

How Did We Miss the Signs?

A Case Study in Sexual Misconduct
in Youth Sports

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National Snapshot of Offenders

Age (mean)	44.3
Caucasian	66%
Male	98%
Adult	80%
Minor Victim	90%

Victim-Offender Relationship

	All Victims	Adult Victims	Child Victims
Family	26.7%	11.5%	34%
Acquaintance	59.6%	61%	58.7%
Stranger	13.8%	27%	7%



But we do background checks!

- 96% of persons convicted of a sex offense were not on the registry at the time of the offense.
- At least 66% of all sex offenses are not reported to authorities.
- One study of sex offenders found that fewer than 5% of the offenses committed were reported.



Soccer coach accused of inappropriate relationship with girl, 14, goes on trial

Police: Somerset Academy soccer coach charged with sending 'sexual' messages to minor

Pembroke Pines soccer coach accused of sending nude photos to girl



NEWS

Coach accused of exposing himself: I just drive with my pants unbuttoned

Former Cathedral High School volunteer coach accused of sexual relationship with student



The Process of Offending

- Work to create a respectable image
- Gain access to potential victims - access resulting from circumstance
- Select a child for abuse
- Engage the child and family in a relationship
- Groom the child and the gatekeepers - desensitize and disarm the child and family
- Test and erode barriers



The Process of Sexual Offending

- Sexualize the relationship with the child
- Maintain the child's cooperation and silence - avoid discovery
- Create conditions to discredit the victim
- Plan ahead for an excuse

Career Selection

- Occupation or opportunity providing access to children
- Circumstances create perception as a mentor or revered figure
- Profession or opportunity imparting status

Factors Affecting Grooming Process

- Sport
- Age
- Gender
- Family
- Access
- Other factors

Family Selection

- Family circumstances
- Develop trust with parents
- May assume a “father figure” role, or offer to assist with babysitting, transportation
- Cultivate reasons to see the child alone to further develop trust
- If there is suspicion or reluctance, the abuser will move on to another family



Selecting a Victim

- A very strategic, well-planned process
- Access to a particular minor
- The degree of attraction to the child
- The offender's perception of the child's vulnerability

Grooming

- Requires skillful manipulation of a child and the community
- Disguise intent by being charming and helpful
- Strategically manipulate the victim, caregivers and community to hide intentions and avoid detection



Grooming

- Purposeful, calculated and patient
- Special attention given to the child
- Touching begins in the presence of others to normalize the behavior
- Cultivate an emotional relationship before any sexual contact or conduct
- Trust erodes the child's defenses
- Isolation of the child from friends or caregivers with attention, special activities and gifts



- May engage in peer-like behavior
- Testing the child by introducing sexual topics, touching and inappropriate behavior
- Watches for signs of discomfort, fear or curiosity, and responds accordingly
- Normalizes sexual behavior
- Either retreat and try again, or proceed
- Initiate sexual touching, rarely by force



Anticipating Disclosure

- Preventative measures taken
- Sabotage the child's relationships with caretakers to diminish trust
- Disclosure of the "innocent mistake" before the child discloses in an effort to discredit
- Threats to discourage disclosure
- Encourage others to defend the offender



Avoiding Consequences

- Manipulate others out of reporting – “You know I would never do that, this will ruin me.”
- Denial by others - “He would never do that.”
- Familiarity – “I know him.”
- Blame – “She just wants attention, look at her family situation.”



Difficulty in Detection

- Behaviors appear to be innocent
- A trusting relationship has been established – “he wouldn’t do that”
- Caregivers lack insight into grooming behaviors
- The motivation remains undisclosed
- Sexual abuse occurs in private



A Case Study

The Coach:

41 years old

President of soccer club

Employed by government agency servicing
children with developmental disabilities

Married with a child the same age as the victim



The Family

- Intact family unit
- Very involved with the children
- Mom served as assistant soccer coach

The Victim

- 14 years old
- Coach was “her idol”
- Abuser was her coach from the age of 8
- While intelligent, attractive and athletic, socially naïve – no experience with boys or relationships
- Victim the same age as and friends with Abuser’s daughter – Victim spent the night at Abuser’s home



Preparing to Abuse

- Coach singled Victim out for compliments
- Began texting Victim outside of group texts
- Compliments escalated from commenting on her soccer skills to her appearance

The Grooming

- During sleepovers with his daughter, after daughter was asleep, they would go to another place in the house and talk
- Began texting one another for hours at night
- Made plans for their future – he would leave his wife, chose a name for a future child
- Abuser convinced Victim that once her father accepted their relationship, they would be together forever



The Sexual Contact

- Abuser experienced a death in his family, Victim, which visiting his daughter, expressed her condolences; a hug by him lingered for an inappropriate amount of time
- Abuser texted Victim that he enjoyed the hug
- Victim believed Abuser loved her and that they would be together in the future
- Each time Abuser and Victim saw one another, Abuser texted her that night about something that he liked, and expressed a desire to do something more intimate



The Sexual Contact

- “I wish I had kissed you” – the next time they saw one another he kissed her
- Escalating intimacy
- Sexual contact and conduct

The Discovery

- Mom read and then deleted Abuser's text messages
- Mom and Dad confronted Abuser with an ultimatum for their silence:
 - Never coach again
 - Never contact Victim



Deception and Control

- Two weeks after the ultimatum, through his daughter, Abuser provided Victim with a new cell phone
- Victim hid the phone from her parents – texting through the night commenced again
- At Abuser's request, the two exchanged nude photos and videos
- Mother discovered new cell phone when Victim fell asleep after all-night texting session with Abuser



The Prosecution

- Victim reluctantly and slowly disclosed contact
- Victim “tested” response to her admissions
- Victim continued to profess affection for Abuser
- Victim may not have disclosed full extent of sexual relationship



What can you do?

- Develop consistent, mandatory policies
- Restrict one-on-one access to children
- Always be watching
- Engage in training on abuse process
- Be willing to be suspicious
- Get to know the people who have access to children
- Act on your concerns

