



**Youth Discussions: Mentors & Trusted Adults: Identifying Red Flags  
with Mike Johnson  
Joshua Center Video Transcript**

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Hi, everyone, today I'm joined by Mike Johnson, a former lead detective and child abuse investigator. Michael was also the first youth protection director for the Boy Scouts of America, and is on the advisory board here at Joshua Center. Thank you so much, Michael for speaking with me today.

I wanted to start this conversation off by talking about mentors and trusted adults: who these people are and why they are important. Mentors plays such a critical role in youth development. Mentors often guide us to make critical decisions, influence our behaviors, and can play a role in how we perceive ourselves. Developmentally, a mentor can be a bridge between childhood and the larger social world that the young person moves into with increasing age and independence. Ideally, these mentors are trusted adults, you can choose and identify in your own life, where there's depth of relationship which is beyond a typical youth adult relationship. They can be a parent, teacher, counselor, therapist, religious leader, or other adults. This person may be a confidant. They may be someone you trust with very private information, like abuse you may be experiencing, or the abuse and dangerous behavior of a peer. They may even be the person you talk to if another adult in your life is abusing their power or role. I think it's important to note that a mentor may value serving as a guide and teacher. But the mentor relationship is one in which the purpose, boundaries, and level of attachment is directed towards the best interest of the youth, not the adult. A groomer who is interested in something other than being a mentor acts very similarly to a person who wants to be a mentor. It is important in protecting yourself from a groomer that you recognize when a person's behavior has stopped being about being a mentor and is moving towards something else. A good way to be conscious of this is to be able to identify warning signs early. Warning signs or red flags that the person is moving away from being a mentor. Michael Johnson has developed a list of red flags or warning signs that we should all be conscious of. Thank you.

Thank you, Celeste. You know, this is a very important conversation. It's important for a number of things because just as Celeste talked about it, mentors and trusted adults and other adults in your life are in different facets of your life, and it's sometimes very difficult to differentiate when what they're saying or doing is appropriate or wrong. We've developed a list of things we refer to them as red flag behaviors. They run very closely to grooming behaviors, and you've learned a lot about grooming already.

One of the key issues is an individual who gives you really expensive gifts. Usually they're giving you this gift in anticipation of some inappropriate behavior or conduct, or because they've done or said something already, and they're trying to buy your silence.

Another big area obviously, with so much sexting and other things that are going on, is discussions about or showing pornography. In my role as a child abuse detective, that is a very common ploy by predators and child molesters is to engage youth in looking at pornographic materials, magazines, videos and what have you. Obviously, the youth feels like they should keep that secret and quiet in it's a taboo type of issue and topic. But really for the groomer, it serves as violating your boundaries, introducing you to a topic that they are going to be following up on later, which is something that we need to watch out for. Right along with that is allowing you what I refer to as taboo access to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, vaping products, those type of things to represent themselves as being cool with you.

And obviously, anytime, any adult or anyone asked you for nude pictures of yourself or of your friends and sharing that information. Any individual that encourages you to violate your home rules, your parents' rules surrounding like sneaking out of the house, or giving access to -- certain items, passwords or what have you, is a major red flag. Adults know that's inappropriate. And that's something you should look out for also.

Sexual remarks. And they could be to correct that a female or male, especially about your your, your development, your body. You know, obviously, hey, you look great today, you look fantastic, whatever, that's fine. But when it has a sexual overtone, and it is very specific, it's something that kind of makes you, and it's very important to be in touch with your instincts that makes you say, you know, something's not quite right there. That's the type of thing that crosses the line and requires that you might want to speak with your true trusted adult or mentor about.

Seeks to have deeply personal relationships with you, about, you know, it's one thing to share with a mentor that you're having relationship problems or what have you. But when they want to talk about sexual activity, when they want to talk about any type of drug usage or anything that's elicit, and it seems like they're more interested in the activity than what's appropriate for you or not. And again, the nature of boundaries is it's not a clear dividing line, it's a area of what's appropriate over here, and what's not so appropriate over there. And if they want to have deeply personal relationship, relationships and discussions with you. I'll give you an example, we had a I had a case involving a guy who literally told a 12-13 year old, all about his divorce and his sexual relations with his wife. And, and I mean a lot of detail about what's going on. And I think we'd all agree that is, although you want to be adult like and take a lot of pride that this adult is so interested in me that they're respecting me and having this conversation. But really, and truly, that's very, very inappropriate between a mentor, a trusted adult, an adult, and a youth, regardless of the age.

