jesus Christ.

**Jesus... asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared.
"Go now and leave your life of sin." John 8:10-11 NIV**



Perhaps no temptation or sin strikes more fear and shame into the heart of an individual than sexual attractions toward children. People who are attracted to children are often afraid to get the help they need because of the anger in society toward those who have abused and the fear of being reported. It is important to understand that no one is hopeless, and that Jesus Christ loves those who are attracted to children and wants to set them free. It is important to understand that suspected acts of child abuse must be reported in order to obtain help for those who are affected by the abuse as

well as the individual who has abused another. It is also important to understand that temptation alone is neither a sin nor a crime, and is not reportable. The intent of this article is to explain pedophilia, and what may be occurring in the hearts of those who are attracted to children. Although this article looks at some of the emotional issues that a pedophile may be facing, it is in no way intended to excuse his/her behavior or attractions. It is intended to encourage those with such attractions to seek help so that they may be set free from the shame and temptations that are keeping them in bondage. If you or someone you know is struggling with this sin, please call 586.739.5114. Come and meet Jesus Christ at the foot of the cross and let Him set you free from the temptations that have kept you emotionally imprisoned.

Pedophilia is a recurrent sexual disorder in which a person has frequent, intense sexual urges toward children who have not entered puberty.¹ Persons with pedophilia may or may not act upon those urges. Ephebophilia is similar to pedophilia, but involves a sexual attraction to minors who have begun to experience some of the physiological changes of puberty but have not yet reached adulthood.² Because the characteristics of pedophilia and ephebophilia are similar, the term pedophilia will apply to both disorders throughout this article.

The American Psychiatric Association classifies those attracted to children as "exclusive", only attracted to children; or "nonexclusive", attracted to both adults and children.³ Ward identifies "situational offenders" as those who experience a later onset of attractions to children, tend to abuse family members, experience increased attraction to children during seasons of stress, and prefer sex with adults.⁴ Ward identifies "preferential offenders" as those who experience an earlier onset of attractions to children, are more compulsive in their offending, abuse children outside of their family, and engage in a belief system that fuels predatory behavior.⁴ Pedophilia usually begins in adolescence,¹ however cases of prepubescent offenders have been reported.⁵ Up to 94 percent of pedophiles are male and may prefer girls, boys, or both.^{5, 6} In a study of 678 male pedophiles, 47 percent preferred females, 27 percent preferred males, and 25 percent reported attraction to both sexes.⁶ Most prefer children in a specific age range, and limit their activity to incest, step-family incest, or non family members.

Pedophiles report feeling inadequate when relating to peers and have difficulty functioning in appropriate heterosexual relationships.⁶ They may also experience additional difficulties including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and personality or mood disorders.¹ Sabatino reports that

approximately one-half of his clients who are attracted to children are themselves victims of childhood sexual abuse and many of those who were not sexually abused have suffered from emotional abuse.⁷ Their own abuse results in a sense of powerlessness which leads to feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. Because of an overwhelming sense of shame, the abuse victims find it extremely difficult to relate to healthy adults in their own peer groups and prefer the vulnerability and acceptance that they gain from those who are weaker. Van Domelen explains that as a child, the pedophile was in some way isolated from himself. He grew into a physical adult yet remained trapped in a perceived need to connect with children and his own lost childhood. Pedophiles are trying to avoid their painful feelings of inadequacy and create a sense of acceptance and value.² Fearing adult relationships, they try to establish intimate relationships with children with whom they feel accepted and in control.⁷



Sexual offenders often seek situations where they have influence over children such as teaching, coaching, or developing relationships with the mothers of children to whom they are attracted. Approximately 60 percent of boys and 80 percent of girls who are victims of pedophilia are victimized by someone the child or the child's family is familiar with.⁵ Many offenders are drawn to children who have characteristics that the offender desires within himself.⁸ The offender who unconsciously believes that his innocence and childhood playfulness have been stolen from him by his abuser may be drawn to children who have a childlike, carefree behavior. The abuser has to balance the desired characteristics with the vulnerability that will allow him to groom the victim. He may have to substitute the ideal child with a vulnerable child that he can connect with. Putnam cites several factors that increase a child's vulnerability to sexual abuse.⁹ Approximately 75 percent of all victims of childhood sexual abuse are girls. The risk of sexual abuse for girls begins at an earlier age and lasts longer than the risk for boys with the exception of boys with disabilities. Putnam states that boys suffering from a mental or physical handicap are at a substantially increased risk compared to boys that do not suffer from these conditions. He found no socioeconomic, race, or ethnic influences on the frequency of sexual abuse. Putnam reports that the risk of sexual abuse also increases substantially for children living in single parent homes, or in homes where both parents are absent. Girls with a step-father in the home face twice the risk of being sexually abused by the step-father or by another adult prior to the step-father's arrival. Children who are socially isolated and whose parents are impaired are also at increased risk.

Whether you are an adult who is sexually attracted to children, or you are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, Jesus Christ can heal the hurts of the past, present, and future. Don't let shame or fear stand in the way of the help that you need. Call 586.739.5114 and ask how Reconciliation Ministries can help you. There are many men and women who have walked down a path very similar to yours and have found healing. There is hope for you too.

References:

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