



Grooming Awareness Activity

an activity for church leaders and members Participants guide

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Handout for participants

Please note: in seeking to be sensitive, mindful and respectful of survivors, this material uses the language of 'Targeted Person' rather than the language of 'Victim'.

Church congregations, faith communities and healthy relationships

- Church congregations and faith communities are communities of people who gather together out of love for and commitment to God
- Church environments need to be places that are safe for all people especially for vulnerable people (children and adults)
- The relationships between people in communities of faith ought reflect and express love and respect
- There are many ways to safely grow relationships
- It is important to maintain safe personal boundaries
- A part of safely growing relationships is being able to name behaviour that is inappropriate and stopping behaviour that leads to abuse and harm
- While most people would never contemplate abusing and harming another human being, there are some people who intentionally seek to abuse and harm others
- Behaviour may or may not be grooming. That is the subtlety of grooming

What is grooming?

- Grooming is conduct that creates and then exploits opportunities to engage in sexual activity
- Grooming is a subtle process (hard to notice) that happens over time
- Grooming involves a graduation or progression of behaviour

Who might be a groomer?

- Groomers can be young, middle aged or elderly, married or single, male or female, and of any cultural background, of any clan or kin
- Groomers can be friends, family members (parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents), neighbours, church members, Church Ministers/Pastors/Leaders or lay people

Who can be groomed?

- Anyone can be groomed – children, adults, Ministers/ Pastors, Church leaders, Church congregations as a group

Where can grooming take place?

- Grooming can take place anywhere - family home, relative's house, friend's house, local Church, office place, online, via telephone, in a car, car park, hallway, in public, in private

What are the stages of grooming? refer Welner in Dooling (2012) '*Grooming' opens door to abuse* The Ithaca Journal 7th January 2012 New York (* Welner's language of Victim has been replaced here with person)

- **Targeting the person*** (who is vulnerable, lonely, isolated, emotionally needy, who will I be able to spend time with, who will not say no, who can keep a secret)
- **Gaining trust** (watching, gathering information, developing rapport, spending time, develop a trusting relationship)
- **Filling a need** (gifts, extra attention, distinguish the Targeted Person from others, touch, doing special favours, testing what can I get away with)
- **Isolation** (seek to separate the Targeted Person from others, create opportunities to be alone, share private information then swear to secrecy)
- **Sexualising the relationship** (emotional closeness and connection, sexual acts and activity)
- **Maintaining control** (manipulate and silence the Targeted Person, blame the Targeted Person, threaten, blackmail, intimidate, embarrass, shame)

How does a groomer groom?

- Groomers target a person – they look for someone who is vulnerable and needy, who will not say no, and who can keep a secret
- Groomers develop and establish a trusting relationship with the Targeted Person and with the person's family and friends – the goal is to have access to the Targeted Person alone
- Groomers are typically charming to those around them and seen as likeable and trustworthy. Groomers make the Targeted Person feel special – this lowers personal safeguards and defences
- Groomers are skilled at manipulating behaviours and relationships and expert at making people doubt their own instincts that something is not quite right
- Groomers trick the Targeted Person and the Targeted Person's families and friends to create secrecy, and to gain power and control
- If challenged, groomers make excuses for their behaviour
- Grooming can occur in public and in private. Grooming behaviour that occurs in public demonstrates to the Targeted Person that others approve of the relationship and behaviour
- Groomers convince the Targeted Person that the behaviour is right. They also convince the Targeted Person that the Targeted Person is to blame for what has happened
- Targeted Persons are silenced with shame, embarrassment, threats, blackmail, bribes and punishment. Targeted Persons are told by Groomers that something terrible will happen if they tell – relationships will fall apart, their family/friends will get hurt, the community will be damaged, the groomer may go to prison

Why are Church congregations, faith communities and members vulnerable to grooming?

Church congregations	Groomers
Church congregations want to encourage members. Church congregations and members can be very hesitant to question behaviour – they do not want to discourage members or to suggest that normal behaviour is grooming.	Groomers know this.
Church congregations and their members want to be friendly and inviting to each other. Church congregations are full of people of good will.	Grooming thrives in places where people are accepting.
Church congregation members give people the benefit of the doubt.	Grooming thrives when people accept excuses or justifications for behaviour.
Church congregations encourage caring and closeness.	Grooming thrives in places where warmth and affection are celebrated.
Church congregations encourage sharing.	Grooming thrives on personal information.
Church congregations struggle to name and address differences.	Grooming thrives on silence.

