

Understanding Grooming

Grooming is the process by which sexual predators gain the trust of children, teenagers, or vulnerable adults with the intent to sexually abuse them. This article explores the purpose and signs of grooming.



According to the American Bar Association, sexual predators first target the survivor, then secure access to and isolate the survivor, while they gain their trust. Finally, they initiate sexual contact—which can range from voyeurism to rape—and convince survivors to conceal the relationship. This can happen online, or in person.

Children are sexually abused more than any other demographic in the U.S., with as many as one-in-five girls and one-in-six boys being victims of child sexual abuse before they turn 18 years old. More than half of perpetrators are family members, and less than 25 percent are strangers.

The purpose of grooming is:

- to manipulate the perceptions of other adults around the child.
- to manipulate the child into becoming a co-operating participant which reduces the likelihood of a disclosure and increases the likelihood that the child will repeatedly return to the offender.
- to reduce the likelihood of the child being believed if they do disclose.
- to reduce the likelihood of the abuse being detected.

Identifying Grooming:

The perpetrators of this sexual abuse are often acquaintances, family members, or trusted members of the community who take advantage of the victim's trust to manipulate them into secrecy.

Signs include:

- Adults who play games with a child that involve touching genitalia
- Adults who discuss sexually explicit content with children.

- Adults who buy children gifts with the purpose of building trust and feelings of security and appreciation.
- Touches or hugs them in front of trusted adults which makes the child think the touching is OK
- Finds out what your child's likes and interests are and then flatters the child by claiming to have the same likes and interests
- Pretends to be a good friend to the child, even "best friends" and acts as a sympathetic listener when child is upset
- Tries to find ways to be alone with the child
- Tells the child dirty jokes or shows them pornography
- Grooms parents to gain more access to the child such as offering to babysit
- Grooming happens online as well so be aware of your children's online activities

Often times, sexual predators use their power to fill an emotional need within their victims, which makes them susceptible to being violated.

While parents may prepare their children to say "no" to inappropriate communication or touching from strangers, it is not always strangers that children need to be aware of

In order to better protect your children, it is important that parents discuss healthy physical and emotional boundaries with them.

Keep open the lines of communication with your children. Make sure that they know that they are loved unconditionally. These things will make it more difficult for sexual predators to target them.

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