

Each week, as I think about what I'm going to write in my column, I reflect on recent events related to families and children that have come to my attention. In the past few weeks, two things have happened that have directed my choice of topic for this week.

The first happened when an individual came to see me in my office, wanting to talk with me about an interview with an RCMP officer that appeared in a local paper. The article followed the arrest of a man in Qualicum Beach on charges of possessing child pornography, coupled with possession of some pretty heavy-duty firearms. The concern was the message that children in the community are safe because the perpetrator was a child pornographer, not a pedophile.

The second event was an item on both national and regional newscasts that an international child pornography ring had been busted and a number of high-profile men were arrested, including one well-known pedophile.

The article indicates that the community has a tendency to identify all sexual offenders as pedophiles. Anyone sexually offending against children is a pedophile. They may not be predatory but the term for offenders who choose child victims is pedophile.

The literature relating to child sexual abuse can be ambiguous in defining what constitutes abuse but that is due to the limited number of actual studies that are available to inform the literature. It is also true that pedophiles can be attracted to peers as well as children, so the fact that an individual has an adult partner is not significant. Pedophiles do not necessarily sexually abuse their own children. That is classified as incest.

In relation to the recent case in Qualicum Beach, pedophiles can also engage in viewing child pornography. The article quoting the RCMP seemed to minimize the viewing of pornography as not being as bad as pedophilia.

This is the kind of rationalizing that is used by offenders in treatment: I did this but I don't do that, as if there is a degree to which one can abuse a child.

For one thing, viewing child pornography is child sexual abuse. The child is not a consenting participant. Viewing pornography is not a passive behaviour, it is an aggressive behaviour. Abuse of any kind is an act of aggression. The fact that the Qualicum Beach perpetrator had an arsenal of weapons would certainly underscore his aggressive nature.

I can see why the RCMP wants to calm the fears of the community but minimizing the threat by philosophically ranking the sexual abuse of children is off-base.

It is very important that we as a society become clear about what is abusive and what motivates the abuse of others, especially children. We have too many examples in our communities of how sexual offending is dismissed because people are uncomfortable or uninformed.

Children are safe when parents and other adults in their social network have accurate information. Be informed!