

1. Targeting the Victim

The offender targets a victim by sizing up the child's vulnerability – emotional neediness, isolation and lower self-confidence. Children with less parental oversight are more desirable prey.

2. Gaining the Victim's Trust

The offender gains trust by watching and gathering information about the child, getting to know his needs and how to fill them. In this regard, sex offenders mix effortlessly with responsible caretakers because they generate warm and calibrated attention. Only more awkward and overly personal attention, or a gooey intrusiveness, provokes the suspicion of parents. Otherwise, a more suave sex offender is better disciplined for how to push and poke, without revealing themselves.

3. Filling a Need

Once the offender begins to fill the child's needs, that adult may assume noticeably more importance in the child's life and may become idealized. Gifts, extra attention, affection may distinguish one adult in particular and should raise concern and greater vigilance to be accountable for that adult.

4. Isolating the Child

The grooming sex offender uses the developing special relationship with the child to create situations in which they are alone together. This isolation further reinforces a special connection. A special relationship can be even more reinforced when an offender cultivates a sense in the child that he is loved or appreciated in a way that others, not even parents, provide. Parents may unwittingly feed into this through their own appreciation for the unique relationship.

5. Sexualizing the Relationship

At a stage of sufficient emotional dependence and trust, the offender progressively sexualizes the relationship. Desensitization occurs through talking, pictures, even creating situations (like going swimming) in which both the offender and victim are naked. At that point, the adult exploits a child's natural curiosity, using feelings of stimulation to advance the sexuality of the relationship. When teaching a child, the grooming sex offender has the opportunity to shape the child's sexual preferences and can manipulate what a child finds exciting and extend the relationship in this way. The child comes to see himself as a more sexual being and to define the relationship with the offender in more sexual and special terms.

6. Maintaining Control

Once the sexual abuse is occurring, offenders commonly use secrecy and blame to maintain the child's continued participation and silence – particularly because the sexual activity may cause the child to withdraw from the relationship. Children in these entangled relationships – and at this point they are entangled – confront threats to blame them, to end the relationship and to end the emotional and material needs they associate with the relationship. The child may feel that the loss of the relationship and the consequences of exposing it will humiliate and render them even more unwanted.