

Knowing about “sex offender” rules: “Do residency restrictions make us safer?” NARSOL says no

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By [Sarah Jaffe](#) . . . If you grew up in the ‘80’s, you probably heard a lot about “stranger danger.” Now, as a parent yourself, you may find yourself caught in between the desire to be a a free-range parent and making [parenting decisions that stem from anxiety](#). It can be hard to get the balance right, and our isolated modern world, where many of us don’t know our neighbors, can only add to the anxiety. What if the neighbor across the street is an abusive person or has been convicted of a sexual offense? And what exactly are the rules – do sex offenders have to notify their neighbors?

The answer is slightly complicated, and there is state-by-state variation, but the basics are this: No matter what state you live in, no one is likely to come to your door and notify you that they’ve been convicted of a sexual offense. However, that information is public. There are also better and more productive ways to keep your kids safe than looking up everyone in your zip code who has been convicted of a sexual offense. . . .

Megan’s Law, the federal law that required that information about certain sexual offenses be made available to the public, is named for Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old who was abducted and killed by a neighbor who had previously been convicted of a sex offense against a child in 1994. The thinking behind the law was that if parents are aware of potentially dangerous people in the neighborhood, they’ll better be able to protect

their children. . . .

Many states require people to register even if they committed their alleged crime when they themselves were children. Slate reports that sex offender registries [have included children as young as 9 years old](#), and that up to 70% of sexual offenses committed against children are committed by other children. So while the phrase “sex offender” can conjure a very specific, scary image, that’s often out of step with who is actually on the registry. . . .

Do community notification laws keep children safe from sex offenders? Ample research suggests that unfortunately, no, they do not, says [Sandy Rozek](#), board member and the communications director for the National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL). Part of NARSOL’s mission is to bring attention to the ways in which community notification laws, and other laws that restrict registered sex offenders, do not meaningfully address community safety. “A huge amount of resources are expended every year in most states at Halloween enforcing sex offender restrictions, all without a single shred of evidence showing that there is any issue at all involving registrants and Halloween but much evidence showing there is none,” Rozek tells Romper. . . .

[**Read the full piece here at Romper.**](#)