

The 4 Stages of Grooming



Written by
Dr. Lisa Turner
mindCET Ltd
Cornwall
www.cetfreedom.com

White paper: 4 stages of grooming



People who experience abuse are seduced, groomed, brainwashed. They have an overwhelming sense of very deep shame which causes them to stay. They don't need to be tied up, they'll never run, they'll never tell, they'll never prosecute. It was the enslavement of the mind that trapped them originally and kept them trapped.

To prevent abuse from happening, to spot the signs, and to help someone heal and recover, we need to understand how it works. So, I started to speak out about child abuse, grooming, and trafficking. I also decided to update this book with a second edition that identifies and explains the steps and stages of grooming. My intention is to increase awareness and compassion for all. After all, if people don't understand the problem, then how will they understand how to help, how to prevent it?

Understanding and Recognizing Sexual Abuse

Most of us imagine child trafficking like a scene from a true crime special—a kid grabbed from the streets or playground, bundled into the back of vans or boots of cars, and locked in basements and cellars. This is what our media tell us and, undoubtedly, it happens. But it's rare. Very rare.

The truth is that 96% of childhood sexual abuse occurs while the child is still living at home and superficially engaged in normal life. They often lead a double life: a normal life amongst their families and school, and weekends and evenings in the hands of their abuser, often in hotels where they are prostituted. As a result, spotting a pattern of abuse or a potential abuser isn't as simple as telling our kids not to get into cars with strangers. Protecting our kids by keeping them physically safe only protects them against 1% of the risk. The other 99% chance of risk is much more covert than nabbing a kid from a playground.

The greater risk is emotional and psychological enslavement. It's their loved ones—those they are in the care of, their teachers, family, friends, friends of the family. I'm not suggesting that every adult is about to abuse or traffic a child, but the fact is that a potential abuser won't be a stranger with a balaclava and a van—it will be someone you know, and trust, and probably even like.

Not all abusers set out to consciously abuse a child or create an abusive relationship. Some are a victim of their own sense of powerlessness and worthlessness. It is their own emotional challenges that drive them to create unhealthy, co-dependent relationships. They lack the emotional maturity and awareness to foster healthy interactions, while stopping themselves from acting on their desires and impulses.

This was certainly the case with Gary. He lacked the right tools to form healthy relationships. Without a doubt, it can be a challenge for some adult teachers to be in a room full of teenagers. Many, if not all, teenage student-adult teacher relationships must contend with sexual energy and the power struggle to manage it. That's normal. It becomes a problem when the teacher doesn't know how to control or manage their own sexual energy.

Most teachers handle it well, but there are some who don't. Those who don't, share key elements that increase their likelihood of forming inappropriate relationships with their students.

Signs of a Teacher in Trouble

First, the male teacher will be somewhat of a loner. He may not be a complete loner, but he will probably have only a few friends, and he won't have a strong peer group or family support. He may not fit in with other teachers in the staff room. The teacher may be new to the school or new to teaching and perhaps has not yet found his place. As a result, he may seek out children as friends. This may simply be age-related. Young teachers may feel more of an affinity with the older students than the crusty geography teacher nearing retirement. They may feel more on the side of the students in the "teachers vs students" war.

Secondly, the teacher may be sexually immature, sexually confused, or not feel fully in control of his sexuality. Sexual attraction can seem overpowering. Everyone has sexual desires, some of them unwanted. It's important to differentiate between apparently involuntary desires and voluntary actions. The great majority of people learn to not act out every thought or desire, yet a few seem to feel unable to do this. The desire or temptation is too strong for them. A teacher without control may not have much confidence with his sexuality or with the opposite sex. He may be inexperienced, either having had only a few sexual partners or having a limited sexual repertoire. Additionally, they may not be able to regularly experience full sexual release. This can happen when someone is in a relationship where full sexual release isn't possible, or, they are in a sexually repressed relationship where they don't feel able to fully express their sexuality.

For many, self-pleasuring or masturbation is still taboo and triggers guilt or shame. They may try to ignore it and suppress their sexual desires, which then eventually "leak out". Although masturbation is becoming less taboo, it is still something that people hide or deny. Let's face it, we don't walk into the office on a Monday morning and say, "Wow, I had a great wank last night."

Third, it's also common for the teacher to be not particularly emotionally evolved or confident. He may even be emotionally immature. He may have little understanding of the full range of human emotions and how to relate to others in a complex and complete way. He may have a low awareness of the motivations of others or himself; he is unlikely to have done much personal development.

