

“Why didn’t I recognize the signs?”



According to research, people are unlikely to recognize sexual grooming behaviours, regardless of the stage of grooming (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Although in one study participants were reported to be able to identify the behaviours involving physical touch and isolation as *potentially* inappropriate, they were still uncertain about the predatory nature of the behaviours. This indicates that grooming is very subtle and that not many know what grooming looks like. The child’s family may also find it difficult to recognize grooming behaviours because the offender works at gaining the trust of the family as well. In a survey of child sexual offenders, it was reported that in more than 70% of cases, the parents knew the offender was spending time with the child, but they never suspected the offender’s sexual intentions (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001).

Why is it so hard to recognize the signs?

Sexual offenders often behave with kindness and charm, and offer to be helpful (van Dam, 2001). This is used as a strategy to manipulate the victim, their family, and the community to hide their intentions of sexual abuse and avoid being detected (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Moreover, many grooming behaviours appear to be innocent in nature and typical of adult/child interactions, making the identification of the motivation for sexual abuse more difficult to identify (Craven et al., 2006). If offenders believe that their sexual abuse intention may be detected, they will change strategies, making them even more difficult to identify (Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989). Distinguishing between sexually motivated behaviours and normal adult/child interactions is made extra difficult when the witnesses have no knowledge of the grooming tactics employed by sexual offenders (Winters & Jeglic, 2017).



References:

- Smallbone S & Wortley R. 2001. Child sexual abuse: offender characteristics and modus operandi. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice No. 193. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi193>.
- van Dam, Carla. 2001. Identifying Child Molesters: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse by Recognizing the Patterns of Offenders. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.
- Winters, G. M. & Jeglic, E. L. (2017) Stages of Sexual Grooming: Recognizing Potentially Predatory Behaviours of Child Molesters. *Deviant Behaviour*, 38 (6), 724-733.

Remember

Sexual assault is always the offender's fault, never the victim's/survivor's.



In Australia, it is against the law for anyone to force another person to have sex, or to participate in any sexual act.



Sexual assault is more common than thought to be. It is a crime experienced by women, children and men.

References:

- Smallbone S & Wortley R. 2001. Child sexual abuse: offender characteristics and modus operandi. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice No. 193. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi193>.
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