Encourages you to keep secrets, that's a big one. More often with younger youth. But obviously, it's a humongous issue for older, for older youth and for you also, we'll talk a little bit more about that and in a minute. Threatens you with your mistakes. The very nature of all of us growing up as we are education, and job is you're gonna make mistakes. Some of those mistakes may be very embarrassing, they may involve sexual activity, they may involve drugs, they may -- and whenever anybody wants to exploit you, or extort you with your mistakes, to have some type of leverage against you. That is a major red flag. That's just the beginning of how this individual is going to use things against you later. Remember, early on, we talked about the sexting potentially nude pictures, that's the type of thing that I'm talking about. And even though you feel

like you have participated in this, there is always a way out, trust me, we as appropriate adults know that you're going to make some mistakes, and there are certain people that are going to want to manipulate you. So be on the guard of that for yourself, as well as your friends and colleagues.

Showing you unnecessary physical affection. Now this is a tricky one. A very important area is uncomfortable touches, especially to private parts. Everybody knows that family who when you go over to their house has lots of hugs, and even kisses on the cheeks and, and on the lips. And today, we know that that's not necessarily welcome by everybody. And all, I say all, most adults should know and understand that also. Truth of the matter is, you may have to enforce those boundaries of yourself, yourself. Your parents and other adults in and around, you may not enforce those things. And again, one of the key parts beyond the hugging and that is anybody who brushes their hand across any part of your body that you know is inappropriate. Our tendency is to give them the benefit of the doubt and say that was an accident. The vast majority of the time and trust me when I tell you it is not an accident. Adults know where their hands and body parts are in reference to your body. And it may be something that's a trend, transgression, and it's something you should speak about. Or if you're uncomfortable confronting them, talk to somebody else about it. Especially if this affection occurs. Obviously we expected to happen in private, but sometimes these things can happen in public and you're thinking -- how can it be a transgression if it's occurring in public? Part of grooming is a desensitization of your sense of boundaries. And what better way to do that than to do it in public? Think of the inappropriate person who wants to wrestle, an adult wants to wrestle all time with a much younger youth and our hands are in and around private areas, and what have you. And again, they're doing some of these activities in public, just to lower that youth's sense of boundaries. Again, some of these areas are kind of touchy to talk about. But it's important to enforce your sense of what's appropriate with your body.

Seeks or encourages you or others to be alone with them. You know, I think it is pretty obvious nowadays, especially as it -- relates to youths, that there ought to be some sense of what we refer to as 2 deep leadership, or to adults around the youth at all times. But I'm talking specifically about that adult who's working to get you in a private area. And many times youth that I've talked to that have had bad things happen to them, tell me that they kind of had instincts or the hair on their neck kind of told them something wasn't right. I'm here to give you permission that anytime your instincts say to you, something's not right, you should listen to them, and honor them. There's a whole body of research and study on that. And just trust me, take it from Detective Mike that, in sharing that with you.

That individual that you know who excessively calls and chats and texts and wants to interact with you on games, over and over and over and over again. And especially when they begin the process. Keep in mind, it's a grooming process of trying to limit your interactions with not only your parents and other adults, but even with your friends. They're trying to work you into a space, where it's just you and them. That has a very, very strong sense of grooming and manipulation of you in your situation. You friends and you bystanders -- out there, you need to be aware of this with your friends and, and other youth, and even even adults, that these behaviors because for the person that's in it, it's a slow process. And they may not be real clear noticing it. But you as somebody who is a friend of theirs may notice these very clear attempts

at controlling that individual's spectrum of friends. Any real friend is not going to necessarily have a problem with you having other friends, especially friends who care about you.

And here's the biggie uses your past experiences or mistakes, to guilt you into silence or worse into some type of behavior. You will make mistakes, you will do some things that you wish you had never done. Unfortunately, this very inappropriate person, maybe an adult, maybe another youth, is going to use that, again, we talked about extortion, or to manipulate you to engage in some other behavior. Whatever you, whatever you have done, can be forgiven, can be understood and can be worked on to be undone. No one, regardless of what has occurred in the past, has continued leverage on you over and over again. Trust me when I tell you that and for some of you out there that may have had those experiences. Trust me, there's an adult out there like me, like Celeste, like others that will know and understand and help you. Hey, Celeste, thank you very much. This was great and I feel really, really good about having this opportunity to talk about what I think are some incredibly, very important things.

Thank you so much, Mike for your contribution. We really appreciate it.

Thank you so much, everyone for joining us today. I hope that you enjoyed the insight that Mike Johnson was able to share with us from that video and I really look forward to having a discussion today where we can unpack a lot of the nuances of grooming, talk about these red flags. Talk about ways in which we can really be effective bystanders when we witness grooming as well. So thank you so much, and we hope that this is a safe space where everyone feels comfortable sharing what is on their mind after watching that video. And I think that this will be a really great resource for other youths and adults.

