

Understanding the Grooming or Entrapment Process

Sexual Grooming of Children

Most sports clubs offer excellent opportunities for young people to train, try new things, make friends and improve their skills. They are often the places where appropriate trusting relationships with adults outside the family or formal education sector are developed. Such relationships of trust should be used appropriately to advise young people and demonstrate the positive values of sport through role modelling.

However, sports clubs can also provide opportunities for adults to target and groom a child or young person through their role as a volunteer or paid employee. Grooming is defined by the Home Office as communication with a child where this is an intention to meet and commit a sex offence. More generally it can be seen as the process by which an individual manipulates those around them – particularly, but not exclusively, the child – to provide opportunities to abuse and reduce the likelihood of being reported or discovered.

Whilst this is not a common occurrence it is something that should be recognised does happen. Abusers come from all sections of society and are often perceived by others as respectable, reliable and trustworthy people. Research tells us that the vast majority of abusers are well known to the child and often hold a position of trust or authority.

Why do they do it?

We cannot fully understand what motivates some seemingly kind and respectable people to groom and abuse children. The important thing is to understand that this can and does happen. At some level most abusers know what they are doing is harmful, so develop distorted views about appropriate behaviour to justify their actions. They delude themselves, for example into believing they only want to 'love' children, or that the young people enjoy and encourage such behaviour.

Abusers may be able to watch media images of another so called "monster" who abuses and not recognise themselves. They may manage potential feelings of guilt by convincing themselves that their actions don't constitute abuse, that the abuse is not harmful (even that it's good for the child), or that they are actually the victims in the situation. When flashes of reality get through to them they may become depressed. Some may push guilt away, often blaming others, including the child.

How do abusers control children?

"I look for a child who seems to be lonely or sad or looking for attention. Then I take my time gaining her trust and becoming her friend. In time she will do anything I ask."

quote from an abuser

Child abuse is rarely a single incident or event. In order to protect children, we need to know that most abusers develop a relationship with a child (and often with the parents) – a relationship which harms the child and often makes the child feel responsible and unable to tell. Secrecy is fundamental to the abuse continuing and children are often trapped before they know what has happened.



Abusers:

- May be good at making friends with children. They can appear to be kind, trustworthy, caring and helpful. They put on a good act which fools parents, children and other potentially protective adults.
- May appear as both nice and nasty to the abused child? *"I can be loving and kind, but if you don't do what you're told, you'll see another side to me."* They may also be extremely controlling/intimidating and frightening, using fear, threats and violence to get both adults and children to do what they want.
- May live in or join families in order to abuse children.
- May look for jobs or volunteer roles which place them in regular contact with children. They work in child care, schools, dance, sports or any activities involving children.
- May spend time around places like arcades, playgrounds, parks and sports venues to get to know children so they are not seen as strangers.
- May offer a combination of attention, gifts, treats, games, outings, money, toys, bribes and threats to children to entrap them. They may threaten the child with physical harm or with the loss of someone they love if they don't do what the abuser wants.
- Will tend to seek out and join organisations with unclear boundaries around contact with children so as not to draw people's attention or concerns about their behaviour. For example a club with no guidance on travelling with a young person, photography or texting, or where the prevailing culture is to disregard such guidance.

Most abusers try to find out as much as possible about the child and use the information both to engage the child and to drive a wedge between the child and parent or other potentially protective adults, such as other coaches or club volunteers. The more difficult we make it for abusers to come between children and protective parents or protective adults, the safer children will be.

If the abuser is a family member or in a sports setting, possibly a coach or other person in authority with whom the child has had a long term relationship, it is especially painful to face up to the abuse and can be even harder for children to say no and to tell. Parents and adults may find it difficult to believe what the child tells them and can retreat into denial which can isolate the child even further.

When abusers say to a child 'nobody will believe you', they are unfortunately too often correct, as many adults struggle to get over the hurdle of believing abuse could happen to someone they know – particularly when that individual is well liked and respected or holds a position of authority within the organisation..

Finkelhor's model of sexually abusive behaviour

David Finkelhor (1984) proposed a model of child sexual abuse, which describes the stages that a child sexual offender moves through in order to abuse a child. It comprises four preconditions leading to the sexual abuse of a child:

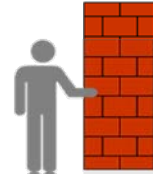
1. Sexual motivation (wanting to abuse)
2. Overcoming internal inhibitions (against acting on that motivation)
3. Overcoming external inhibitors (to committing sexual abuse)
4. Undermining or overcoming the child's resistance to the sexual abuse.



Stage 1 Sexual motivation

- Strong urges or desires
- Thinking about something or wanting to do something
- Reinforced by fantasies

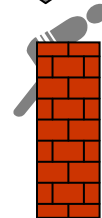
Motivation



Stage 2 Overcoming internal inhibitions against acting on that motivation

- Giving in to the urge or desire
- Making excuses
- Justifications
- Overcoming conscience

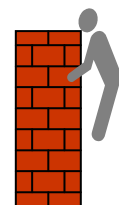
Giving Self Permission



Stage 3 Overcoming external impediments to committing sexual abuse

- How you go about engaging in the behaviour
- Grooming others
- Gaining access to a victim
- Creating situations where abuse can take place
- Reducing the chances of the abuse being discovered or reported, or of disclosures being believed

