

# What is Grooming?



→ The following steps will illustrate how predators infiltrate their way into a child's life with the intention of harming them.

## STEP 1: Targeting

- Picking out a vulnerable athlete – someone who is trusting, admires the coach and respects the coach's authority in an unquestioning way
- Recognizing when an athlete is most susceptible to the coach paying special attention
- Testing the athlete's receptivity to secrecy and reliability
- Striking up a friendship outside of the team – through phone calls, seemingly accidental meeting

## STEP 2: Building Trust and Friendship

- Making the athlete feel special – spending more time with the athlete listening to personal stories or social gossip – adults don't normally do this.
- Giving the athlete small gifts...or nice and simple text messages like "hope you have a good day" or "you did well at practice today" or "have a great birthday"
- Having consistent and regular daily interactions – remember, adults (especially teachers and coaches) should not be socializing with students or athletes – adults normally spend time with people their age.
- Establishing basic conditions for each private meeting – time, place, athlete doesn't tell anyone the coach is spending extra time with them because other players or parents would get jealous
- Beginning to "bargain" – "You have to do this because I've done that." "I told you what I did today, now you need to tell me." "I told you something personal, now you need to tell me."

## STEP 3: Developing Isolation, Control, Loyalty

- Demeaning other people the athlete may depend upon for support and private conversations – friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, parents who “don’t understand you”
- Stopping the athlete or discouraging them from accessing significant others for friendship or support
- Encouraging doubt and fragility – building the athlete up one minute by making them hopeful and joyful and then punishing or shunning them the next – making you desperate for a return to warmth and attention
- Continuing to check on the athlete’s commitment to secrecy – not revealing the relationship to others, consistent questioning of their loyalty

## STEP 4: Initiation of Sexual Contact & Securing

- Gradual incursion into physical boundaries – from accidental and inadvertent “excuse me” touching, to hugs, “I hope you are feeling better”, or holding hands and language mimicking, “I like you”...”you’re special”
- Invoking guilt and cooperation for being nice or treating the athlete specially, “you owe me...just a little touching”
- Threatening the athlete– “If you tell anyone, I’ll hurt you/tell others what you have done/hurt someone you care about/drop you from the team”
- Discrediting the athlete as a way to maintain secrecy – “They won’t understand” or “Nobody will believe you.”

## SOMETHING TO NOTE:

The “Grooming Process” is never the athlete’s fault or something an athlete should be ashamed about telling others. The coach has a responsibility not to use his/her power or status to take advantage of a student or athlete. The behaviors described previously happen when the coach has cultivated the athlete as his/her victim and thinks that he/she has successfully trapped the athlete into silence. It’s never too late to ask for help. The affection and caring is not real, these athletes have been set up to be victims of sexual abuse.