

Grooming

What is grooming?

Grooming is the criminal activity of an adult befriending or forming a close emotional relationship with a child in order to persuade them to enter into a sexual relationship.

How are children groomed?

Perpetrators target children they perceive as vulnerable, such as children who are lonely, bullied or have low self-esteem.

The perpetrator will make the targeted child feel special by giving them time and attention, gifts, and special treats or privileges. They will usually take the child into their confidence, telling them secrets.

Once the perpetrator is sure the child will keep a secret, they will begin touching the child, sometimes becoming more sexually aggressive each time.

Perpetrators also try to gain the trust of the child's family. A recent survey of child sexual offenders found in >70% of cases the parents knew the offender was spending time with the child. (Smallbone, n.d.)

Why don't children tell?

Children often feel unable to tell. They will be confused because even though they feel uncomfortable with the behaviour, they trust the perpetrator. Children often experience conflicted emotions around grooming, particularly if they enjoyed the attention as well as the physical sensations that come with the molestation.

They are usually left feeling "dirty" and intensely ashamed, largely blaming themselves for the sexual abuse that they were lured, tricked, and sometimes threatened into enduring. (Goetz, n.d.)

Online grooming

How perpetrators approach children online

As in the real world, perpetrators frequent places where children are present. This includes gaming websites, social networks (e.g. Instagram) and chatrooms. Perpetrators often assume a false identity and may pretend to be someone closer to the child's age or someone the child admires (such as a celebrity). The perpetrator will look at what the child posts, their likes and dislikes and what activities they are involved in. This information is used to quickly establish a connection and trust.

The perpetrator will aim to persuade the child to send them explicit images and may also try to meet the child in person.

How to protect against online grooming:

- Know what your children are doing online

- Explain and set boundaries for what information is appropriate to share and with whom

- Set up internet filters and blockers to prevent access to certain websites and content

- Have the computer in an open family space, rather than the child's bedroom

Grooming warning signs

In isolation these behaviours can be normal and innocent but when more than one are present they may indicate a cause for concern.

Behaviours

- Interested more in children than adults
- Offers to baby-sit or take the children to give you a break
- Works closely with children
- Is especially affectionate toward children
- Has activities with kids when parents are not invited or involved

Relationships

- Often single, not interested in dating people their own age or dating at all
- More interested in their partner's children than their partner
- Married but more affectionate with kids than their spouse

Circle of Friends

- Identifies better with children than people their own age
- Has lots of friends who are children but not many adult friends
- Their friends (who are children) fall within a particular age group

Most importantly, notice your children's behaviour

- Sudden changes in their usual behaviour
- Sudden sleep problems or nightmares
- Doing sexual things or acting sexually with other children
- Suddenly fearing people or places they didn't fear before

(From "Profile of a Pedophile," n.d.)

Myths and facts about sexual perpetrators

Myths	Facts
Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers, in places like schoolyards and playgrounds.	Most sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim or the victim's family. Often the abuse happens in the victim or perpetrators own home.
All sex offenders are male and only girls are victims of sexual abuse	The vast majority of sex offenders are male. However, females also commit sexual crimes. Boys and girls of all ages can be victims of sexual abuse.
Sex offenders commit sexual crimes because they are under the influence of alcohol, mentally ill or are 'dirty old men'.	Offenders are generally from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and the majority are not suffering from any mental illness. While drugs and alcohol are often involved in sexual assaults, it is more common that the victim may be under the influence of alcohol increasing their vulnerability.
Youths do not commit sex offences.	Adolescents are responsible for a significant number of rape and child sexual abuse cases each year.

Child sexual abuse only occurs in dysfunctional families.	Sexual abuse can occur in all family types, cultures and classes.
Victims of child sexual abuse grow up to be adult sex offenders.	This is not the case. Multiple factors, not just sexual victimisation as a child, are associated with the development of harmful sexual behaviours in youth.
Most child sexual abusers use physical force or threat to gain compliance from their victims.	In the majority of cases, abusers gain access to their victims through deception and enticement.
If a child does not tell anyone about the abuse, it is because he/she must have consented to it.	Children often do not tell for a variety of reasons including the offender's threats to hurt or kill someone the victim loves, as well as shame, embarrassment, wanting to protect the offender, fear of being held responsible or being punished, fear of being disbelieved, and fear of losing the offender who may be very important to the child or the child's family.
Reporting sexual abuse can cause more harm to the victim.	If abuse is not reported, it is more likely that it will continue happening at the child will be more at risk. It also helps the victim to talk about the abuse. The victim's recovery will be enhanced if she or he feels believed, supported, protected, and receives counselling following the disclosure that s/he was assaulted.
Victims of sexual assault are often partly to blame for the assault because they are seductive.	Victims of sexual abuse are NEVER to blame for the assault, regardless of their behaviour. Victims are often made to feel like willing participants, which further contributes to their shame and guilt.
If a victim does not say "no" it is not sexual assault.	Sexual assault victims may not say "no" or not fight back for a variety of reasons including fear and confusion.
Children lie about sexual abuse	Studies have found that less than 5% of allegations of child sexual abuse brought by children are fictitious. (Jones. & McGraw, 1987; Oates, Jones, Denson et al, 2000)

(From "Myths and Facts About Sex Offenders" 2000)

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