

Warning Sign 3



## ***An Adult Who Goes Overboard in Touching Children***

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***By Sharon Womack Doty, J.D., M.H.R.***  
***Consultant to the VIRTUS® Programs***

“The only way I know to protect myself from being accused of molesting kids is to never touch a child again.”

The frustration, fear, and concern many people feel today are evident in this comment. We are bombarded with stories of trusted adults who abuse children. These reports undermine our faith in our own instincts and our ability to protect our children.

Heightened awareness about the warning signs of potential child molesters is a key to stopping abuse. One of the warning signs of a potential abuser is an adult who goes overboard touching children; for example, an adult who takes every opportunity to put their hands on children—such as tickling and wrestling with a child—even when he or she doesn’t know the child very well.

The problem is that tickling and wrestling, in and of themselves, are not inherently “bad.” Human touch is important for children. Unfortunately, child molesters use a child’s need for touch to groom the child for other types of touching that are not acceptable. Physical grooming often begins with an innocent pat on the shoulder or the arm. During the



grooming process the touching becomes progressively more intimate.

To prevent abuse, adults must first pay attention to the physical interactions between other adults and children. Take notice of inappropriate touching or when something about the interaction gives you an uneasy feeling. Trust your instincts and communicate your concerns to someone who can intervene.

When caring adults pay attention to the interactions between adults and children, would-be abusers become uncomfortable that their actions are being noticed and monitored. This attention interferes with the abusers' plans and can help save children from harm.

Second, raising awareness about appropriate touch can reduce the fears of genuinely caring people—allowing them to touch children appropriately without fear of accusation.

When adults know the appropriate boundaries for touching, all of us can begin to take notice of those who cannot or will not keep their hands to themselves—making the world a safer place for children.