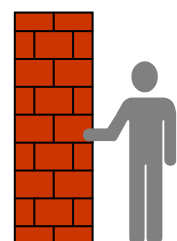
Creating Opportunity



Stage 4 Undermining or overcoming the child's resistance to the sexual abuse

- Getting the victim to be compliant
- Threats
- Bribes
- Treats
- Force
- Trickery

Overcoming Victim's Resistance



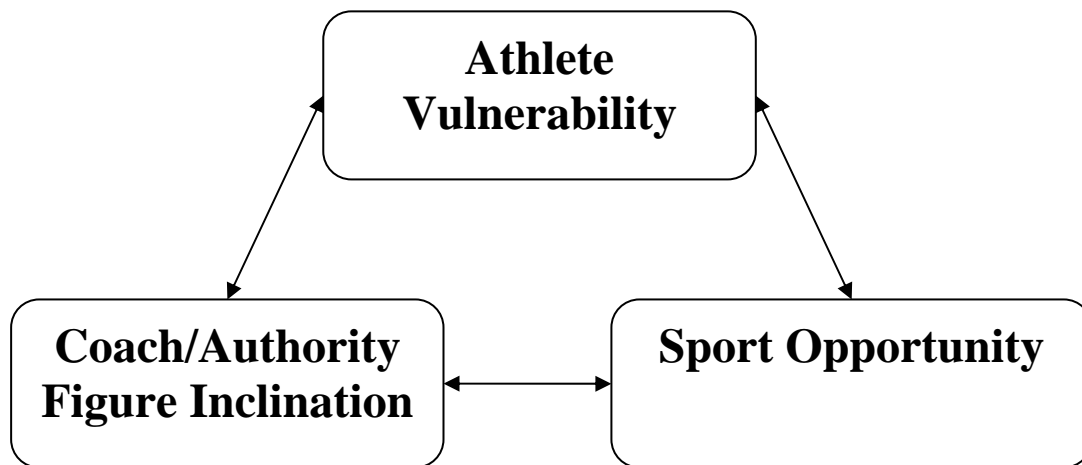
By understanding the behaviour of sexual offenders we can place obstacles in their way in order to interrupt this cycle, particularly in stages 3 and 4. For example:

1. Recruitment and selection - strengthen external inhibitors by preventing access to children and young people by those with a known history of harming children. It also makes it clear that the organisation/club is alert to potential abuse and safeguarding issues, by having policies and practices in place from the outset
2. Codes of conduct, policies and procedures for reporting and responding to any concerns in the sports environment - strengthens external inhibitors by providing a safeguarding culture and environment within which it is difficult for the person to commit offences and where challenging/reporting concerning behaviour is actively encouraged
3. Raising awareness through training amongst staff, volunteers and children/young people - strengthening the external inhibitors and the child's resistance to the abuse.

Successful abusers groom not only the child but also the adults around the child. This could include the child's family members and people within the sports club. For example, an adult who wanted to abuse a child might spend significant time and energy building a friendship with the child's parents. By grooming the adults around the child, developing a reputation of respectability, helpfulness or popularity within the club, the abuser makes it more difficult for the child to disclose abuse, or for adults (who trust and may know the individual well) to accept even the possibility the allegations could be true.

Brackenridge's Model of Exploitation (2001)

Celia Brackenridge is the Professor of Sport Sciences (Youth Sport) at Brunel University. She has developed a model of understanding how adults exploit children. The Brackenridge model is not explicitly about sexual abuse, but could apply to all forms of abuse.



(Thanks to Celia Brackenridge, Professor of Sport Sciences (Youth Sport), Brunel University for permission to use the Model of Exploitation.)

The Brackenridge Model shows the elements of a triangulated relationship which exists in order for a coach/official to act on their intent to abuse an athlete in the sport.



The key factors which enable the coach/official to exploit a child are:

1. Sport opportunity

If the sport or club provides situations or opportunities for the coach/authority figure that are not recognised as good practice (for example allowing the coach/authority figure to develop an opportunity/excuse to meet the athlete outside the club), this can contribute to the vulnerability or potential susceptibility of the athlete in that situation. The athlete may feel unable to refuse the offer or be flattered by the invitation.

2. Coach/authority figure inclination

The coach/authority figure must have a desire or interest in developing a relationship beyond that of the coach/authority figure appropriate athlete relationship and the good practice boundaries expected by the sport, club and family of that relationship.

3. Athlete vulnerability

The athlete by virtue of the relationship with their coach/authority figure is vulnerable and potentially powerless. They may view any potential inappropriate coach/authority figure behaviour as acceptable in order to achieve or advance their achievement goals within the sport. Conversely the athlete may be anxious that questioning or raising a concern about the coach/authority figures behaviour may jeopardise their selection for their team or club.

This model also highlights how the cycle can be broken through good practice within the club. For example, ensuring volunteers and staff in positions of trust model good practice and by having members who are keen to promote and support the positive aspects of the sport. It is also important to develop a culture of listening to young people in order to reduce athlete vulnerability.

Importance of challenging secrets

If abuse remains a secret, abusers will continue to abuse. If someone speaks about the abuse, this allows us to end the abuse, support the child, and may open the door to treatment for the abuser, leading to positive change and them becoming safer citizens. Today there are some effective treatment programmes run by prison and probation services and by voluntary organisations for people who abuse. If you are unsure or worried about the sexual behaviour of someone you know (whether they are an adult or a child) you can contact the Stop It Now! Helpline on 0808 1000 900 www.stopitnow.org.uk.

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