A challenge

Church congregation members want to be nice.

There is a challenge for members of congregations and for Church leaders – would they rather risk offending someone by suggesting that their behaviour needs to stop or through lack of action enable an offender (Groomer) to abuse and harm. Behaviour may or may not be grooming. Church congregations need to be aware that people (children and adults) in the past and in the present have in the life of the Church suffered abuse and harm. Church congregations need to be committed to preventing abuse and harm. It is a shared responsibility to be a safe healthy Church congregation.

Resources

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.org.au>

Smallbone 2015 Evidence to Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Welner in Dooling (2012) 'Grooming' opens door to abuse The Ithaca Journal 7th January 2012 New York.

www.StopItNow.org

Stages of grooming (Welner*) and grooming interruptions

1. Targeting the person	2. Gaining trust	3. Filling a need	4. Isolation	5. Sexualising the relationship	6. Maintaining control
<p>Congregation is committed to being a safe place for all people especially vulnerable people (children and adults).</p> <p>Congregation has clear expectations of behaviour.</p> <p>Congregation has processes in place for keeping vulnerable people safe.</p> <p>Congregation members are educated about safe ministry.</p> <p>Congregation leaders are trained about responding to disclosures and allegations/ complaints of abuse and harm.</p>	<p>I don't mean to offend you but I feel I need to let you know that this Church has a number of processes around keeping people safe. Being a new person here I would really like you to feel welcomed. We make sure that everyone knows the processes we have. These processes are ...</p> <p>We've both been part of the congregation a long time. I don't mean to offend you but I am concerned by something I saw. I need to talk with you about my concern.</p> <p>Games of catch and tickle with children are not ok.</p> <p>It is not ok to sit a child on your lap.</p> <p>Inform the minister/pastor.</p>	<p>TP says: <i>No.</i> <i>Stop.</i> <i>I feel uncomfortable.</i> <i>There are some secrets I don't keep.</i></p> <p>We don't do that here.</p> <p>My gut tells me something is wrong.</p> <p>That behaviour is not ok and this is why.</p> <p>We have clear ways of relating to people here and the behaviour I observed is not acceptable.</p> <p>Where did that gift come from?</p> <p>No gifts or presents thank you.</p> <p>Tell the minister or pastor.</p>	<p>TP says: <i>No.</i> <i>Stop.</i> <i>This does not feel right.</i> <i>My gut tells me something is wrong.</i> <i>My private parts were 'accidentally' touched by that person.</i></p> <p>Did that person say what I think they said?</p> <p>That person seems to want to come between me and my child.</p> <p>That person seems to take a 'special' interest in particular people.</p> <p>Telling sexual jokes, making sexual comments is not ok.</p> <p>Did that just happen?</p> <p>I need to report this.</p> <p>Tell the minister or pastor or the head office of the Church.</p>	<p>TP says: <i>No.</i> <i>Stop.</i> <i>I need help.</i> <i>I need to talk.</i></p> <p>I saw G touch TP and it seemed a bit odd to me.</p> <p>There seems a closeness between G and TP that doesn't look right.</p> <p>I just saw G touch TP's private parts.</p> <p>I need to report this.</p> <p>Call the police/child protection unit.</p> <p>Tell the minister or pastor or head office of the Church.</p>	<p>TP says: <i>G and I have special cuddles.</i> <i>I was told to keep a secret.</i> <i>Something has happened between G and me.</i></p> <p>You did the right thing telling me.</p> <p>This needs to stop.</p> <p>Thank you for telling me.</p> <p>I need to report this to others.</p> <p>You (TP) are not to blame.</p> <p>It is not your (TP) fault.</p> <p>Call the police/child protection unit.</p> <p>Tell the minister or pastor or the head office of the Church.</p>

*Welner in Dooling (2012) 'Grooming' opens door to abuse The Ithaca Journal 7th January 2012 New York Note: Welner uses the language Victim. The language Targeted Person has been used here.

Note: TP refers to Targeted Person G refers to Groomer