The first question we have for you guys today is have you previously encountered the concept of grooming? If so, or if not, did Celeste and Mike present anything new to you about grooming, what stands out to you, as the most important point that the two of them made in the mini lecture?

Something that I noticed first was trying to, in my mind, and from my personal experiences, like separate, or like, what is the first sign of an inappropriate relationship between an adult and the minor? Or just someone who has -- just an adult in general, and even if it's a person who's technically, I'm not a minor anymore, but someone who's clearly younger, and is much more vulnerable. And I was thinking about how I think of something that Mike said that when the relationship like the -- confidentiality that shared, the things that the either the minors confiding in, is reciprocated by the adults, so like when they're using the minor, the younger person as a confidant, and maybe sharing personal experiences, stories that don't have anything to do with the advice that they're giving, like, they're seeking a similar type of advice or validation. And then I was thinking about that in my own my own personal experiences, and also sort of reflection on like, what grooming really means, and sometimes in some senses, trying to separate if it if it always has a connotation with sexual assault and with actual, like physical touch, or if it can just be completely emotional as well. And still be grooming, I'm trying to just sort of process in my own mind about like, what I associate with grooming and I think what Mike said, really resonated with me.



Yeah, I agree with that. And I think that the groomer, kind of confiding in the younger person kind of makes them feel like they're, they're equal and kind of, there's that trust and establishing an inappropriate relationship where the minor thinks that they're equals. And if that makes sense, I think that that can be inappropriate and cause a lot of harm in the relationship.

We tend to make excuses for people or like, give them the benefit of the doubt, instead of realizing that people have control over their actions. And usually the adults know what they're doing in a position of power. And so if we're always thinking, well, maybe they didn't mean it this way. But I think it's good to be cautious about the actions of the adult, rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt over and over again.

I think also, this could explain some, I mean, as much as people have emotional things where maybe they went through a divorce, or you talking about how they're opening up about death or divorce towards a child, or minor, it feels like that could also be explained why some adults don't as much as they want to keep it inside, and not really talk about it, the benefit of the doubt, like you just said, where it's like, oh, they've been going through hard times right now, this is okay, that they're opening up to someone like this. And I think that's just the point where we need to recognize that, that doesn't matter. There's other outlets for non minors, not just not talking to minors about that, because that can get really personal. And as Mike talked about, not very appropriate. So I mean, there's other ways through adults and I think we need to as much as we want to get minors aware of how this is gonna happen. I feel like we also need to be able to get adults that who are groomers get make them aware that there's other ways, not through minors.

Similar to what Michaela was saying earlier, and very brief note about how, in general when people are making excuses, we're really I think humans are really good at prioritizing the good stuff and ignoring the bad and so I think that is the foundation for a lot of the excuses we make are like this moment where I really trusted this person and they were super kind and and whatever to them and then ignoring the the other moments that could be deemed as grooming or sexual assault and then making excuses for them, so.

Kind of like bouncing off that something that I picked up from the video that I thought was like super important is to really like be in touch with your instincts and be able to like honor them and like understand when a situation is not necessarily healthy.

Yeah, adding on to that. I think a lot of people think that you can spot grooming a mile away, and it's really obvious, but all the signs that might show this was like they're really subtle and they can happen, like over a long period of time and it's really hard to actually spot them.

One thing that Mike said that caught my attention was he said that groomers' techniques start with a desensitization of boundaries, and I think that that is like really important when teaching kids about, like the signs of grooming and also like implementing those like strong boundaries. So like that kids have, and minors have a good foundation of knowledge to recognize the signs and recognize their own boundaries and what they're comfortable with.

What is difficult from distinguishing a mentor mentee relationship from grooming?



Similar to what I said before, I think it's also the child, the minor who needs an outlet as well. And I think someone made this point as well. But the fact that both people need outlets because of an incident that's happened earlier. One, it's an inappropriate relationship if it stretches too far, but I liked -- Like you said, there's a cert-- or like Mike said, there's a certain point where it gets too far. And both people need someone in their life to to bring their spirits back up to help them get through something. And they the minor needs to reconnect, recognize that there's other ways through rather than just like a friend, a friend's parent or - you could even say, an uncle or an aunt or someone. Um, but like, there's other ways, maybe through your school or therapist or something. But I think the signs is really important, because sometimes it can just feel like a really personal relationship where both people are getting positives out of it. I'm kind of just talking through it, I guess.

Kind of what Owen mentioned, but I think in the case of family members and family dynamics, I think it can be difficult sometimes to like, just differentiate the signs between grooming, and like a positive mentor in someone's life.

I think another element to this can be that the minor has never had a healthy mentor relationship. So they might not even realize that they're being groomed, because they don't know what a healthy relationship looks like. So in that case, it would just be important for them to know, the warning signs so that they could think, okay, this is not a healthy or normal relationship.

