

Understanding the Grooming Process: Preventing Inappropriate Behavior and Sexual Misconduct with Children

In most cases of sexual misconduct with children, offenders use a subtle and gradual process known as **grooming** to put children and their families at ease. Grooming is typically done over weeks, months or years to slowly lure and manipulate children into abuse. On the surface, grooming behaviors can appear quite innocent, and may even give the perception that the individual is good with children.

Over 90% of sexual offenders are individuals known and trusted by the child and family. Notoriously friendly and likable, they insinuate themselves into a child's life through his/her family, school, house of worship, sports and hobbies.

Secrets typically play a significant role in the grooming process. Teach children early on that there should be no secrets from parents, even seemingly innocent ones. Secrets often lay the groundwork for future abuse.

Most incidents (81%) of child sexual abuse occur in **one-on-one situations**. Therefore, limit opportunities for individuals to be alone with your child. Adults who must spend one-on-one time with children should be within sight and earshot of other adults. Question the motives of adults who want to spend the majority of their time with children.

Abusers come from all walks of life. Both men and women offend, although men offend more often. Notably, **juvenile offenders** (abusers under the age of 18) are responsible for over 30% of child sexual abuse. Average onset of juvenile sexual assault behavior is 12-14 years old. For safety's sake, supervise children whenever possible, especially during sleepovers and gatherings involving multi-aged youth. Abuse often occurs while adults are socializing and youngsters are playing unsupervised in separate areas.

By being aware of the Grooming Process, adults can interrupt behaviors that may lead to inappropriate or sexual misconduct with children, thus allowing youngsters to grow up healthy and safe.

Grooming Behaviors: How Offenders Build Familiarity & Trust

- Befriending the youngster and their family to slowly gain trust.
- Giving gifts, money, trips, and/or performing special favors for youngster.
- Promoting the notion that the relationship with the boy or girl is special.
- Encouraging harmless secrets, laying the foundation for future sexual secrets.
- Taking pictures/video of the child.
- Communicating with the boy or girl excessively; texting, emailing or calling.
- Desensitizing the child through nonsexual touching, "accidental" touching of privates and/or walking in on bathroom or dressing time.
- Testing a child's boundaries by using inappropriate language and/or telling dirty jokes.
- Playing body contact games with children; tickling, backrubs or wrestling.
- Making alcohol/drugs available to the boy or girl.
- Introducing pornography to initiate sexual interest or to normalize the behavior.
- Offering to carpool and babysit, including overnight trips or sleepovers.

Does Your Child's Youth Serving Organization:

1. Conduct Background Checks/References for all staff & volunteers?
2. Implement Policies & Procedures surrounding child personal safety?
3. Support Improved Supervision of children and teens?
4. Ensure One-on-one Time with minors is in open, observable spaces only?
5. Provide Information on Grooming, Child Lures, Signs of Abuse & Reporting to staff, volunteers, parents and children (age appropriately)?

