Understanding the Grooming Process:
Preventing Inappropriate Behavior and Sexual Misconduct with Children

In most cases of sexual misconduct with children, offenders use a subtle and gradual process known as grooming to put children and their families at ease. Grooming is typically done over weeks, months or years to slowly lure and manipulate children into abuse. On the surface, grooming behaviors can appear quite innocent, and may even give the perception that the individual is good with children.

Over 90% of sexual offenders are individuals known and trusted by the child and family. Notoriously friendly and likable, they insinuate themselves into a child’s life through his/her family, school, house of worship, sports and hobbies.

Secrets typically play a significant role in the grooming process. Teach children early on that there should be no secrets from parents, even seemingly innocent ones. Secrets often lay the groundwork for future abuse.

Most incidents (81%) of child sexual abuse occur in one-on-one situations. Therefore, limit opportunities for individuals to be alone with your child. Adults who must spend one-on-one time with children should be within sight and earshot of other adults. Question the motives of adults who want to spend the majority of their time with children.

Abusers come from all walks of life. Both men and women offend, although men offend more often. Notably, problem child sexual behavior makes up about 30-40% of peer-on-peer incidents of sexual misconduct. Average onset of problem child sexual behavior is 12-14 years old. For safety’s sake, supervise children whenever possible, especially during sleepovers and gatherings involving multi-aged youth. Abuse often occurs while adults are socializing and youngsters are playing unsupervised in separate areas.

By being aware of the Grooming Process, adults can interrupt behaviors that may lead to inappropriate or sexual misconduct with children, thus allowing youngsters to grow up healthy and safe.

Schools and Youth Serving Organizations should:
1. Conduct Background Checks/Obtain References for all staff & volunteers
2. Implement Policies & Procedures surrounding child personal safety
3. Support Improved Supervision of children and teens
4. Ensure one-on-one time with minors is in open, observable spaces only
5. Provide Information on Grooming, Child Lures, Signs of Abuse & Reporting to staff, volunteers, parents and children (age appropriately)


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