



GROOMING IN SPORTS

Grooming often starts in the presence of other adults. This is an intentional play by the predator to normalize the behavior and to make the child think that if the other trusted adults around (like parents or guardians) aren't objecting, then this must be okay.

SIGNS OF GROOMING COULD INCLUDE:

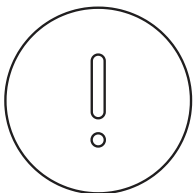
Special attention, activities, or gifts

Isolating the child away from their team, friends, or family

Isolation can take place physically or emotionally. This could look like excessive one-on-one interactions or undermining relationships with parents and friends to show that "no one understands you like I do."

Increased physical touch that crosses boundaries

Encouraging secrets



STAGES OF GROOMING

1

Identifying and Targeting the Child

Sexual perpetrators identify and select their young targets based on ease of access to them or their perceived vulnerability. Athletes that are looking to excel quickly, have been displaced/are starting at a new training facility, or struggle with familial relationships are common targets.

2

Gaining Trust and Access

- In a sports context, trust is almost immediately gained because the children see that their parent/guardian trusts the coach or athlete guardian to teach them. Respect (listening and not talking back) is also almost immediately gained as children are taught to respect/listen/obey the authority (the coach or athlete guardian).
- Sexual predators rely on their target's vulnerabilities or strengths to gain trust and access to their potential victims. This could look like someone saying "you have great potential, but need more training with me," or "you know you're not as flexible as the rest of your team, let me help you."
- They may also use social media and cell phone texting to develop a friendship with the child.
- The sexual perpetrator may begin to isolate the child. This may take the form of rides (which could be framed as taking the burden of transportation off the parent/guardian), walks, and additional 1:1 time. Perpetrators may specifically exploit a child and/or family's vulnerability. For example, by providing rides specifically for a family that has a single parent, providing cell phones/gifts to a low SES child, or even affirming a stigmatized/oppressed identity.

3

Developing Trust and Keeping Secrets

- Abusers attempt to gain trust of a potential victim through gifts, attention, sharing "secrets" and other means to make them feel that they have a caring relationship and to train them to keep the relationship secret. The perpetrator may convince the child they understand the child in a way that no one else does – they fill a void in the child's life and make their target feel special.
- The perpetrator will give the child the attention they believe the child wants in their life. By doing so, they develop deeper levels of trust and secrecy.

4

Desensitization to Touch

- Abusers will often start to touch a victim in ways that appear harmless, such as hugging, wrestling and tickling, and later escalate to increasingly more sexual contact, such as massages or showering together. Abusers may also show the victim pornography or discuss sexual topics with them to introduce the idea of sexual contact.
- Physical touch might be confusing for the child as the coach or athlete guardian may use physical contact to correct body position, form, or spot the child. Spotting the child (especially in high risk stunts) can be particularly confusing as the coach or athlete guardian may accidentally touch the child, that would be considered inappropriate, in order to prevent a fall and injury. For example watch this coach prevent the athlete from falling on her head and neck.

Controlling the Relationship

After the first act of sexual perpetration, the abuser will become more aggressive at ensuring that their victim will maintain secrecy and protect their abuser's interests. The perpetrators will often give gifts to keep their victim happy. The perpetrator may threaten the victim with pulling them from competition, canceling scholarships, or pulling them from the team to maintain a position of control.

HOW TO RESPOND

Overall, we enable abuse when we trust that other people have our children's best interests in mind - especially when we're paying them. This is just not the case. It's important to note that not all adults who exhibit grooming intentions may have intentions of abuse. That said, they are teaching children that grooming behaviors are okay to accept from adults, meaning that predators would have an easier time with grooming a child who has already learned to accept such behaviors from a well-meaning adult.

Predators take grooming at a very slow pace, so it's important that those with the children's best interests in mind don't wait on a big sign of grooming. There will likely be small signs spread out over a large amount of time rather than one large event.

IF YOU SEE GROOMING, CONSIDER THESE OPTIONS:

Report the behavior to the manager or owner of the sports organization

Discuss your concerns with the parents of the child athlete if the child is not your own

Help give them the tools necessary (like the resource you're currently reading) in order for them to discuss this with their child.

If the child is your own, discuss the concerns you have with them

If you observe the coach or athlete guardian saying something to your child, specifically ask your child what was said in that moment. "I saw coach pull you aside after making that goal, what did they say to you?" Also use correct anatomical language when discussing abuse. This avoids confusion and helps show the child that you as the parent are open to talking about these difficult topics.

Put boundaries in place with the individual exhibiting the grooming

Such as never letting children be along with the individual.

