

HAS YOUR TEEN OMEGLED RANDOM STRANGERS?

MINNESOTA: A former high school coach has pleaded guilty to kidnapping and sexually assaulting two 13-year old girls that he met through an online chat site called *Omegle*, a website devoted to randomly connecting strangers. The girls and the 23 year old man had sexually suggestive chats online and via text for about two weeks before he arranged to pick the girls up near their homes and brought them to his home. He said they watched a movie, then he engaged in sexual acts with both girls.

The girls were found at his home the next morning, crying and “huddled behind a couch” in the basement.

The man was a part-time volleyball coach at a Catholic high school and had previously served as a volunteer coach for a junior varsity baseball team in another city.

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How does this happen? Let’s start there. The whole point of *Omegle* is **TO TALK TO STRANGERS**. Point of fact, you can’t be on the app for more than a short time without coming across sexually explicit content — the sort of behavior that in real life would get you arrested for indecent exposure. But the draw is you are



“chatting” with an anonymous stranger who you will never be connected to again... unless you arrange to do that off site by exchanging phone numbers or other data.

Which is exactly what the girls did. This predator groomed them for 2 weeks, before getting them to agree to be picked up and taken back to his home.

Blocking *Omegle* (or any similar site) is not the answer because tomorrow there will be a new app to take its place.

While it may be an uncomfortable discussion, helping your child protect themselves **when you aren’t there** is crucial. Failure to have those conversations because you are afraid “it will make them curious” or “steal their innocence” could literally place your child in a situation where s/he is completely defenseless, and inclined to be compliant because they don’t want to hurt their predator’s *feelings*.

WISHING WON’T MAKE IT SO

Most teens have adopted the cultural progression for relationships:

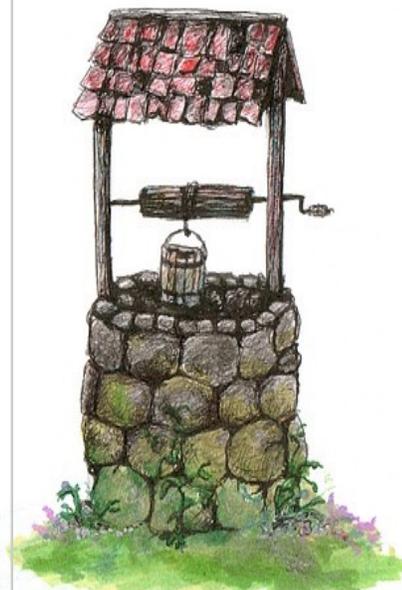
Meet → Date → Move in together → Get married (if it works out).

But numerous studies over time have shown that cohabitators (living together without being married):

- Break up before they ever get married,
- Are 50% more likely to divorce if they do marry,
- Make and save less money,
- Have children who perform academically and socially more like children of single parents.

There are always a handful of teens who respond: “I don’t think it should matter if a couple lives together without being married, if they love each other. What if they don’t have the money to get married? What if they don’t believe in marriage?”

This is a great teaching opportunity if used correctly. First, there are a lot of things in life we all wish wouldn’t “matter,” but they do. I wish it wouldn’t matter if I had chocolate cake every day, but it does. All of us wish it wouldn’t matter if a child grows up with no dad, but it does. It’s important to discuss the



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Of course, you should also check if your child has apps like *Blink*, *Snapchat*, or *BurnNote* installed on their phone because these apps were created with the express purpose of sending messages which are deleted shortly afterward.

Using hypothetical situations to role play so your child can experience the emotions connected to their choices will help them construct a neural network. Remember the goal is NOT to get them to swear "I won't use *OmeGLE*." Rather the goal is for THEM to be able to recognize situations that *look* harmless can still be dangerous.

(CONT: WISHING)

potential results of ignoring a pattern of behavior that has emerged.

I often put it this way, "A lot of people did think back in the day, that it wouldn't matter. Living together seemed to be like a 'trial marriage.' But now we know, after decades of cohabitation, what really happens is it makes people less likely to keep a commitment. So if YOU decide to cohabit, you would do it *knowing the evidence is not in your favor*, and that means you would have no one but yourself to blame if things fall apart."

In my experience, just pointing out they would OWN the consequences of their decision can help an adolescent process a warning. **But a word of caution:** Just letting the facts "float around in their head" doesn't guarantee they will ever process the information! Absolutely no processing whatsoever happens when you use the phrase, "*You need to think about that.*"

This month's COACHING TIP is from Positively Waiting Board Member, Johnny Mercado.



WHOSE JOB IS IT ANYWAY?

We've heard different public figures, people who have influence due to athletic, musical, or acting skills, reject the notion that they are role models. Often times this comes from a person who enjoys the frills of success yet baulks at the responsibility that comes along with it. Responsibility to embrace the fact that many will take their cue of behavior from them.

Regardless of your personal stance on the responsibility of public figures, those of us who are parents do have that responsibility. We do not have the luxury of selectively choosing when we want to have influence over our children and when we don't. The "do as I say, not as I do" method has proven time and again not to work. It has been said that we teach what we know but reproduce who we are.

Where am I going with this? Simply put, as a father of 3, I am often reminded that my voice (and that of my wife) is the single greatest influence on my kids. What I do with my time, how I live my life out in front of them builds the mental constructs and muscle memory for their lives. This truth echoes in my mind during those times when I am exhausted and would REALLY like to just sit on the couch, read a book and veg. Yet the call goes out, "Papa, can we go outside and hit?" "Papa, can you help me with my writing homework?" "Papa, can you fix this?" I wish I could tell you that I have always risen to the call, but I haven't. What I can say is I have never regretted the times I have answered the call.

So I would like to encourage you: mom and dad, single mom or single dad, aunt, uncle, grandma, or grandpa to stay the course! Keep being the voice and example in your kid's life (regardless of your kid's age)! Don't forfeit your spot to public figures. There is no one who can do, what you can. No one can influence like you do! Does it get challenging and tiring at times..... absolutely. But may I encourage you today, to stay in the game! Keep your stride steady and be what you, as your kid's parent, were meant to be! And if, through life's circumstances, you have stepped off the field and are standing on the sidelines, may I encourage you to go for it again? You are not disqualified from speaking into your kid's life and living your life out before them. The truth is, no one is as qualified as you!

Ahhhh, my phone is ringing..... literally the call is for me to pick up two of my kids.



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