



TRICKS PERPETRATOR'S USE

Sexual assault is an abuse of power and an act of control that is generally forced on women and children by men they know. However, anyone with power over another person can use this to hurt and control them and in a small number of cases, might also include women abusing children.

Some perpetrators think they have the right to treat others in this way, or use a range of excuses to justify their behavior. Some think that those they assault (like their partners and children), belong to them so they have a right to abuse them. Others think that what they want is all that matters. While most perpetrators are men, most men are not perpetrators. Unfortunately, there are a small group of men who use violence to hurt, humiliate and gain power and control.

How do they do this?

Research with perpetrators has shown that those who sexually abuse children often deliberately set up and target a child for abuse. This process is sometimes called **grooming**, which is the way perpetrators of sexual abuse manipulate their victim, the victim's family or community over time. Some perpetrators may spend from months to years targeting and grooming a child for abuse. In a family situation, the child may still be 'groomed' by the perpetrator and the tricks that perpetrators use can greatly affect how that child sees themselves both in their childhood and as an adult. Tricks perpetrators use will depend on the relationship they have with those they are planning to assault and the age of their intended victim. Some of the tactics perpetrators use are:

Deliberately targeting a vulnerable child

Perpetrators choose a child who may appear lonely, left out or shy. They might deliberately choose to become involved with someone who has young children. Perpetrators often target a child that may have already been abused - or a child who is neglected, not supervised properly or is physically abused. Some perpetrators target children who have no father figure and use the child's need to be around a male. They might choose a child in a large family where individual attention is rare or choose jobs where they know they can have contact with children.

Building trust with a child and/or the child's family

This can happen by buying small gifts - taking part in family activities - becoming involved in Church or sporting activities, building or relying on a reputation as an upstanding community member. Perpetrators also spend time with the child while

family members are present - often not starting any form of sexual contact until the child and/or family feel 'safe'.

Separating a child from the family/friends

In family situations, this may mean treating one child as 'special' - setting up jealousy with siblings. Perpetrators can also continually 'scapegoat' one child so that they become known as a 'troublemaker'. Scapegoating means to pick on or blame the child for things which might not be their fault. It can also mean building up the idea that the child is a 'liar' or 'naughty' so that they are less likely to be believed if they disclose abuse. This may also mean that when these children get good attention and gifts after being scapegoated, they feel lucky or special.

A child may also not be allowed to socialize, to have friends home or mix with others outside the family. Their activities may be restricted and a great deal of control exercised over their everyday activities. This sometimes looks very 'caring' - ie picking the child up from school every day.

Establishing power and control over a child

This may involve physical punishment, verbal abuse, exposing a child to violence towards other children or animals or the other parent - setting the child up to know that the adult has power over them and can do whatever they like to their body. It can also involve denying needs; food, clothes, and companionship; and/or high level of control over daily activities such as sleeping, washing, eating, and going out anywhere. Anything a child has or does depends on the perpetrator's approval. This places the perpetrator in a position of power over the child.

Treating a child as "special"

"Daddy's little girl" "uncle Jim's favorite" - special gifts and time together - children are particularly vulnerable to attention/affection and perpetrators know this.

Using a child's natural need for touch/affection

All children need touch, attention and affection. The perpetrator uses this need to abuse the child.

Confusing a child

The perpetrator may behave like an affectionate, playful fun person in the daytime and abuse a child in the night. Or a child may continually be told by others what a good person the perpetrator is. No reference is made to the abuse and the child becomes confused about whether it is really happening. Some perpetrators may tell a child the abuse is not happening or that the child imagined it. Many things adults do are confusing to children. In the beginning, sexual abuse (if not violent or painful) does not seem more 'odd' than many things adults do.

They might tell the child that '*this happens in all families*', '*this is how I teach you to be a woman/man*', '*all fathers/uncles/brothers do this*'. Young children have no way of knowing a reality outside that which the adults around them create for them.

Another trick is to ignore, reject or be physically or verbally abusive to the child EXCEPT when sexually abusing them (when they might be treated nicely). This creates confusion, blame and guilt for the child who may approach the abuser in order to prevent physical abuse or to have some attention.

Desensitising a child

Desensitising means to make someone NOT notice things or not worry about things when other people usually do. The way it happens is by touching which starts as o.k- cuddling, kissing, tickling - sexual touching only begins bit by bit so it is a progression and less likely to shock a child or cause them to tell. Desensitising can also involve showing a child pornography, exposing them to adult sexual activity or behaving inappropriately, such as making sexual comments and innuendoes (hinting), nudity, showering or masturbating in front of the child. Desensitising can also mean beginning the sexual touching when the child is very young.

Creating the idea that the abuse is the child's idea or the child's fault

"But you liked the cuddle games we played" - "you shouldn't have sat on my lap -look what you made me do" ...

This can sometimes be said like an apology - *"I'm sorry I shouldn't have done that - but you did come and hug me..."*

Abuse is never the fault of a child. It is the adult's responsibility to NOT abuse! Blaming a child is a perpetrator tactic.

Encouraging secrets

Buying children treats they are not allowed to have, taking them places they are not allowed to go or allowing behaviour they are not usually allowed. This lets the perpetrator start to say 'don't tell your mother' and also gives them a hold over the child. They might also teach the child to lie or not tell the truth or tell them what to say to other people.

Making sure the abusive touching is pleasurable for a child

Our bodies are designed to respond to sexual touching. Some perpetrators make sure that their touching is sexually stimulating, feels good and is not painful. Children do not know that this sort of touching by an adult is not ok. Many victims carry guilt all their lives because their bodies responded to the abuse. This does not mean the child wanted the abuse. It means that the perpetrator used the child's natural responses to 'set up' the belief that they did. This also makes abuse very confusing and hard to tell anyone about it.

Learning the tricks that perpetrators use is really important because it can often help to understand that it was not your fault.

If you are still unsure, you might find the fact sheet called "Telling" useful to read.

Thanks to the SILENT NO MORE Project for this information.

