



“Tell-Tale Signs a Sexual Predator is Grooming You for Sexual Violation”

By Mary Ellen Mann, LCSW

Grooming does the damage that takes the longest recovery work in therapy. Thus, I will be explicit about ways sexual predators groom their victims to gain psychological control over them.

Sexual predators appeal to children, students, employees, and even romantic partners using any—if not many—of the following techniques. **Admittedly, predators say that their favorite part of grooming is getting their potential victims to pity them.** Dr. Patricia Love’s book *The Emotional Incest Syndrome* has been a fundamental tool in my practice and has been foundational to my understanding of how boundary crossing, like grooming, occurs.

Below are the 3 Categories of Emotional Incest, provided in part by Dr. Love. **Grooming initially appears as a “well-meaning” overture of kindness or attention.** Even if you have never personally been sexually abused or assaulted, you may have experienced something like this. **Any breach of trust, especially when committed by a person in a power-over dynamic is egregious and damaging.** Read the following lists and see whether you have been in a situation like this:

1. Indications of an Inappropriately Close Bond

I was a source of emotional support for the groomer.

I was immediately “best friends” with the groomer.

The groomer shared confidences with me quickly after meeting.

The groomer was deeply involved in my activities or in developing my talents.

The groomer took a lot of pride in my abilities or achievements.

I was given special privileges or gifts by the groomer.

The groomer told me in confidence that I was the favorite, most talented, or most lovable child/student/employee/wanted as a spouse too soon in the relationship.

The groomer thought I was better company than other people their age or at their level of authority.

I sometimes felt guilty when I spent time away from the groomer.

I got the impression that the groomer did not want me to date, marry or move away from home.

I idolized this person in authority.

¹ Patricia Love, *The Emotional Incest Syndrome: What To Do When A Parent’s Love Rules Your Life*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 25, 26

Any potential boyfriend or girlfriend of mine was never “good enough” for the groomer.
The groomer seemed overly aware of my sexuality.
The groomer made inappropriate sexual remarks or violated my privacy.

2. Indication of the *Groomer’s Unmet Needs*

The groomer was separated, divorced, or widowed or didn’t get along very well with other adults.

The groomer was often lonely, angry, or depressed.

The groomer did not have a lot of friends.

The groomer had a problem with drinking or drugs, or addictions to other behaviors such as work, spending, or pornography.

The groomer thought the other adults cared too much about rules.

I felt I had to hold back my own needs to avoid “hurting” the feelings of the groomer.

The groomer turned to me for comfort or advice.

The groomer seemed to rely on me more than on other people, who would have been more appropriate to handle their needs and problems.

I felt responsible for the groomer’s happiness.

The groomer disagreed with and/or interrupted my long-established relationships.

3. Indication of the *Groomer’s Neglect or Abuse*

My needs were often ignored or neglected by the groomer.

There was a great deal of conflict between me and the groomer.

I was called hurtful names by the groomer.

The groomer had unrealistic expectations of me.

The groomer was very critical of my achievements or how I looked.

The groomer insisted on secrecy around our relationship, claiming that it was too special to tell anyone about.

I sometimes wanted to hide from the groomer or had fantasies of running away.

It was often a relief to get away from the groomer.

I felt invaded by the groomer.

I sometimes felt I added to the groomer’s unhappiness.¹

Notice what fits your experience as a survivor of grooming. Understand that the solidarity that groomers try to create is only a pretense to control you.

¹ Patricia Love, *The Emotional Incest Syndrome: What To Do When A Parent’s Love Rules Your Life*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 25, 26