

The Dyer Case: An Opportunity for Talking with Your Kids

On Sunday, July 26, Belmont School Superintendent Jill Geiser announced that Middle School teacher Leon Dyer had been arrested for possession of child pornography, leaving parents and students shaken and wondering how best to respond. While the details are still unfolding, so far, the case does not appear to involve any middle school students or any sexual assault by the teacher.

The news concerning Mr. Dyer is disturbing, but it provides an opportunity for parents to discuss important issues of body autonomy and personal safety with their kids.

Engaging in candid, non-judgmental conversations is one of the best defense strategies against sexual assault and predatory grooming. Kids armed with knowledge about sexual assault are more likely to recognize – and feel empowered to report – inappropriate behavior.

With pre-teens, parents might start the conversation by asking what the child has heard concerning Mr. Dyer. Be prepared to simply and concisely share the facts: *“A Belmont teacher has been accused of having inappropriate images of children on his computer and phone.”*

With middle/high schoolers – who may have interacted with Mr. Dyer at school – parents can ask their kids about it: *“Was there anything that made you feel unsafe or uncomfortable?”* or *“Is there anything you've been worried about that you haven't told me?”*

Regardless of age, parents can take this opportunity to teach their kids - children and teens - to recognize and talk about sexual assault and predatory grooming:

- Tell them clearly that their body belongs to them – and that they have the right to say “No” to any touch, words, or actions that make them uncomfortable, no matter who it comes from (e.g., teachers, relatives, clergy, coaches, parents, friends).
- Help them recognize grooming behaviors. Explain that some people may use gifts, extra attention, special favors, or secrets to build trust and make it harder for kids to recognize or talk about behavior that is inappropriate or makes them uncomfortable.
- Explicitly tell kids they will *never* get in trouble for telling a trusted adult about behavior that makes them uncomfortable, confuses them, or seems wrong—even if someone told them to keep it a secret or threatened them.
- Encourage them to come to you if they are ever confused or scared and repeatedly reassure them that they will be believed and supported.

- Encourage them to identify “other trusted adults” (e.g., aunt/uncle, older sibling, grandparent) that they can speak with around this topic, if they are not comfortable speaking with you. Trustworthy adults do not ask kids to break rules about body safety, keep uncomfortable secrets, or make them feel responsible for an adult's feelings.
- Let them know they can keep telling until someone helps. If the first adult doesn't listen or isn't available, encourage them to tell another trusted adult until they receive help.
- Consider “role playing” different scenarios so that kids develop skills, language, and confidence around saying No and asking for help.
- **Online Safety:** Remind kids that the same body safety rules apply online. No one should ask them to share private photos, engage in sexual conversations, or keep online interactions secret from a trusted adult.
- Keep the conversations ongoing. Rather than having “one big talk,” revisit these topics regularly in age-appropriate ways, so kids know they can always come back with questions or concerns.
- Consult RAINN <https://rainn.org> – an excellent resource on this topic.

The goal is to empower kids, not scare them. Regular, calm conversations about body autonomy, personal safety, and boundaries help them to not only recognize unsafe situations but also to seek help.

Having a trusted teacher be accused of downloading child pornography is a deeply troubling development. But, as a community, let's make sure we're following the facts, and not leaning into rumors or assumptions. As parents, we can be steady and reassuring for our kids while the legal process unfolds.

For additional resources, see <http://belmontwellness.org>

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