

Grooming Overview

Grooming refers to the subtle, gradual, and escalating process of building trust with a child. This process may take place over weeks, months, or even years before any abuse takes place.

Offenders often start by grooming adults to ensure that their time with the child is welcomed and encouraged.

How offenders groom children

The following outlines the possible progression that an offender may take in grooming a child:

- *Building trust:* befriending a child and gaining his or her trust.
- *Testing boundaries:* through telling inappropriate jokes, roughhousing, backrubs, tickling, or sexual games.
- *Desensitizing:* moving from non-sexual touching to “accidental” touching. This often happens over time so that the child is gradually desensitized to the touch.
- *Manipulating:* using the child’s fear, embarrassment, or guilt to manipulate them not to tell anyone about the abuse.
- *Confusing:* making the child feel responsible for the abuse.

How offenders groom adolescents

In addition to those listed above, offenders may use additional strategies in grooming adolescents.

- *Displaying a common interest:* in movies, music, sports, video games, etc.
- *Identifying:* the offender may appear to be the only one who understands or identifies with him/her.
- *Showing affection:* the offender may fill the adolescent’s increased need for affection.
- *Giving gifts or special privileges.*
- *Breaking rules:* the offender may encourage the adolescent to break rules. This may later be used to “blackmail” the adolescent into staying silent about the abuse.
- *Communicating outside of their given role:* the offender may communicate with the adolescent outside of their given role (e.g., teacher or coach) through texting, emailing, or calling.

What to look for

While none of the indicators listed below necessarily indicate that a person is grooming your child or family, they are things to watch out for and ask questions around. Pay particular attention when an adult or older youth:

- Seems overly interested in your child and creates opportunities to spend time alone with him/her.
- Gives special privileges or gifts to your child.
- Befriends your family and shows more interest in a relationship with your child than with you.
- Plays with your child in a way that makes you uncomfortable.
- Seems “too good to be true” (e.g., babysitting for free, taking your child on special outings).
- Creates opportunities to be around your child outside the context of their given role.