

Grooming and predatory behaviour

What is grooming?

Grooming is the criminal activity of becoming friends with a child in order to persuade them to enter into a sexual relationship.

How do predator's groom children?

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

The predator 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 predator is sure the child will keep a secret, they will begin touching the child, sometimes becoming more sexually aggressive each time. ("Protecting your child from pedophiles - GoodCityLiving.Com," n.d.)

Predators 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 predator. Children often feel they cooperated 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 predators approach children online

As in the real world, predators frequent places where children are present. This includes gaming websites, social networks (e.g. Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter) and chatrooms. Predators 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 predator 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 predator 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



Illustration 1: How predators groom children

Child sexual predator 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.)

Protective behaviours to teach your children

You can start teaching children as young as 2-3 years of age about their bodies and personal boundaries.

Naming body parts - When in the bath or dressing, use proper names for body parts. Explain that certain parts are private – "They are for you and no one else". Rather than saying "Don't let anyone touch your private parts", you should phrase it "You should tell me if anyone touches your private parts" to ensure your child is not scared they will get in trouble if they are assaulted. Describe the situations where showing your private parts or having them touched is OK, such as cleaning or being healthy (e.g. going to the doctor).

Secrets – Explain that there are secrets and surprises. Surprises have a happy ending and everyone will find out about it at some time (like a surprise party). There are also bad secrets, which make you feel sad and uncomfortable. Tell your child that they always need to tell you bad secrets, even if the person telling them the secret asks them not to. Use examples to test your child's understanding.

Safe and not safe touches (safe and not safe is used instead of the terms good and bad to avoid confusion e.g. getting a vaccination at the doctor is bad, but safe) – Explain that not safe touches are the touches to your private parts or those that make you feel mad, upset and confused. It is important to explain to your child that it could be someone that they know and like touching them, but if it is an unsafe touch, they should still tell you. Reinforce that they will never get in trouble for telling you someone touched them.

Use examples to test your child's understanding.

Adults aren't always right – Tell your child that some adults can do wrong things, so if an adult touches you in a not safe way, you can say NO or STOP.

Trust your instincts – Reinforce that if your child ever has a bad feeling about the way someone is touching or treating them, that they should try and get out of the situation and tell their parents.

(From “10 Ways To Talk To Your Kids About Sexual Abuse,” 2012)

Myths and facts about sexual predators

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 predators 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 molestation 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 sexually offending behaviour 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)



References

- 10 Ways To Talk To Your Kids About Sexual Abuse. (2012, November 26). *Everyday Feminism*. Retrieved April 1, 2014, from <https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/02/10-ways-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-sexual-abuse/>
- Goetz, B. (n.d.). Things You Need to Know About Child Molesters - Abuse. *The Jewish Woman*. Retrieved February 11, 2014, from http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/1707466/jewish/Things-You-Need-to-Know-About-Child-Molesters.htm
- Jones, D. P. H. & McGraw, J. M. (1987). Reliable and Fictitious Accounts of Sexual Abuse to Children, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2, pp. 27-45
- Myths and Facts About Sex Offenders. (2000, August). CSOM Publications. Retrieved April 1, 2014, from <http://www.csom.org/pubs/mythsfacts.html>
- Oates, R. K., Jones, D. P. H., Denson, D., Sirotnak, A., Gary, N., & Krugman, R. D. (2000), Erroneous Concerns About Child Sexual Abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(1), pp. 149-157.
- Profile of a Pedophile. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2014, from <http://www.child-safety-for-parents.com/profile-of-a-pedophile.html>
- Protecting your child from pedophiles - GoodCityLiving.Com. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2014, from <http://iredw.squarespace.com/protecting-your-child-from-ped/>
- Smallbone, S. W. W. (n.d.). Child sexual abuse : offender characteristics and modus operandi. Pamphlet. Retrieved April 1, 2014, from <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/181-200/tandi193.html>