



# Summer 2024 Newsletter

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## UNDERSTANDING GROOMING



### Grooming Dynamic

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse (CSA) may gain the trust of potential child victims and their caregivers by methodically “grooming” them. This process begins with identifying potential victims, gaining their trust, and breaking down their defenses. These grooming tactics are often directed at potential youth victims as well as the adult caregivers—parents, other youth-serving professionals, and the community-at-large. After gaining access to children and youth by achieving this trust, the perpetrator initiates some kind of contact that s/he finds sexually gratifying.

This sexual contact may range from voyeurism to rape and other forms of child sexual abuse. Grooming helps the offender gain access to the victim and sets up a relationship grounded in secrecy so that the crime is less likely to be discovered. Perpetrators of child sexual

abuse are often individuals known to the family; they may be acquaintances, influential members of the community, trusted friends and even family members. Sometimes the offender is known to the family through association with an organization or activity in which the child or youth participates such as school, a community club, sports team, recreation center, or camp.

One reason that the perpetrator is able to exploit the child is because he or she holds the power in the relationship based on age and experience, size and strength, and adult status. A perpetrator may manipulate and use those power differences to gain the youth’s trust and confidence, and/or to create fear that enables the perpetrator to coerce the child or youth. (Note that this is not common in all cases of CSA; in many scenarios, there is NO trust at all, only coercion and fear.)

## Grooming steps include:

- **Identifying and targeting the victim.** Any child or teen may be a potential victim. Some predators may be attracted to children and youth with certain characteristics or may target youth with certain co-existing factors—such as vulnerable parents— as means to facilitate the crime.
- **Gaining trust and access.** The perpetrator may observe the child and assess his/her vulnerabilities to learn how best to approach and interact with the child. Perpetrators may offer the victims special attention, understanding and a sympathetic ear, and then engage the child in ways that eventually gain their friendship and trust (they may play games with victims or give them rides, provide them with gifts and/or special treats).
- **Playing a role in the child's life.** The perpetrator may manipulate the relationship so that it appears he or she is the only one who fully understands the child or meets the child's needs in a particular way. A perpetrator may also exploit a youth's empathy and convince the young person that s/he is the only one who understands the perpetrator and reinforce that the perpetrator "needs" the child or youth.
- **Isolating the child.** Offering the child rides and/or taking the child out of his or her surroundings is one way that the perpetrator may separate the child from others and gain access to the child alone, so that others cannot witness the abuse. (Note that in other instances, perpetrators have been successful in molesting victims without detection while other adults were in the room.)
- **Creating secrecy around the relationship.** The perpetrator may reinforce the special connection with the victim when they are alone or through private communication with the victim (such as letters, emails, or text messages), and strengthen it with admonitions against telling anyone, lest others be unhappy about it. The perpetrator may threaten the victim with disclosure, suicide, physical harm to the child or loved ones, or other traumas if he or she tells.
- **Initiating sexual contact.** With the power over the child victim established through emotional connection, coercion or one of the other tactics, the perpetrator may eventually initiate physical contact with the victim. It may begin with touching that is not overtly sexual (though a predator may find it sexually gratifying) and that may appear to be casual (arm around the shoulder, pat on the knee, etc.). Gradually, the perpetrator may introduce more sexualized touching. By breaking down inhibitions and desensitizing the child, the perpetrator can begin overtly touching the child.
- **Controlling the relationship.** Perpetrators rely on the secrecy of the relationship to keep it going, and to ensure that the child will not reveal the abuse. Children are often afraid of disclosing the abuse. They may have been told that they will not be believed, or that something about the child "makes" the abuser do this to them. The child may also feel shame, or fear that they will be blamed. Often, the perpetrator threatens the child to ensure that s/he won't disclose the abuse.





# How to Identify a Trauma Bond

Part 2 of a 3-part series

In our last newsletter, we discussed how a trauma bond develops and why it can make it so difficult for someone to leave a toxic relationship. So, what does this look like from the outside? There are signs that you may see in someone who is experiencing a trauma bond as well as some telling behaviors in abusers.

