

Grooming Behaviors

Taken with permission from: Victim Grooming:
Protect Your Child from Sexual Predators (Stewart,2008).

What is “Grooming”?

- A process of identifying and engaging a child in sexual activity.
- It involves an imbalance of power and elements of coercion and manipulation.
- It involves motivation and intent to sexually exploit the child.
- Generally it can appear a great deal like flirting behavior

Who is targeted?

Predators typically target children with obvious vulnerabilities:

- Unpopular
- Feels unloved
- Seeking attention and friendship
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Isolated from peers
- Spends time alone
- Often unsupervised
- Experiencing family problems

How are victims approached by predators?

- Typically presents self positively to child.
- Exhibits interest in the child.
- Is complimentary.
- Learns child’s habits, likes, dislikes.
- Pretends to share common interest, backgrounds, experiences, etc.

What is the purpose of grooming?

- The perpetrators goal is to MAKE A VICTIM by increasing access to the victim and decreasing the likelihood of their intent being discovered by others, including the victim.
- The perpetrators goal is also to make the potential victim feel comfortable enough to be close with the offender, to be alone with the offender, and to keep the sexual behavior a secret.

Grooming is a process that typically consists of the following steps:

- Building Trust and Breaking Down Child's Defenses
 - Pretend to share common interests, backgrounds, experiences, etc.
 - Give gifts as tokens of friendship.
 - Play games.
 - Give rides.
 - Provide access to valuable items, privileges, or activities typically unavailable or off limits.
 - Flatter and make child feel special and somehow indebted.
 - Offer a sympathetic and understanding ear (i.e., "No one understands you like I do"; "I am here for you"; "I know what that's like", etc.)
- Reassuring to the Family/Staff
 - Strike up relationships with parents (single parent families are prime targets).
 - Attempt to gain trust or take advantage of the trust of the child's parents or care-providers.
 - Behave in exemplary ways to alleviate concerns or possible suspicions.
- Gradual Erosion of Boundaries
 - Inappropriate escalating physical contact, such as:
 - hugging or touching non threatening areas of body (i.e., hand holding, rubbing back, caressing hair, etc.)
 - pretending to accidentally touch or brush up against child
 - positioning self in close proximity to child (i.e., sleep in the same bed)
 - engage child in non-sexual inappropriate behaviors (i.e., drinking alcohol)
 - touching and fondling inappropriate areas of the body
- Construct Secrecy with Child
 - Make child fearful that he or she will be in trouble if their activities together are discovered.
 - Tell child that touching between them is good; their relationship is special.
 - Tell child there will be consequences if they report behavior (i.e., "We no longer can be friends", "Your family will hate you", etc.).
- Working to Secure Compliance
 - Escalate intrusiveness of sexual behaviors over time.
 - Manipulate child into performing or permitting desired sex act.
 - Threaten to harm child or some person important to child if they do not comply