

Newsletter

THIS ISSUE

- Grooming
- Warning sign of Grooming



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

No one ever told me when I was a child that being an adult was going to be so hard. Finding balance in our lives today isn't easy and sometimes feels impossible. We are given so much information on a daily basis, on the radio, television and in the newspaper about the challenges we face in the world, the country, the state, and in our own neighborhoods. This information can be overwhelming and create a lot of pressure and fear. This is especially true when we talk about sexual abuse of children.

Twenty years ago what was believed to be true about child victims of sexual abuse, those who offend, and our responses to both have changed dramatically. And there is no doubt that what we believe to be true today; twenty years from now will have changed or evolved as well. The one constant that was true yesterday, is true today and will be true tomorrow is that children deserve to be protected from abuse and exploitation. It is our challenge as adults to keep an open heart and an open mind as to how we can continue to protect them.

The information in this newsletter about grooming is not intended to create suspicion towards others, but rather to help better understand how someone might be grooming or preparing a child to be a victim. By trying to understand what puts a child at risk of sexual abuse, we can take actions to counter those risks.

Amy Peterson

Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Services

What is grooming?

Most adults in our children's lives are trust worthy, caring individuals. It is an uncomfortable thought that an adult could have an ulterior motive when engaging with children. We are often shocked and surprised by headlines which name longtime coaches, doctors, clergy or others who have been identified as having abused children for years. When we take a closer look at the behaviors of these individuals and their relationships with children, the light bulb goes on. Although not all sexual abuse is preceded by grooming, it is a very common process which can be used by strangers or those known by the victim. (It is a common statistic that 85% of the time, the offender is known to the child.) Grooming is when someone tries to prepare a child to be the victim of sexual abuse. A person who wants to gain access to a child for the purpose of sexual contact will groom the child or the parents and caretakers in order to get access, gain trust, break down defenses and decrease the likelihood of suspicion or discovery. Sexual abuse of a child is not something that just happens. Grooming is a process, one that can take months or longer.

Grooming Techniques:

Grooming behaviors can be positive or negative

Positive:

Giving Gifts or money for no apparent reason

Emotional Nurturance and closeness, having inappropriate social boundaries (e.g. talking to a child about problems that one would usually discuss with people the same age

Special privileges – getting to do things other kids don't get to do

Overt Bribery – offering drugs and alcohol

Becoming friends with child's parent in order to gain access (e.g. babysitting)

Looking for opportunities to be alone with the child

Inviting a child for sleepovers or sleeping in the same room or bed with the child

Negative:

Psychological intimidation – “no one will believe you” “this is your fault” “if you tell it will break up the family or I will go to jail”

Threats or coercion (e.g. saying that harm will come to another family member or a pet)

Physical abuse (e.g. slapping, pulling hair)



This newsletter is comprised from information gathered from the following websites: www.netsafe.org and www.stopitnow.org. Feel visit these sites to learn more information.

A copy of this Newsletter can be found on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website www.archmil.org/safeguarding under the heading, Resources.

Online Grooming

Groomers try to establish a 'relationship' with the victim

Groomers try to find out more information about their potential victims.

Groomers try to establish the risk in going further with their plans.

Groomers might try to establish what the consequences will be of their victims 'telling on them'.

Groomers often try to isolate their victims from those around them. Groomers might use threats and blackmail to achieve compliance and control.

Groomers are sometimes interested in their victim's social networks.

Groomers can expose their victims to inappropriate and illegal sexual material.

These are just some examples of grooming behavior. Some of these behaviors may raise more concern than others. Often if the situation doesn't feel right, there is a reason to ask questions and get more answers. As written by Gregory M. Weber, Assistant Attorney General for the State of Wisconsin; “The best way to recognize grooming behavior is to pay attention to your child and the people in your child's life. Parents should know their child's teachers, coaches, day care providers, youth group leaders and other significant adults in their lives. Stay involved and talk to you children. Teach them to trust you with their problems and their pain. The safest child is the child who knows he can bring his problems and concerns to parents and adult caregivers without reproach or retaliation.”

Weber, Gregory. "Grooming Children for Sexual Molestation." The Zero - The Official Website of Andrew Vachss. 16 Oct. 2002. [August 19, 2009]. http://www.vachss.com/guest_dispatches/grier_weeks.html

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