

Do You Know the Stages of Grooming?



Stage 1: Targeting the Victim

An offender often looks for vulnerable children - those who are frequently away from their parents, have low self-confidence, seen as the shy “people pleasers”. Children from single parent homes are targeted more often, as the offender can present themselves as a provider and source of support. A child who has little parental involvement is a prime target.

Stage 2: Gaining the victim’s trust

This stage is when the relationship between offender and potential victim begins to form. Trust building starts off small, as the offender seeks to learn about the child and their needs. In this stage, the offender is also developing trust with the child’s family. With the family’s trust, they will have easier one-on-one access to the child in the future, because the parents view them as a kind, trustworthy person.

Stage 3: Filling a need

Once the offender feels enough information about the child is gathered, they begin filling the needs of the child (example: paying for and taking the child to soccer practice). Often disguised as kindness, the offender provides special attention, gifts, money, etc. for the child.

Stage 4: Isolating the child

Now that the offender is viewed as reliable and resourceful, they attempt to use their growing relationship to create one-on-one situations with the child. Since the trust of the child and family has been formed, offenders take advantage of this by suggesting special trips, outings or situations where they could be alone with the child. The child can feel special, loved and appreciated by the offender. The parents may appreciate the opportunities the offender is providing for their child.

Stage 5: Sexualizing the relationship

This stage is initiated only when the offender feels a strong bond and sense of trust. The offender needs to feel confident the child will keep the abuse a secret. Sexualized talk, touch and play may start off small with tickling or touching, then lead to more horrific acts as the relationship continues. It is during this stage the offender manipulates the thoughts and views of the child, trying to convince them it is okay, that they like it, etc.

Stage 6: Maintain control

The offender uses threats, shame and secrets to control the child’s ability to speak up. The message of *silence = safety* and *speaking up = dangerous* often makes the child feel responsible for keeping themselves and their family safe. The offender may use their gifts, trips and special privileges as leverage, to make the child believe the abuse is a small price to pay for all the things they are providing for them.



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