



Grooming and coercion

Grooming is the subtle, deliberate process of gaining the trust of a child with the purpose of transitioning from a non sexual relationship to a sexual relationship. The purpose of grooming is for the perpetrator to appear to the child as natural and nonthreatening, to breakdown the child's defences and increase physical contact. Perpetrators use grooming to increase access to the child and decrease the likelihood of being discovered.

Grooming may include:

- showing interest in a child and pretending to share common interests
- being complimentary towards the child
- making the child feel special and grown-up
- enticement or rewards such as money, gifts, holidays or outings for a child
- preferential treatment of one child over others
- allowing and encouraging a child to break rules and not disciplining the child
- taking child/ren on holidays, car trips or outings away from their protective parent/caregivers, and
- isolating a child from their protective parent/caregivers.

It is important to note that some of these behaviours may be appropriate behaviour between an adult and a child and must be assessed within the context of the situation.

In addition to grooming the child, perpetrators often groom parents/caregivers to gain their trust, and increase access to the child. Perpetrators use these relationships to reassure the family and discredit the child.

Coercion involves a power imbalance between the alleged abuser and the child. The power imbalance may relate to:

- age and developmental level
- intellectual ability
- knowledge
- experience, and
- gender.

Coercion may include:

- bribes
- threats of negative consequences
- threats of harm to the child, family members or pets if they don't comply, and
- confusing the child into feeling responsible; blaming the child.

Coercion results in fear, anxiety, low self-esteem and increased stress for the child. Coercion is used by the perpetrator to construct secrecy with the child, so that child fears that they will get in trouble if they tell anyone about the abuse. The perpetrator secures compliance so that they can escalate the intrusiveness of sexual behaviour over time.