You Can Trust Me!
How Child Molesters Groom Caregivers and Children

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It is helpful to understand these dynamics when doing child sexual abuse interviews, investigations, and trials.

What is Grooming?

- One of the earliest references was by Anna Salter in 1995
- Emotional seduction
- Establishment of affection and trust
- Betrayal of that trust

Anne-Marie McAlinden, 2006
What is Grooming?

• Befriending a child
• Cultivating a special relationship
• “Forbidden fruit” activities
• Sexual activity introduced

Anne-Marie McAlinden, 2006

Another Definition

Perpetrators gain the trust of potential child victims and their caregivers by identifying potential victims, gaining their trust, breaking down their defenses, initiating contact that perp finds sexually gratifying, maintaining secrecy, and controlling the relationship.

Self-Grooming

• Offenders prepare themselves mentally
  • justification or denial of their offending behavior (van Dam, 2001)
  • Partly explains thought process and behavior
• Helpful in suspect interviews

From Sexual grooming of children: Review of literature and theoretical considerations (Samantha Craven, Sarah Brown & Elizabeth Gilchrist, 2006)
Self-Grooming

- Cognitive distortions about themselves & victim (Ward and Keenan, 1999)
  - Failure feedback
  - Success feedback
  - Cognitive distortions

From Sexual grooming of children: Review of literature and theoretical considerations (Samantha Craven, Sarah Brown & Elizabeth Gilchrist, 2006)

Familial Grooming

- Already have access
- Already have a place of trust
- Develop “special relationship”

DELAYED DISCLOSURE IS COMMON

Extrafamilial- Institutional Grooming

- Abuse normally took place over a number of years
- Typically more than one victim (Finkelhor et al., 1988; White and Hart, 1995; Gallagher, 1998, 1999; Waterhouse, 2000)
- Often more than one offender (Finkelhor et al., 1988; White and Hart, 1995; Gallagher, 1998, 1999; Waterhouse, 2000)
- Victims were afraid to disclose the abuse; or when they did, no action was taken;
  - There was a conspiracy to keep allegations quiet or
  - Denial by the alleged perpetrator was accepted (Sullivan and Beech, 2002: 161)

DELAYED DISCLOSURE IS COMMON From Anne-Marie McAllinden, 2006
Grooming The Environment: Three Goals

1. Access
   Provides entry or access to several victims.
   • Access to a potential pool of victims
   • An environment which provides unsupervised and unlimited time with the child
   • Gain access without raising suspicion

2. Allure
   Draws potential victims into a relationship with the perpetrator.
   • Generate a desire in environment to have child spend time with the perpetrator
   • Become accepted & valued by the environment
   • Environment doesn’t want child to sever the relationship

3. Alibi
   Reduces the probability of being reported and lower the chances of the victim being believed.
   • Believable reason to be with children
   • Rationale for isolated individual attention
   • Promote a believable reason for behavior that might otherwise be questioned
Faith Community

**Common Characteristics:**
- Religious leader seen as devout, innocent
- Victims
  - Abuse is okay and/or their fault
- Victim’s commitment to religion causes confusion about the abuse and perpetrator
- “Godly way” to learn about sex

**DELAYED DISCLOSURE IS COMMON**

Filling a Void

**Interviews with 91 Child Sex Offenders**
(Elliott et al. (1995))

- Most often picked victims who...
  - Were alone
  - Lacked confidence
  - Had family problems
  - Trusted arbitrarily

From Anne-Marie McAlinden, 2006

Psychological Grooming of Child

“...used to achieve...increased sexualization. At first, the offender may justify the sexual behaviour through providing the child with his version of sex education, which states that sex between children and adults is acceptable and that the offender has a responsibility to train the child for later life (Berliner & Conte, 1990; Leberg, 1997)”

From Sexual grooming of children: Review of literature and theoretical considerations (Samantha Craven, Sarah Brown & Elizabeth Gilchrist, 2006)
Physical Grooming of Child

“…gradual sexualization of the relationship between the offender and the victim (Berliner & Conte, 1990)”

From Sexual grooming of children: Review of literature and theoretical considerations (Samantha Craven, Sarah Brown & Elizabeth Gilchrist, 2006)

Grooming the Victim

- Bond
  * Treat like an adult * Keep secrets

- Reduce Resistance
  * Progression * Explanation

- Trap
  * Groom * Threaten * Guilt/Fear

DELAYED DISCLOSURE IS COMMON

Themes from Male Survivors

“...bribes, isolation, and coercion continue to be used after the onset of abuse as a way of maintaining the child’s secrecy (Campbell, 2009; Katz & Barnetz, 2015; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001)”

Victim Interview Topics

- How met or earliest memories of subject
- Initial thoughts & feelings about subject
- Changes over time in relationship / interactions
- Thoughts & feelings about subject now

Victim Interview Topics

- What the subject said about [X]:
  - picture-taking
  - exhibition of sexual material
  - touches
  - the relationship
  - telling others
Victim Interview Topics

Disclosure Information

Was victim able to tell about what was going on?
• Tell me more about that (yes or no response)
• What kept you from telling?
• What helped you tell now? or What made you tell now?
• How has it been for you since you told?

Caregiver Interview Topics

• How caregiver & victim met the subject
• Initial thoughts & feelings about the subject
• Changes over time in relationship / interactions with subject
  • Caregiver and child

Prosecutors

• Review cases for evidence of grooming, if appropriate
• Let investigators know if they need to do additional work
• Consider having an expert testify about grooming dynamics and delayed disclosure