



Understanding the Grooming Process

What is Grooming?

Grooming is the process by which someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust, and to ensure secrecy, for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation. Grooming is a gradual, calculated process that can last for months or even years. Children, families and even communities are groomed.

Stages of the Grooming Process

1. **Identify the child.** The abuser targets his victim. This is a calculated choice. Abusers look for children and families which appear vulnerable in some way.
2. **Gain the child's trust.** The abuser works towards establishing a 'special relationship' with the child. Once vulnerabilities have been identified, the abuser uses this information to get closer to the child. The abuser may use gifts to gain the child's affection and then later to ensure the child's compliance.
3. **Isolate the child.** The 'special relationship' with the abuser becomes more intense while the child becomes increasingly isolated from friends and family. Babysitting, tutoring, 'special' trips are all opportunities for the offender to isolate the child.
4. **Sexualize the relationship.** Once the affection and trust have been established, the abuser will begin to sexualize the relationship by introducing increasingly intimate physical contact such as tickling, wrestling, and even hugging. Abusers try to blur the boundaries between ordinary affection or caretaking and abuse, causing confusion for child.
5. **Keep the secret.** Once the sexual abuse is occurring, the abuser must maintain the child's continued participation and silence. This is commonly accomplished through manipulation, bribes, and threats. Children are often afraid of disclosing the abuse. They may have been told that they will not be believed, or that the abuse is their fault. Abusers sometimes threaten the child or the child's family to ensure secrecy.