

UNMASKING

Sexual Con Games

3rd Edition

A TEEN'S GUIDE to Avoiding

EMOTIONAL GROOMING and DATING VIOLENCE

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The Emotional Grooming Process

There are two key elements that the emotional groomer must have in place in order to successfully control someone else – a **false sense of trust** and **secrecy**.

False Sense of Trust

One element of the emotional grooming process is developing a false sense trust. A groomer convinces the target that he is the only person in the world who can really be trusted. The groomer swears that his life revolves around the target: *“You’re all I think about,” “You’re my everything,”* or *“You’re the only one who really understands me.”* At the same time, the groomer also tries to convince the target that the groomer is (or should be) the most important person in her life: *“I’ll always be there for you,” “No one could love you the way I do,”* or *“I’ll always protect you.”*

The groomer also attempts to build trust by saying over and over that this relationship is good and natural: *“Everything is all right, don’t worry, I’ll take care of you.”* The groomer usually does take care of his targets; he may buy them gifts, or protect them from others, or treat them with

favoritism. The groomer skillfully connects much of what he does with the word “love:” *“This is the way it’s meant to be. This is what real ‘love’ is all about.”* The target is easy prey once she feels sure that the groomer is loyal and trustworthy, and is convinced of his “true” feelings.

Throughout this process, the target’s loyalty is tested and the groomer’s control is strengthened. After a groomer successfully weaves this web of false trust, his next step is to get the target to take part in some form of sexual behavior. The target is assured that premarital sexual activity is not only okay, but also the “right” thing to do.

In healthy relationships, trust develops slowly and gradually. Trust is not earned by simply repeating over and over again, *“Just trust me, baby!”* Trust is not based on the spoken word but on actions. It is through a person’s behaviors, shown over time, that he or she proves worthy of trust.

The emotional groomer tries to rush this process and create a false sense of trust. The groomer is in a hurry to convince the target that he is dependable and trustworthy. The groomer will **talk** a lot about trust, especially telling the target why others should not be trusted, but allows no time for a real sense of trust to develop. In reality, the groomer is creating a false sense of trust. It certainly is not the trust that is present in healthy relationships. It is really an unhealthy dependence that is created by manipulation and deceit.

Teens who are hungry for attention and affection are prime targets for the emotional groomer. So are teens with poorly established boundaries. Such teens are eager to find someone they can trust, someone who will protect and befriend them. These teens don’t have enough real life experience to recognize the characteristics of a real trustworthy person. They are easy prey for the groomer’s lines and sexual con games.

This book contains excerpts from actual letters written by one teen to another. These letters illustrate how groomers go about developing a relationship with their targets. The following excerpts illustrate how the groomer tries to create a false sense of trust.

"I just want to talk to you in private with no one else around so I can tell you how I really feel. I won't do anything else, I promise. You will know that I can be trusted when you get to know me better. I would never hurt you or anything like that."

"No matter what happens to us I just want you to know if you need anybody to love or just talk to when you are down, I will always be available."

"I'll treat you right and I'm not going to do anything behind your back. You are what I live for. So without you my soul is black and my heart is empty. It might sound like I'm trying to get over on you but I'm not. I mean everything I say. It comes from the heart. I cry almost every night hoping I could be with you. You're the best girl I ever had."

"We can't let anyone break us apart. If we get into an argument or disagreement we will work it out. People here can't be trusted. Only trust me."

What makes these lines believable? First of all, a sexual con artist will say these things over and over. She doesn't give up. She figures the more she says something, the more likely someone will fall for her game. She also will use other tactics designed to "prove" how trustworthy she is. It can be extremely difficult for some unsuspecting teens to see through these words and actions to find the truth.

Secrecy

The second stage of emotional grooming is developing secrecy. Groomers persuade their targets to keep “our little secret” safe from others: *“No one, absolutely no one, can know about what we do.”* This is one of the few times the groomer gives realistic reasons: *“I’ll have to move away”* or *“We’ll both get in trouble and not be able to see each other again.”* The groomer understands that there could be real trouble if they get caught. If parents or other adults find out, the groomer and the target might face serious consequences at home. If the target is a minor and the groomer is not, the groomer could face serious legal consequences or even jail-time. That’s one of the reasons the groomer works so hard to keep the relationship a secret, especially from adults.

Obviously there are different kinds of secrets. Telling your best friend about your secret crush on someone or keeping the plans for a surprise party secret are harmless secrets. But there are certain things that should never be kept secret. Anytime people talk about hurting themselves or someone else, it is your obligation to tell an adult who can help. Even if you swore you’d keep it secret, it is in everyone’s best interest to tell an adult. You don’t want to take the chance that this person might actually do what he or she threatens to do.

It’s also wise to be suspicious of anyone who asks you to keep a secret or hide something from your parents or loved ones, especially if that secret involves your relationship. Think of it this way – when you really love someone and they really love you, you want the whole world to know. That’s the nature of love – to be shared. If someone loves you and wants what’s best for you, he or she isn’t going to ask you to keep your relationship or anything you are doing in that relationship a secret – especially from those who love you the most.

