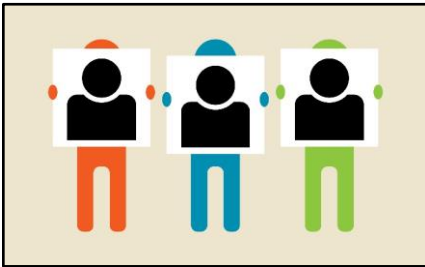


What Does an Abuser Look Like?

This article is primarily a summary of Chapter Three, "Profiles of Abusers", from *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* by Dr. Steven R. Tracy. The book was published by Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2005. This summary was written by Dan Hitz, director of Reconciliation Ministries of Michigan, Inc. More articles on abuse recovery are available at www.recmin.org.



When we hear stories of abuse, it is amazing how often the survivor's heartache is heightened by the sad reality that the perpetrator was someone who was trusted and respected. Assaults may happen by scruffy looking people lurking in the bushes, but most long-term abuse happens by people who are well known by the survivors. They don't look like what we expect an abuser to look like. Abusers are usually skilled at gaining the trust of the victim and earning the respect of many in the community. This article includes a very brief summary of four general characteristics of abusers and

the five types of sexual abusers identified by Dr. Steven Tracy in his book *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Zondervan, 2005). His book is an excellent resource to learn more about abuse recovery.

Whether you are an abuse survivor seeking to understand the profiles of an abuser, you are one who is tempted to abuse, or you are one who has abused; remember the powerful work that Jesus did on the cross. Not only did He pay the penalty for our sins through His sacrifice, He also made provision to restore us from the sins done against us on the cross. Help is available. If you or someone you love has been affected by abuse, reach out for help. Call Reconciliation Ministries at 586.739.5114.

Four General Characteristics of Abusers detailed in *Mending the Soul*.

Abusers demonstrate a pervasive denial of responsibility. Another name for this type of denial is *rationalization*. The person justifies his actions by making illogical excuses in his own mind. This is one of the most blatant characteristics of unrepentant abusers. Abusers who are skilled in the grooming process often justify their abuse by claiming that the child either consented to the sexual activity or that the child initiated the activity. He may rationalize that the child was curious or that the victim dressed seductively. I have bluntly reminded a few people I've counseled that no matter how a child behaves, we have the spiritual, ethical and legal responsibility to protect him or her and teach him or her how to live a holy life. There are absolutely no excuses for abusing a child. Abusers must take full responsibility for their behavior.

Abusers are skilled at bold deceitfulness. Abusers are usually skilled at gaining the trust of others. They may gravitate to the children's education department of the local church because they know that Christians can often be too trusting and naïve. They may exercise great concern for the child in front of the parents as they come to pick him up for a special activity, and then abuse the child as soon as they leave the home. Continuing the abuse requires that they maintain the false perception of their trustworthiness and manipulate the victim into silence and continued compliance. They are specialists at looking parents, church leaders and victims in the eye and maintaining their innocence. They may blatantly use deceit to continue the charade and cast suspicion on others. It is essential for abusers to fully admit their sin – without excuse – in the recovery process.

Abusers spew harsh judgement toward others. I've often asked the question, "Whose fault is 'it' in an addict's mind?" The answer is, "Everybody else's!" Addicts are famous for blaming everyone else for their own actions. "My wife made me so mad that I had to drink!" Abusers take this practice to a whole new level. Whether due to the intense personal guilt and shame abusers feel over their own actions, or to deflect attention and responsibility off of themselves, abusers can be some of the most critical and angry people around. It can be a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde experience. They may be a model citizen and church goer in front of the majority of their acquaintances, but they turn into an entirely different person in front of those they are abusing. They may also use a "religious judgmentalism" and uphold lofty standards as a shield to hide their own harmful behavior. They work to create a "holy" persona that seems to be above reproach. Repentant abusers must stop judging everyone else, and admit their own sinful actions.

