

*Summary by Lynn Ryan, Title IX Compliance Officer
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Keenan Safe Schools Training entitled “Boundary Invasion” (<https://abuse-keenan.safeschools.com/training/player/DBEA46F6-9DC8-11E9-908F-86AC2E253C89/808D2412-C830-11E9-A46F-53B3FC57D02C>) in relevant part, states:

There is not one single profile of a person who is involved in predatory behavior. Still there are some signs you may observe. Experts divide adults who prey on children into two categories: grabbers and groomers.

- Grabbers assault a child with little or no warning....
- Groomers...most sexual misconduct follows a period of sexual grooming – a process during which an adult predator gradually wins the trust of a targeted child through a series of escalating behaviors...a simple boundary invasion may progress into an inappropriate boundary invasion, and then to sexual grooming.

In order to prevent sexual grooming, “the key to protecting students...is stopping inappropriate boundary invasions before they escalate.” This is often difficult because it is often subtle and the grooming process can take weeks or months.

Even if a student is not offended by the inappropriate actions or comments of a staff member, note that minors cannot give consent to inappropriate boundary invasions, so the staff member is acting inappropriately regardless.

Inappropriate boundary invasions include, but are not limited to, invasions of personal space or personal life through:

- an “undue interest” in a student via a “special relationship”
- giving gifts or money (not for educational reasons)
- engaging in peer-like behavior
- being overly touchy with students
- favoring certain students by giving special privileges
- inviting students to the classroom at non-class times
- getting the student out of class repeatedly to visit
- talking to the student about problems that would normally not be discussed with adults
- telling students secrets or having secrets with them
- talking about the student’s personal problems to the extent the adult becomes a confidant when it is not the adult’s job to do so
- allowing the student to get away with inappropriate behavior
- being alone with the student behind closed doors
- taking students on outings away from protective adults
- giving rides to students in the teacher’s personal vehicle without administrative approval
- initiating or extending contact with students beyond the school day for personal purposes
- using email, text-messaging, or websites to discuss personal topics or interests with students
- invading the student’s privacy (i.e....walking in on the child in the bathroom or locker-room, asking about bra sizes or sexual experiences, etc.)
- going to the student’s home for non-educational purposes
- taking the student on personal outings, even with the parents’ permission

- inviting students to the teacher’s home without proper chaperones
- telling sexual jokes to students
- engaging in talk containing sexual innuendo or banter with students
- talking about sexual topics that are not related to curriculum
- showing pornography to the student
- hugging, kissing, or other physical contact with a student

Boundary invasion and sexual grooming are not the same thing. An inappropriate boundary invasion may be an innocent lapse of judgement...and have no sexual misconduct in mind; however, inappropriate boundary invasions are **frequently** a sign of an adult who is sexually grooming a targeted student. It is important to confront even “innocent” boundary invasions in order to stop them.

Sexual grooming is a process. Typically, the predator identifies a vulnerable student as a target. The adult then employs a series of increasingly invasive boundary invasion behaviors. The student becomes accustomed to the behavior – and may even welcome it – until the student believes they have established a “special relationship” with the adult. However, the adult-student relationship is not a relationship of peers. The adult still maintains power over the student.

Dr. Carla van Dam identified sexual grooming as a five-step process:

1. Identifying a vulnerable child – often, the child lacks self-esteem or self-confidence
2. Engaging the child in peer-like involvement
3. Desensitizing the child to touch – such as tickling, wrestling or rough-housing
4. Isolating the child – by making them promise to keep secrets.
5. Making the child feel responsible – suggesting that the child is responsible for the nature of the relationship.

By using an escalating pattern of inappropriate boundary invasions, the predator grooms the targeted child.

Students in sports programs and special education are less likely to report incidents.