



BEWARE OF GROOMING: THE SINGLE MOST COMMON BEHAVIOR PATTERN OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSERS

Ninety percent of abusers are known to the child, and typically the parents as well. They manipulate the relationship and use the grooming process in order to isolate, sexually abuse and manipulate the child to keep their secret. **Knowing this pattern helps you protect.**

- 1 Gaining access:** Some abusers seek jobs, volunteer positions or just hang out where they're surrounded by children. They may pose as a child online to lure a child via the internet. Others become friends with a family to get next to their children. They might date a single parent who could use some extra help, who needs a babysitter to cover extra shifts at work. Sometimes they watch for children whose parents aren't able to be around as much. Family abusers have more access because they're in ready-made relationships with children. Similarly, teachers, coaches, religious authorities, camp counselors and others have the power to provide or withhold things the child wants and needs.
- 2 Targeting a child:** Any child can become a victim. Some factors that contribute to vulnerability include gullibility, high stress, limited relationships, few social connections, low esteem or fewer boundaries for friendships or who comes into the home. If you don't personally identify these vulnerabilities in your family, DO NOT assume your child isn't at risk. Proximity to a child can be the single reason one child is targeted.
- 3 Developing trust:** The abuser works to form a relationship with the child and sometimes the parents. This helps them gain cooperation and manipulate the child. They begin with making the child feel as if they're important and in a very special relationship with them. They use the developing relationship to create situations where they're alone together. This isolation reinforces a special connection. Babysitting, tutoring, coaching and special trips all create this isolation.
- 4 Introducing touch or nudity:** Perpetrators start desensitizing a child to being touched by them. They tickle, wrestle or take the child swimming. They might hug while a child is on their lap. They may involve nudity in online communications. Seemingly "innocent" touch gets them used to physical contact and weakens a child's natural defenses. This stage is used as a test to see whether a child will resist OR tell about the "innocent" touch. The abuser progressively sexualizes the relationship.
- 5 Promoting secrecy:** Abusers depend on silence and secrecy. Promoting secrecy often starts before the sexual abuse, with the abuser calling themselves a "secret friend," "trusted friend" or the child's "best secret keeper" as a way to bond the "friendship." It also helps distance children from parents or other caregivers. Once the abuser has escalated to inappropriate sexualized touching, secrecy is used to cruelly maintain the child's continued participation and ensure they don't disclose. Abusers prey on fear and confusion.