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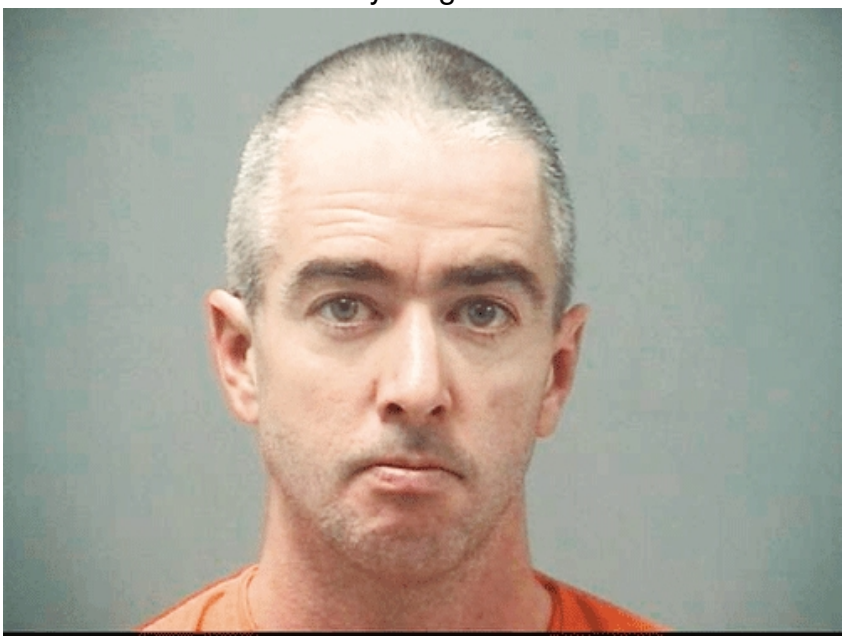
Thirty-five-year-old faces first-degree assault, child porn charges after victim tells defendant's mother of abuse

A 35-year-old Port Washington man has been charged with sexually assaulting a 4-year-old girl he was entrusted to watch and taking pornographic pictures of her.

James R. Esselman was charged last week in Ozaukee County Circuit Court with two counts of first-degree sexual assault of a child younger than 12 and five counts of possession of child pornography.



On Sunday, Jan. 22, Port Washington police launched an investigation that quickly led them to Esselman after a hospital reported the suspected sexual assault of the girl, Police Chief Kevin Hingiss said. Esselman was arrested the next day after police searched his home in the 200 block of W. Jackson Street.

According to the criminal complaint filed Wednesday, Jan. 25, Esselman's mother told police that her son brought the girl to her home on Saturday, Jan. 21, so she could watch the child while Esselman ran errands.

Esselman, who met the girl's mother through an Internet chat room five years ago, was apparently watching the girl, who is from Green Bay and was visiting Port Washington, according to authorities.

Esselman's mother said she was clipping the girl's fingernails when the girl said she and Esselman, whom she referred to as Jimmy, play "boy butt and girl butt," the complaint states.

When Esselman's mother asked the girl to explain, the girl moved her hands in such a way to suggest masturbation, according to the complaint.

The woman said that when she asked the child if she liked the game, the girl replied, “No. I cry. I don’t like that,” the complaint states.

Esselman’s mother said that when she confronted her son about molesting the girl, he said, “It only happened once,” the complaint states.

After the girl told Esselman’s mother about the assaults, she was taken back to her home in Green Bay, where she was examined at a hospital, Hingiss said.

Esselman told authorities he sexually assaulted the girl twice, beginning Friday, Nov. 4, according to the complaint.

Esselman said he and the girl, who was staying at his home, were lying on his bed watching a movie when he began to rub her back, then pulled down her pants. He said he had sexual intercourse with the girl, the complaint states.

Esselman told police the second assault happened about two weeks later after he picked up the girl and took her to his house, according to the complaint.

Esselman also admitted to taking several pornographic photos of the girl. His mother, who said she retrieved the pictures from her son’s home, turned the images over to police, the complaint states.

In all of the photos, the girl is wearing a diaper even though in at least some of the pictures she is clearly too old to be wearing diapers, according to the complaint. Some of the pictures show the girl posed on a pink blanket decorated with butterflies.

The girl was 4 years old during both assaults. She turned 5 last month.

During Esselman’s initial court appearance on Jan. 25, Assistant District Attorney Jeffrey Sisley asked that bail be set at $500,000. Judge Paul Malloy set bail at $100,000 and, in the event Esselman posts bail, ordered him not to have contact with the girl or her mother. The judge also ordered him not to have unsupervised contact with anyone younger than 18 and not to possess photographic equipment, including cell phone cameras.

Esselman, who will be represented by a public defender, remained in the Ozaukee County jail this week. He’s scheduled to appear in court for a status hearing on Feb. 6.

If convicted of the sexual assault charges, Esselman will be subject to a bifurcated, or two-part, sentence comprised of a prison sentence and extended supervision totalling a maximum of 60 years for each count. Because Esselman is older than 18, the prison term must be at least 25 years.

The possession of child pornography charges each carry a maximum 25-year sentence that must include at least three years in prison unless a judge determines a lesser sentence does not endanger the public. The crime also carries a maximum fine of $100,000 and a mandatory

$500 surcharge.

Image Info: Photograph of James Esselman