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Fox Valley Technical College

**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*


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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



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What is Grooming?

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

Anne-Marie McAlinden, 2006

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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.

National Center for Victims of Crime (Slide by Maria Rosales-Lambert)

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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)

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Self-Grooming

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

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Familial Grooming

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



DELAYED DISCLOSURE IS COMMON

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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*)

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From Anne-Marie McAlinden, 2006



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**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

Jim Tanner & Stephen Blake (2013) (Slide by Maria Rosales-Lambert)

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Grooming Child's Environment

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

Jim Tanner & Stephen Blake (2013) (Slide by Maria Rosales-Lambert)

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Grooming Child's Environment

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

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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

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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

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From Anne-Marie McAlinden, 2006

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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)

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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)

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Grooming the Victim

• **Bond**

- * Treat like an adult * Keep secrets



• **Reduce Resistance**

- * Progression * Explanation

• **Trap**

- * Groom * Threaten * Guilt/Fear

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Jim Tanner & Stephen Blake (2013) (Slide by Maria Rosales-Lambert)

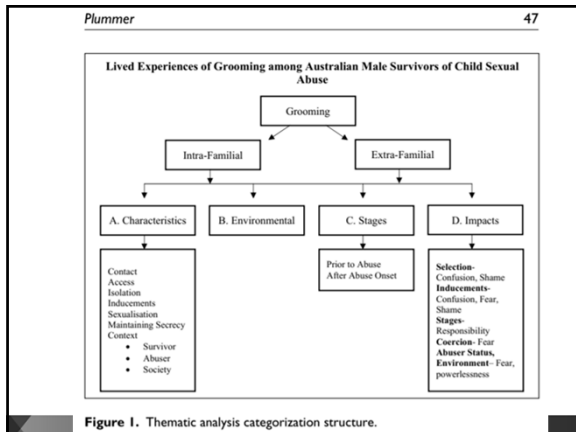
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Themes from Male Survivors

“...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 & Barnett, 2015; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001)”

From Plummer, M. (2018). Lived experiences of grooming among Australian male survivors of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(1), 37-63.

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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

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Victim Interview Topics

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

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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?

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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*

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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

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