

**A CHILD IS VULNERABLE BECAUSE:**

- She/he likes people, craves attention, affection, kindness and gifts
- She/he is still developing socially and emotionally, and therefore can be easily confused, controlled and coerced
- She/he has been taught to respect and obey adults
- She/he does not have a developed understanding of sexuality
- She/he may not interpret or understand an adult's intent
- If she/he is an adolescent, vulnerability increases as they are inexperienced, curious, rebellious and easily aroused.

**IN THE GROOMING PROCESS THE OFFENDER:**

- Manipulates the child into becoming a cooperating participant who is unlikely to report the abuse and repeatedly returns to the offender
- Begins by establishing trust with adults around the child
- Begins by establishing a friendship/mentorship and gaining the child's trust
- Moves to testing the child's boundaries. Moves from non-sexual touching to "accidental" sexual touching. This usually occurs during play, so the child may not identify it as purposeful, inappropriate touching. Tests to see if the child tells anyone
- Confuses the child into feeling as if she/he is equally responsible for the contact
- Creates an emotional dependency on the offender
- Discourages and prevents the child from telling anyone, employing a variety of means to ensure silence
- Makes the child feel obligated to the offender

**DISCLOSURES ARE DIFFICULT BECAUSE:**

- Outsiders hesitate to interfere with the family unit
- There is widespread denial, minimization and even romanticizing of the harmful effects
- The incest victim often carries a burden of personal shame and self-blame about the experience
- Disclosure will cause the victim to be treated as "damaged", sometimes leading to blaming and punishment of the victim
- Male victims fear being shamed as weak or not masculine
- Same sex incest has added dimension of cultural homophobia
- If any of the experience felt pleasurable it may cause more confusion
- The child victim struggles with conflict of loyalty toward the perpetrator and fears the consequences of telling