Teachers are in charge of our children's minds, yet there is little in the way of any kind of emotional maturation process for teachers where they can learn to become more self-aware and more conscious of the motivations and behaviour of others *and* the effect of their behaviour on other people. Sadly, for any teacher who finds himself in the unhappy situation of being attracted to a student, or tempted into an inappropriate relationship, there is little or no help available. They cannot tell anyone what they are experiencing because they know they will be met with judgement, punishment, and lose their job, or worse. Very few people fully understand the complexities of the situation. Rather than judging and punishing teachers who find themselves being tempted into inappropriate relationships, it would be better to have a place where teachers can discuss their experiences in safety and security. I believe it would be so much more helpful if every teacher, male and female, were required to have some kind of on-going personal development programme. Alas, our current education system simply doesn't have the funding, knowledge, or understanding to set up such a support network which can prevent inappropriate relationships from forming.



It's important to remember that for those teachers who find themselves attracted to their students, it's never simply sexual attraction alone. It's about an unmet emotional need, and the powerful sexual desire of which they aren't fully in control. Equally, if not more important, is the emotional attraction. They truly feel and believe they love the student.

Indeed, Gary was always adamant that he loved me. Now, years later, I question: did he love me, or did he love the adoration I lavished on him? Maybe he loved the power he had over me? Perhaps he was so overwhelmed by his sexual feelings that he was unable to control them? Sure, my situation with Gary was extreme, but on a daily basis in every lesson there is the opportunity for a teacher to nurture and empower or to damage and dis-empower. Adults can inspire self-confidence, but they can also destroy it.

Media stories also often portray luring, trafficking, and abuse as a moment of crisis, or a series of rapid crises—the child is grabbed off the street when the parent's back is turned, the woman is punched or raped, the boss drops his trousers in the office. However, to fully understand the seduction process, we need to recognize that it is more than a moment of crisis. It is not simply an action that could've been prevented. No, abuse is a slow, drip feed. It's a long, gentle but very slippery slope. It has roots. To simplify, I've broken the pattern down into four clear stages of abuse, including actions and behaviours that might seem innocent or even well-meaning to the untrained eye.

The Four Stages of Seduction: from Free to Enslaved Mind

1. Luring

Luring is both more complicated and simpler than offering a child free candy before snatching them up. During this initial phase, a potential abuser puts out feelers, assessing, testing, and collecting information on potential victims. He doesn't necessarily target specific individuals; he casts a wide net and sees who responds. He may put out feelers to every kid in school and see who takes the bait and shows interest.

What is it that lures someone to a potential abuser? What causes a child or teenager to take the bait? When an adult or someone in a position of authority demonstrates fascination and interest in a child's or teenager's life, asking questions and listening in a way that someone may never have been listened to before, it can feel incredibly flattering. From the outside, it appears loving and caring. Beneath the surface of a seemingly parental or teacherly interest, lurks a more sinister purpose. The potential abuser is looking for a way in, a "hook." They are fishing around for something, anything, any area of lack or need that the child might have that can be exploited. It might be something the child feels they are missing in their life from the adults around them. Do they want someone to give them attention? Do they want someone to feel proud of them? Do they want someone to make them feel special? Do they feel unheard? Do they feel unrecognized?



It's misleading to think that only "dysfunctional" children or those from dysfunctional families make good potential targets for abusers. A potential abuser will understand how to tap into common insecurities that have nothing to do with how "functional" or "well-raised" or "emotionally intelligent" a teenager may be. Everyone is susceptible. We all have basic needs and desires—add the common insecurities that childhood and puberty amplify, and you have the potential for disaster. A teenager doesn't need to be dysfunctional in order to want their basic needs met. It is entirely normal, and even developmentally appropriate, for children and teenagers to need attention, approval, recognition, and to feel heard *and* to feel as if these needs are not being met. Learning how to negotiate our basic needs and fulfil them in healthy and functional ways is part of growing up.

An abuser can also take advantage of the kindness and better nature of a young person. The abuser may intentionally show vulnerability by openly expressing his own need to be loved and cared for. When the abuser puts the child in the position of carer or helper to an adult, the child feels special and grown-up. But a potential abuser is also tapping into younger people's fundamental human nature to want to do good and be good. Many children are taught to respond to vulnerability with kindness (hugging someone when they cry, for example, or helping someone in distress). Abusers can manipulate a willingness to help by appearing vulnerable and needy. Learning how to identify vulnerability used for manipulation is a key skill that even many adults fail at (just think about those Internet scammers who manipulate kind old ladies out of their pensions).

To an extent, ALL children and teenagers are vulnerable to allurements, and a skilled abuser knows this and will know how to tap into and exploit unmet (or the *feeling of* unmet) needs.