Abusers practice calculated determination. Keeping the victims silent and the abuse hidden is a top priority for abusers. He will intentionally manipulate and intimidate the victim to carry out his plans. Abusers can be very skillful at identifying the weaknesses and fears of the victims and use those insights against victims to force

continued submission. This has very devastating effects, and explains why many victims shut down their emotions and refuse to admit their needs. They eventually realize their abuser has used their own emotions and desires against them to propitiate the abuse. It takes a lot of healing for survivors to allow themselves to feel and acknowledge their own needs. Those who work with abusers need to realize how skillful offenders are at manipulation and directly confront it when they see it.

Five Types of Sexual Abusers detailed in Mending the Soul.

Dr. Steven Tracy identifies five types of abusers in his book *Mending the Soul*. I've used the concept of an **attraction profile** in the counseling process to help people in recovery understand how their specific attractions can help them understand the specific type of healing they need in their hearts. The age and type of attractions can help us understand when traumas have occurred, or the types of legitimate wounds that strugglers are trying to heal in sinful, illegitimate ways. We can then take those legitimate needs to the Lord who can truly heal. Tracy's list of the five types of sexual abusers can help in this process.

General Adult Child Molesters – Tracy writes that child molesters come from a wide cross section of society. Not all of them have been molested as children, 80 to 90% of them are male, and most of them have come from a very dysfunctional family of origin. They rarely molest family members, yet when they do the abuse is usually long-term and much more severe. Those who molest females usually have about 20 victims, while those who molest boys usually have about 150 victims. Step-parents are ten times more likely to abuse children than birth parents.

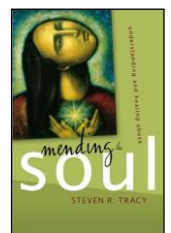
Fixated Child Molesters (Pedophilia) – Fixated child molesters, also known as pedophiles, are usually attracted to a specific gender and a specific age range prior to puberty. The majority of pedophiles are attracted to boys. They tend to be less violent, but more focused on the deliberate grooming and emotional manipulation to gain the trust and compliance of their victims. Hebephilia refers to those who are fixated at pubescents aged 11 to 14. Ephebophilia refers to those focused on adolescents aged 15 to 19.

Female Molesters – Research suggests that about 20% of child molesters are female. Tracy cites researcher, Anna Salter, who identifies the following three main categories of female offenders: 1) Women who molest children under the age of six, usually their own children. 2) The teacher/lover group of women who primarily molest adolescents. 3) Women who were at least initially coerced into having sexual relations with children by an adult male partner.

Adolescent Molesters – Approximately half of all child molestations are committed by adolescents and their victims tend to be younger children. Tracy identifies the following five categories of adolescent offenders: 1) Experimenters who tend to be younger, sexually naïve and have a limited number of interactions with children. 2) Group offenders who are influenced by others to participate in group sexual offenses against children. 3) Undersocialized offenders who possess chronic social isolation, poor social skills, and act out to exert power over other children. 4) Pseudosocialized offenders who have adequate social interaction, but were likely sexually abused themselves and abuse for sexual pleasure. 5) Sexually aggressive offenders who have come from severely dysfunctional homes, possess negative emotional traits, and abuse to dominate and humiliate their victims.

Children Who Violate Other Children – Most children are curious about their sexuality and many engage in “playing doctor” at some point in their lives. The behavior is a problem if it occurs after caregivers have discovered it and explained to the children that it is inappropriate, if a child manipulates or threatens others to engage in the behavior, if it happens with a wide age group present, or it includes sexual acts beyond merely looking and touching.

This summary on the characteristics of abusers and the types of abuse is far from conclusive. I recommend that you read *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* by Dr. Steven Tracy for more information. If you or a loved one are struggling with the emotional effects of abuse, you may need professional help. Contact Reconciliation Ministries for more information at 586.739.5114.



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