

October 21, 2026

**The Belmont Police Department
and Belmont Wellness Coalition
Present**

**Understanding Risk, Grooming,
and Online Safety**

A Community Awareness and Safety Seminar

Presenters

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The Legal Framework of Sex Crimes

Suspicion versus Accusation

It's not enough to suspect someone. To charge someone with a sexual offense, the crime must have all the elements of a statutory offense.

Classification of Sex Crimes & Offenders

Once a crime is established, statutory definitions govern sex offenses, child involvement, and violent predators. The following variables are used to determine severity and later classification:

Key Risk Factors

stranger victim	male offender
weapon use	substance abuse
behavioral compulsions	position of trust

Mitigating Factors

- age
- supervision
- treatment programs

Modern Predatory Tactics

- Target and Victim Selection:** Identifying vulnerabilities – social isolation, low parental supervision, or online expressions of alienation.
- Gaining Access and Isolation:** Orchestrating alone time and fostering an "us versus them" mindset.
- Trust and Rapport Development:** Creating dependency by fulfilling unmet needs for mentorship, validation, or resources.
- Desensitization to Boundaries:** Moving from boundary-testing to abuse and enforcing secrecy through coercion and guilt.
- Maintenance and Secrecy:** Sustaining control and preventing disclosure post-abuse.

Recognizing Red Flags

Grooming is methodical.

Watch for *sudden shifts* in behavior during middle school years:

- Intense secrecy regarding devices
- Unexplained gifts, money, or in-game currency
- Withdrawal from family into isolation
- An adult showing excessive individualized interest

Understanding SORIS (Sex Offender Registry Information System)

Offender Risk Levels

- **Level 1 (Low Risk):** No public access; registers by mail with Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB).
- **Level 2 (Moderate Risk):** Public access serves safety interest; registers in person at local police; searchable via SORIS (if post-2013).
- **Level 3 (High Risk):** Substantial public safety interest with active notification; registers in person; searchable via SORIS.

SORIS & Regulations

- Provided for public awareness; harassment/threats using this data is illegal.
- Most sex offenders must register.

Current Registrations in Belmont

Reported Address	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
LIVE	3	2	1
SCHOOL	0	0	0
SECONDARY	0	0	0
WORK	3	0	0

Online Safety Basics

The Vulnerable Window: Ages 11–13

- **The Middle School Shift:**
High vulnerability driven by increased independence, unmonitored devices, and gaming voice chats.
- **Financial Sextortion:**
A rapidly growing threat targeting teenage boys; predators coerce explicit images and demand ransom.
- **Generative AI & Deepfakes:**
Predators use GAI tools on benign social media photos to create explicit deepfakes for blackmail.

Online Safety Basics (continued)

Steps and Actions to Take

1. **Device Audits:** Regularly check "Recently Deleted" folders, battery stats for hidden apps, and in-game DMs.
2. **The Bedroom Rule:** Require all devices to charge overnight in a common area.
3. **The “No Escape” Clause:** Assure children that no online mistake will forfeit your love or permanently cost them their phone, encouraging them to report threats.
4. **Reacting to Abuse:** Do not delete apps if inappropriate messages appear; take screenshots immediately to preserve digital trail for law enforcement.

When to Contact the Police



Early Conversations

It is better to *report a concern* – even if it turns out to be nothing – than to *wait* until a crime has been committed. Early conversations are strongly encouraged.



Notice Red Flags

Call when you notice red flags. Even if immediate intervention isn't possible, law enforcement can provide additional warning signs to watch for.



Immediate Action

If you believe your child has been a victim, call immediately without waiting, preserve any evidence you can, and officers will respond to assist.



Specialized Support

While the investigative process can be long and difficult, local police and the Middlesex DA's office have specially trained personnel to handle these cases.

Why Talking with Kids is so Important

Knowledge is Power!

Kids who have knowledge ...

1. ... recognize unsafe behaviors
2. ... are empowered to say No
3. ... will report to a trusted (safe) adult

Caregivers: Share Knowledge (Information) ...

- Have regular, age-appropriate conversations about body safety (bathing suit rule), boundaries, secrets, photos, etc.

When Talking with Your Kids

Teach Kids *Safety*, Not *Fear*. *Tell Them:*

- You have the right to say NO to *anything* that makes you uncomfortable.
- It is *always OK* to tell a Trusted Adult if someone makes you feel uncomfortable – even if it's someone you know and love.
- You will *never* get in trouble for sharing or asking for help.
- Adults should *never* ask you to keep secrets – especially about touching, gift giving, or seeking alone time.

Protective Factors

1. Recognize Grooming Behaviors

Rather than teaching children to identify "bad people," teach them to recognize *unsafe behaviors*.

2. Identify Other Trusted (Safe) Adults

Tell them to keep sharing, until someone helps.

3. Teach Online Safety

The same “body safety” rules apply to online activity.

4. Keep Conversations Going

Continue to talk with them as they become teens.

The “Stranger Danger” Myth

- **Myth:** “Kids should fear/avoid strangers.”
- **Reality:** Data shows that *90% of abusers are known* (e.g., peers, relative, coach, clergy, etc.)
- **Advice:** Teach kids to be comfortable talking with strangers (they might need to get help from a stranger).
- ... But also teach them how to recognize *unsafe behaviors from anyone* (e.g., secrets, touching, special gifts, extra attention, seeking alone time, etc.)

If Your Child Shares Something Concerning

1. Stay calm.
2. Listen. Let them talk, in their own words.
3. Thank them for telling you – and validate that it might've been hard to do so.
4. Offer reassurance and support.

