CAUTION: The SIX STAGES OF GROOMING

"Grooming is a gradual, calculated process by which the offender draws a victim into a relationship and maintains that relationship in secrecy. The grooming offender works to separate the victim from peers, [whilst] giving a kind of love to the child that the child needs." - Dr. Michael Welner

1

Stage 1: Targeting the victim

The offender seeks out children that show emotional neediness, isolation and lower self-confidence. Children with less parental oversight, family conflict, or dysfunction are more likely to be targeted.

2

Stage 2: Gaining the victim's trust

The grooming offender first observes the child he is interested in, getting to know him and his needs. He then moves to make contact with his victim. Offenders often blend in effortlessly into the community and are well liked by both adults and children.

3

Stage 3: Filling a need

By filling the child's needs through special gifts or extra attention the offender assumes increased importance in the child's life. He may become idealized. The family may appreciate his role in their child's life.

4

Stage 4: Isolation of the child

The offender and child start spending more time with each other, often alone. This special relationship, which has many secret elements to it, isolates the child making that special connection even more unique. Steadily, children feel that this special adult loves and appreciates them more than even parents. Babysitting, tutoring, coaching and special trips deepen this relationship.

5

Stage 5: Sexualizing the relationship

At a stage of sufficient emotional dependence and trust, the offender progressively sexualizes the relationship. Desensitization occurs through talking, pictures, even creating situations (like going swimming) in which both offender and victim may be undressed. At that point, the adult exploits the child's natural curiosity, using feelings of stimulation to advance the relationship.

6

Stage 6: Maintaining control

Once the abuse is occurring, offenders commonly use secrecy and blame to maintain the child's continued participation and silence – particularly because the activity may cause the child to withdraw from the relationship.

Children in these entangled relationships confront threats to blame them, to end the relationship and to end the emotional and material needs they associate with the relationship, whether it be the dirt bikes the child gets to ride, the coaching one receives, special outings or other gifts. The child may feel that the loss of the relationship and the consequences of exposing it will humiliate and render them even more unwanted.

(Adapted from Michael Welner)

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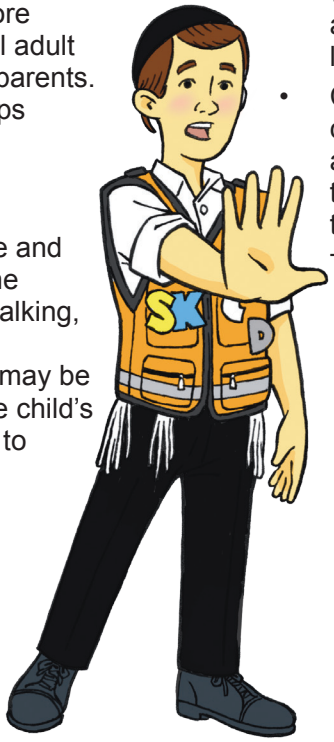

Grooming: Tools for Parental Prevention

- Be aware and pay attention to the people in your child's life and their relationships with your children.
- Ask questions about your child's whereabouts and remain involved in all adult –child relationships in your child's life
- Create a safe environment for your child to share with you **any time** they are uncomfortable with anyone so that they know you will believe them and trust them

Teach your children:

- Never to accept gifts from adults or older children without checking with you first
- Safe touch applies to **ALL** adults in their life
- Adults should "play" with adults and children should "play" with children
- Children should never be told to keep secrets from their parents. If anyone ever tells them to keep a secret from a parent…they should immediately tell their parents …even if they were threatened against it.

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