Let's break down what to look for. If you have a friend who began dating someone, one of the first red flags may be idolization of their partner. This is due to the love-bombing we often see in the beginning of the relationship. Over time as things progress and the abuse cycle begins to spin. You may notice your friend's behavior shifting as the cycle spirals downwards.

## Here's what to watch for:

- They become deeply aware of their partner's needs/wants, and put them before their own.
- They tell you about repetitive fights they have with their partner about the same topics.
- Become unusually secretive about their relationship.
- They idolize the idea of their partner rather than the reality of them.
- Insisting that their partner has changed and that this time will be different.

- Minimizing violence or threats.
- Taking on blame for their partner's behavior.

It can be tricky to notice an abuser's behaviors from an outside perspective. Many abusers are very skilled in keeping up public appearances. This not only isolates the victim as they can fear that no one would believe them if they were to come forward, but it also strengthens the trauma bond. The abuser shows that in front of others, they are very capable of being sociable and pleasant. Then, behind closed doors, their behavior reverts to abuse and their partner wonders what they did to deserve the change.

### Some signs to watch out for include:

- One partner has total control of the finances for both individuals. Keep in mind that this could be portrayed as one partner "taking care" of the other.
- The abuser takes steps to make their partner dependent on them. For example, they may have them quit their job/schooling, or want them to move in together quickly.

- The abuser becomes overly needy so that their partner has no time to maintain their relationships with friends/family.
- The abuser may gaslight their partner with statements like "that never happened" or "no, you're remembering it wrong."
- They may degrade their partner by calling them names or poke fun at their insecurities.
- The abuser's goal is to keep their partner dependent on them, maintain control of the relationship, and to create an unpredictable and hostile environment for their partner.

Trauma bonds are powerful, but they are not impossible to escape from. In our next newsletter we will discuss how people can break these bonds along with some of the challenges that may arise while doing so.

# CVRC Updates

## LOOKING FOR A GROUP SPEAKER?

Would you like to learn more about victimization and the services we provide? Is there a particular crime topic you'd like to learn more about? We would love to come and speak to your organization.

## NEW LOCATION REMINDER

We moved to the main campus of the medical center located at 1000 1 st Drive NW. Visit our offices by taking the Clinic South elevators to Floor 1A-Desk C.

## JOIN US FOR R-I-S-E GROUP

**(RESILIENCE INDEPENDENCE SUPPORT EDUCATION)**

If you are dealing with a difficult relationship, whether an intimate partner or family (i.e. parent/child struggles), join us from 5:30 to 7 p.m. on Wednesdays. Call 507-437-6680 for more information.



## BEST WISHES LINNEA!

It is with great sadness that we announce the departure of our friend and colleague, Linnea Garness. After nearly 8 years with CVRC, Linnea has decided to stay home to care for her family. Linnea's last day with us was June 11th.

During her time here, Linnea excelled at providing above and beyond services to her clients. Linnea was truly passionate about her role as an advocate, and it showed.

Though, we are disappointed that Linnea has left us, we wish her well in this new chapter of her life.

## Crime Victims Resource Center

1000 First Drive NW, Austin • 507-437-6680

Empowering victims of crime through education, intervention, support and advocacy.

The Crime Victims Resource Center will help individuals who have been victims of many different types of crime. Some of the specific crimes we work with are:

- Accidents involving intoxicated driver
- Assault
- Burglary
- Child Abuse
- Domestic Abuse/Assault
- Elder Abuse
- Harassment
- Sexual Abuse/Assault
- Stalking
- Terroristic Threats
- Theft



Tori Miller  
Director



Sasha Border  
Victim Advocate

### Victim Support Services

- 24 hour crisis hotline
- Crisis counseling
- Safety planning
- Arranging emergency shelter
- Support groups
- Referrals to other agencies
- Emergency transportation
- Support during hospital examinations
- Support during police reporting
- Assistance with Orders for Protection and Harassment Restraining Orders
- Assistance with understanding the criminal justice system
- Accompaniment to court proceedings for support
- Updates on the progress of court proceedings
- Notification of victims' rights

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