

How to Identify Grooming Tactics & Prevent Sexual Assault

Parents and caregivers are the number one resource to protect children and prevent sexual assault. The majority of sexual assaults are not random incidents. Nine out of ten children who came to King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC) last year knew their abuser; a family member victimized almost half of those children.

Before assaults occur—especially those committed by someone known to the victim—offenders “groom” victims and families to gain their trust and confidence. This grooming process is a critical time for parents and caregivers to identify the potential risks to children.

- 1) Understand the grooming process used by offenders. The basic steps are:**
 - Gaining the trust and confidence of future victims and their families
 - Introducing the child to sexual types of touch, with escalating inappropriate behavior
 - Manipulating children with trickery or threats to keep the assault secret.

- 2) Know who your child spends time with, and watch for warning signs that grooming is taking place. It is important to look for patterns of behavior involving several of the characteristics below. A potential offender may be someone who:**
 - Is exceptionally charming and/or helpful.
 - Attempts to obtain immediate “insider” status.
 - Consistently prefers the company of children to adults, rather than looking for age-appropriate companionship
 - Attempts to establish peer relationships with people much younger than themselves.
 - Fails to honor clear boundaries set by parents.
 - Roughhouses, wrestles or tickles children after being asked to stop.

- 3) If you think a child is being groomed, trust your “gut feeling” and act on it:**
 - Listen for statements or questions from your child that would support your suspicions.
 - Encourage your child to tell you more about the time he or she spends with the person.
 - Assert yourself and end questionable behavior.
 - Be willing to stop all contact between your child and the potential abuser, even if it makes you the “bad guy”.

- 4) Give your child the prevention tools to help identify inappropriate behavior:**
 - Explain your words and actions to your child as a personal safety skill
 - Talk regularly with children about safety skills and help them become more aware of their environment
 - Make sure children understand that they can and should say “NO!” to anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable.

For more information, contact the KCSARC 24-hour Resource Line at 1-888-99-VOICE or visit our website at www.kcsarc.org.