2. Enchantment

Once an abuser has identified a child who is susceptible to his charms, he moves on to the next stage—enchantment. During the enchantment phase, the abuser turns on all the charms. He lavishes his victim with promises, treats, outings, gifts, and attention. Nothing is too much. It's like Father Christmas, the Easter Bunny, and pick-your-favourite-romantic-part-movie-person all in one. He makes the child feel special, deserving of everything. He makes sure the child knows he can and will give them whatever it is he's figured out they are missing or needing. It's incredibly enchanting for a teenager to have an adult showering so much attention on them. The contrast between the love of a normal parent (even a demonstrative and highly attentive one) simply can't compete with the charms lavished on the child by the abuser.

As if under a spell, the teenager starts to believe they are in love. From the teenager's perspective, the relationship might start to move into a romantic relationship, even if that relationship is totally fake and only pseudo-romantic. The adult might say things like: "You're the love of my life. I'm completely in love with you. Let's go away. I'm going to take you away from this. We're going to set up home together. We're going to have a family. We're going to create exactly what you're missing."

By playing on unmet needs, the abuser will undermine a child's relationships with their family, friends, teachers and other adults. He will convince them that only HE cares about the child. He will subtly persuade them that no one else cares; those who are meant to care for them don't—their family hates them, are abusing them, neglecting them or just don't care! The child becomes isolated and mistrustful of their true family as they become totally infatuated with the potential abuser.

3. Manipulation and Coercion

Once the teenager is enchanted, they will do anything for this adult. They may think something along the lines of, *So-and-So's promising me the world, so doing this for him is the least I can do*. This is where the relationship begins to flip. An abuser will make a teenager feel responsible for his feelings. He begins to use guilt and manipulation to get what he wants. He will convince the teenager that he's owed something and, slowly, all the strings attached to those promises and gifts and attention are revealed. The adult who once showered them with everything they ever wanted may start to withhold that affection, gas lighting the teenager into thinking they have done something wrong. And it works because the teenager has put the adult on such a pedestal that he can do no wrong. So, they internalize the blame, convinced it's their own fault that the affection they've come to depend on is being withheld. He may use rage and/or sulking to control a child who lacks the emotional maturity to recognize the manipulation for what it is—emotional blackmail.

Now that the teenager is properly destabilised and vulnerable, a paedophile will really start to pressure for sexual acts (if he hasn't done so already). Some sexual boundaries may have been crossed during the enchantment phase, but here is where things usually become much more intense and alarmingly manipulative. At this point, some paedophiles may begin to feed their victims drugs and get them addicted to controlled substances. He may reward compliance with drugs, or money, or gifts, or the affection that had been withdrawn.

The abuser will keep testing and pushing to see how far he can go. Things can get dark—truly unthinkable. Some people find it hard to believe that a child or teenager would agree to do some of the things that an abuser may demand of them. Some may even think that the child must actually want to do what they are being asked to do. The truth is, most people who've experienced sexual abuse know fundamentally, deep down, that they don't want to do what their abuser is asking them to do, and they can even resist them for a time. But pleasing the adult has become totally entwined with receiving love and care. Every time they do this thing that they don't want to do, they get rewarded. The child may even start to crave the acts just for the reward that follows. The two experiences become locked together as a single, powerful, but confused, emotional response.

This phase may take years.

4. Exploitation

After locking someone into a cycle of withdrawal and reward, the abuser will move on to full exploitation. In this phase, he will start to use threats. He may threaten that they stop spending time with their friends and family (if they haven't already). This creates confinement and isolation, worsened by the belief the abuser has instilled that family and friends don't really care about the person. He may take away mobile phones, computers—anything that could compete for the teenager's attention. Over time, he will make the teenager completely dependent on him for nearly everything. Once that happens, the debt is really piled on: "I've done all this for you, now you owe me." He starts to bring in financial pressures, and that's when the teenager will become prostituted.

By the time someone gets to that fourth stage, they have no self-confidence, no family, no money, and they believe they owe their captor something. They will have no access to resources, zero self-confidence, and no support community outside of the abusive relationship. They literally have nowhere to go. They've been stripped of everything. And that's why someone stays in an abusive situation and doesn't "just leave." Their mind has become completely enslaved. That's why they stay.

So, what can we do to protect our loved ones from potential abuse? The best defence we have is education and awareness. Had my mother been aware of what was going on in the years before Gary suggested that I move to England to live with him, she might have stood a chance of preventing it. But she, too, had been duped. It's important to note that, depending on whether or not and to what extent the parents are involved, parents can *also* be lured and seduced and manipulated and exploited into believing that they are doing the best thing for their child by allowing this situation to continue. Sadly, by the time my mother understood what was really happening, it was too late, far too late. My mind—and my psyche—were enslaved, and she knew it. She did the best she could.