



Grooming Behaviors

There was a man, a down to earth elderly gentleman, who always had a kind word and offered a helping hand. He met a family that was enduring financial hardships, so he helped them. He gave the man and his wife some part-time work. He even was kind enough to loan them money to pay their gas and electric bills. He went as far as helping them with food and transportation. He seemed like a wonderful person. Well, not exactly, you see he was molesting the couple's mentally challenged teenage granddaughter. His "acts of kindness" were just that, acts. Such acts, when carried out with the intention of gaining access to a child for the purpose of sexually abusing that child, constitute GROOMING. Sex offenders may groom not only the victim, but also the victim's parents or guardians and the community in general.

Grooming of the community-at-large is usually done through gaining a position of esteem or authority. We as a community tend to almost automatically award trust and respect to people who serve particular functions—the football coach, the school teacher, a pastor, or a youth group or neighborhood leader. We understand, thankfully, that the vast majority of people in these positions have no intention of harming our children. However we must be aware that if someone in an esteemed position did intend to cause harm, we have already given over our trust to them.

The majority of sex offenders are not in a position where we so easily give our trust to them. They use techniques to groom vulnerable individuals. There are probably as many grooming techniques as there are offenders; it would be impossible to list them all, but it is easy to understand the general methods of grooming. To conceptualize the methods, let's call them the "B's" of grooming—Bullying, Buying, Building, Bonding, Blackmailing, Belittling and Burning Bridges.

Bullying—Use of verbal or physical threats and intimidation. Threatening to harm victim or victim's loved ones.

Buying Affection—The giving of gifts, including money, to convince child that the offender cares about the child. Giving special treats, allowing child to break rules, giving child special treatment which differs from treatment given to other children whom he or she does not plan to victimize.

Building—Creating relationships with parents and other family members, to build sense of trust within family. Creating a false sense of security.

Bonding—Sharing secrets with the child. Allowing child to break rules in effect making the child an accomplice in the prohibited acts. Later, if child refuses the offender's advances, this threat can be used to remind the victim that he or she will be punished by parents or law enforcement for breaking rules, thus further coercing and isolating the child.

Blackmail—Emotional blackmail. After abuse has occurred, an offender can attempt to manipulate the child to feel guilty and to fear the offender may be harmed or punished.

Belittling—Destroying child's self esteem. Offenders leave their victims with such a negative sense of self worth that child is more likely to agree to the offender's requests or demands to keep the offense secret.

Burning Bridges—Working to destroy the child's relationships with others, causing the child to become overly dependent on the offender for friendship, affection, care-taking, and other emotional caretaking responsibilities.

If we can conceptualize the varying intents of an offender's grooming behaviors, we are in a better position to recognize the actual behaviors. We don't have to be experts, but we *must* stay involved with our children's lives and continue to communicate with them. If we suspect anyone is using grooming behaviors, we must have non-threatening and reassuring talks with our children. We have to be careful to not create something that is not there, but we have to be equally as careful not to ignore what might be occurring.

1) Which of the following is not a grooming behavior that is discussed by the author?

- A) Bullying
- B) Buying Affection
- C) Bonding
- D) Being Needy
- E) Belittling

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