

## Recognizing Sexual Manipulation

Sexual Manipulation, also commonly known as "grooming", is when an individual builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or trafficking.

Children can be manipulated in a variety of ways. Whether it be online or face-to-face, the child and family will know the abuser in approximately 90% of all cases. This number jumps to 99% in Kent County. They can be male or female and any age. For many young children & teens, they do not understand that they have been groomed or that what is happening to them is classified as abuse.

Parents and guardians often wonder how it's possible for children to be abused without their knowledge. The answer is simple. Offenders often go to great lengths to earn the trust of their victims and isolate them from friends, family, and authority figures, all while using various tactics to gain access to children. There is currently no definitive cycle of abuse; however, the stages of sexual manipulation may include:

1

### Selection:

The first step in manipulation is the selection of a victim, which can be based on appeal/attractiveness, ease of access, or perceived vulnerabilities of the child. Approximately 90% of children know their offender, and 60% of those children are abused by people the family trusts. Unfortunately, research has shown that victim selection is incredibly strategic & well-planned, and it is often difficult for parents and guardians to recognize.

2

### Developing a Relationship:

After the selection process, the perpetrator will then try to gain access to the child and develop a positive & trusting relationship. The goal is to isolate the child from his/her/their family, friends, and even authority figures. During this time the abuser may spend time playing with the child, volunteer to babysit, become their "buddy", or buy them gifts.

3

### Gaining Power & Isolating:

Abusers often find excuses to be alone with the child for long periods of time. For example, they may be more inclined to babysit, go on a trip, and/or invite them to a sleepover. With the use of imaginative play, abusers can oftentimes break down the child's resistance to touch. The abusers play games with lots of physical contact, like wrestling or tickling, and then sneak sexual touches in throughout their encounter.

4

### Blaming the Child & Keeping Secrets:




To prevent the child from telling, abusers will make the child feel responsible for what has happened. They may use statements like, "nobody will believe you" or "you know you like the way I touch you."

## Signs & Symptoms of Abuse

 Withdrawal	 Risky Behaviors
 Anxiety	 Changes in eating habits
 Depression	 Aggression
 Problems Sleeping/Nightmares	 Self-harm
 Bed wetting	 Clinginess

## Prevention

Parents shouldn't be embarrassed to talk about things like this, as it is often much harder to manipulate a child who knows what an offender is trying to do.

-  Educate your child on the appropriate body part names, and make these conversations ongoing.
-  Explain the difference between secrets & surprises. No adult should ask a child to keep a secret...including you.
-  Most importantly, listen to your child and BELIEVE them.

For more information, contact the CAC at 616.336.5160 or [www.cac-kent.org](http://www.cac-kent.org).