If you are concerned your child may have experienced sexual abuse, seek professional guidance.

Adults Have a Role in Creating Safe Communities

Adults: Help create safer environments

- Respect boundaries/choices.
- Take children's questions and concerns seriously.
- Avoid situations that create unnecessary secrecy or isolation.
- Follow child safety policies and professional boundaries.
- Report concerns (about others) to the appropriate authorities when required or when a child's safety may be at risk.

Recovery is Possible

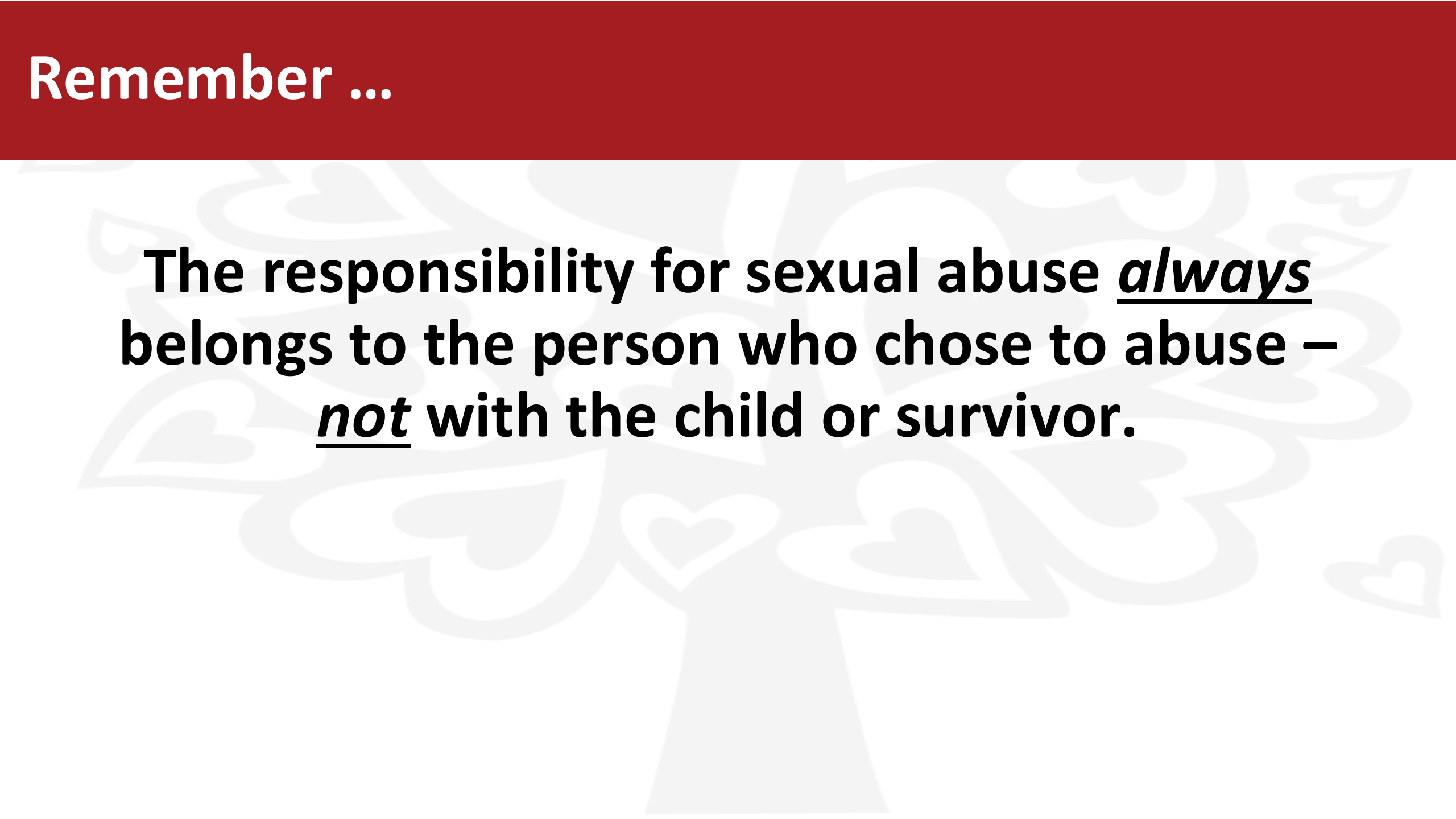
With support, survivors do heal. Many go on to build healthy relationships, find a sense of safety, and live fulfilling lives.

Healing is supported by:

- Caring adults who believe, listen, and support
- Evidence-based treatment
- Safe, trusting relationships
- Opportunities to regain a sense of safety, choice, control
- Being free from blame, shame, and secrecy

Remember ...

The responsibility for sexual abuse always belongs to the person who chose to abuse – not with the child or survivor.

A faint, light gray background illustration of a tree with a thick trunk and many heart-shaped leaves, spanning the width of the slide.

Resources

1. RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) rainn.org
2. Mass Children's Alliance (MACA) machildrensalliance.org
3. Stop it Now 1-888-PREVENT stopitnow.org
4. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)
missingkids.org 1-800-843-5678
5. Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline
childhelphotline.org 1-800-422-4453
6. The Johns Hopkins MOORE Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/moore-center-for-the-prevention-of-child-sexual-abuse>
7. Preventing Online Abuse and Exploitation enoughabuse.org

Questions?

Q and A