Another way the groomer develops secrecy is by telling the target that their relationship is different from anything anyone else has ever experienced: *"No one could possibly understand how deeply we love each other. We couldn't explain it. Why spoil everything by trying to tell them how we feel?"*

Sometimes, groomers use force or threats to make sure the target won't talk: *"If anyone finds out, you'll regret it for the rest of your life"* or *"You tell anyone and you're dead meat."* Other times, the threats involve other meaningful people in the target's life: *"You don't want your little sister to accidentally get hurt now, do you?"*

The groomer often does not have to carry through on any threats. Looks, stares, glares, or other body language can keep the target under his control. Once the target fears what might happen if the secret is discovered, she will do almost anything to keep it hidden. The target is trapped. If anyone finds out, she believes she could be hurt or in trouble. She feels that the groomer holds all the power. If she wants to end the relationship and promises never to tell anyone, the groomer doesn't believe her. He continues to use whatever methods were necessary to keep the relationship a secret.

Finally, the target feels that the situation is hopeless and that she's powerless to do anything about it. She begins believing that it's better to say nothing than to risk making everything worse, and she falls deeper and deeper into secrecy. The following excerpts illustrate how groomers try to keep relationships from being discovered.

"We can still be secret lovers. And no one would have to know about it and it would just be our little secret. You know how much I care about you and hope you feel the same way."

"The main thing is that you just tell me about things and don't tell no one about us. I promise you that we will have some good times. Don't let the teachers see you writing letters. Write in private! Don't worry about getting scared off by all the rules. But don't say anything to anyone, it's our secret."

"I won't do you wrong. Just trust me and no one else. Don't be goin' to no one else cause they'll only do you wrong. This is just between you and me my love."

"The feelings we have for each other are true. And will stay that way. If we start going out, we can't let others get in our way. Just remember I really do care about you in many different ways and I've fallen in love with you. You're all I want. We have to be honest with each other. And we can't tell anyone about us. You know how fast stuff spreads around here. Let's just keep it to ourselves and no one will ever need to know."

Alcohol and Drugs

Before talking about other ways the sexual con artist manipulates, it's important to understand how alcohol and drugs affect both the target and the groomer. The groomer may use drugs or alcohol as an excuse: *"I didn't know what I was doing. I was so out of it"* or *"Don't blame me, I was drunk."* Drug and alcohol use can make the sexual con artist even more aggressive and more likely to use force to get what he wants.

Drug and alcohol use also make the target easy prey for the groomer. Some teens end up involved in sexual behavior primarily because they were drunk or high. It's important to understand how drugs and alcohol affect the body.

Drug and alcohol use make it more likely that you will make poor choices or let things go too far. Being under the influence reduces your ability to make good decisions and to recognize dangerous situations. Things that may seem harmless or fun when a person is drunk or high are real problems when the person sobers up.

Here is what several surveys of young people found:

- Alcohol use by the victim, perpetrator or both has been implicated in 46 to 75 per cent of date rapes among college students.¹
- One survey of college students found that 78 per cent of women had experienced sexual aggression (any type of sexual activity unwanted by the woman) while on a date. Dates on which sexual aggression occurred were more likely to include heavy drinking or drug use.²
- 55 per cent of teens say that having sex while drinking or on drugs is often a reason for unplanned teen pregnancies.³
- Among 18- to 22-year-old men and women, an earlier age at initiation of alcohol use is associated

Drug or alcohol Use Can:

- **Reduce your inhibitions.**
- **Impair your ability to think clearly.**
- **Reduce or even totally impair your ability to make good decisions.**
- **Delay your response time.**
- **Cause you to “black out” and be totally unaware of your situation.**

with the later likelihood of having multiple sex partners.⁴

Or consider these teens' experiences:⁵

"My very best friend had a guy take advantage of her when she was drunk and she got pregnant. She doesn't know who the father is to this day. She loves her son, but how is she going to explain what happened when he gets older?"

"A few of my friends have ended up sleeping with someone after drinking that they wouldn't have otherwise slept with. Drugs and alcohol make the choice easier because you don't think of the consequences."

"Alcohol has played probably the biggest role in my decisions about sex. Of the six people I have slept with, I was drunk with four of them. "

"A friend of mine got really drunk at a party, slept with a guy she just met, and got AIDS. That one night of being intoxicated is going to cost her her life."

¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1999*, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, June 2000, vol. 49.

² Ibid.

³ The National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, *Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sex*, New York, 1999.

⁴ Santelli, J.S., et al., *Timing of alcohol and other drug use and sexual risk behaviors among unmarried adolescents and young adults*, Family Planning Perspectives, 2001, vol. 33.

⁵ Following quotes from National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Weekly Teen Survey: Sex Has Consequences*, April 18-28, 2000.