Yeah, this is very similar to the, to the previous point that was just brought up. But I feel like there's very little conversation in our culture about what grooming looks like and what inappropriate relationships look like. So when you're a young and vulnerable kid who is seeking validation from somebody, which I know that in general validation from adults, like feels really good as a kid. So I think when you're seeking that validation, and there's very little conversation around it, no exposure to what is appropriate and what's inappropriate, it's hard to distinguish. And I think also like, there are a lot of examples in the media that I would consider grooming that aren't clearly represented as grooming like, I mean, Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter, I think in a lot of ways is grooming and relationships, like those that are never talked about as inappropriate. I think that's another big thing is, is the lack of discussion in the media like beyond our community.

It's been so normalized now to, like, get creepy DMs or like this kind of stuff from random people as well. And we kind of overlook that and don't really realize when it goes too far. And I just know that this happens a lot to other people. And like it's just so normalized, that people don't see the issue with it at some point and to see it as something that happens to every teenager.

I also think that like nowadays, everyone just wants a friend. And a lot of people don't necessarily understand what a healthy stable relationship looks like and is. And so it can be difficult for people to realize these red flags and like, not neglect the problems that are in a relationship.

I completely agree with all of your points. And I think one thing that I learned when I was talking to Mike and having these discussions and looking at research that's been done on grooming is

the idea that grooming -- part of grooming is the moment when the needs of the adult are being prioritized over the needs of the youth. And so kind of what we've been talking about, about this idea that adults have needs as well. Some of those needs when they're being fulfilled by youth is completely inappropriate, where it would be where it would be appropriate if they were having those needs fulfilled by an adult, peer or friend. And I think that that's an important distinction to make is that these groomers are preying on the fact that yeah, youth have needs as well and that youth might have certain aspects of their life that are not being fulfilled by other aspects. But I would definitely say like Mike has highlighted throughout the mini lecture, it is very intentional, especially aspects of touching that he spoke about. Like those are very intentional actions used to kind of subjugate youth and put them in a position where they feel like they do not have control. And so I think it's an important distinction of like, yes, adults may have needs that they need fulfilled. But they, I think, absolutely know, when they're being fulfilled by youth that it is inappropriate. I don't think that any groomer is wondering whether or not what they're doing is appropriate or not, I think, most of the time, it's very clear that the adult does know that it's inappropriate.

In a mentor mentee relationship, there's obviously a level of dependency. But in grooming, that kind of shifts to the idea of total dependency on each other from the child and the adult. And I think when regarding that, it's hard for the child to actually like understand that they shouldn't be like, they shouldn't be completely dependent on this one person for everything in their life. And probably why it's so important for each of these people to have an outlet so that they're not completely dependent on each other and don't need to rely on each other for everything.

Next question we have is what are the pressures placed on youth that can sometimes silence them, and how do these make it difficult for the person being groomed to stop it?

I think a big thing is fearing how the groomer is going to react, because they're already in a position where they have power over you. And they're kind of more powerful than you, they could ruin your reputation a lot more easily than if they were your age. So I think a lot of it is just fear based or not knowing who to come forward to. Because a lot of people especially if the groomers well connected in the community, they might have like a lot of friends who will take their side and not really believe what you're coming forward with.

Something that's pretty common with survivors of sexual assault is kind of desensitizing themselves to the abuse that they've faced over the years. And sometimes they might not realize or want to admit to themselves that they were a victim to this kind of behavior and abuse until like much later in life. And sometimes, then it might be like too late to really hold the predator accountable. But I think that the desensitization, and like fear can definitely hold a survivor back from sharing their story.

Yeah, I agree. I also think another thing is, like, just the fear that you're overreacting or you're reading into things like you think you're analyzing everything so differently than like, what is actually happening. So you kind of just like, doubt, what you're feeling and like, what you're thinking is going on. And then also the fear of ruining their lives by like coming forward with these accusations, when you might think maybe they're not even true. So even though you're actually experiencing that, just the fear of not being validated for your experience.

I think especially in our day and age, the belief in the child or believing the child is this point's already been made, but I just want to reiterate it saying that the child is probably not going to be bullied, especially in our day and age, with so much systemic racism, that we're I mean, that I think a lot of people are trying to fix. I think our whole country is trying to fix, of course there's still people who believe -- systemic racism is okay, which is not okay. But I think just the belief system, if if a non white person were to come to a white policeman, and and talk and try to outlet and tell this person what's happening, if they only have one chance at it or something, because all after that, the, say the groomer comes along as like, she's just been acting really weird as of late, she's lying. The white man is most likely going to be believed and, and the white policeman is also not going to believe or the policemen may not believe them, just because of what's happening outside of sexual assault is is affecting sexual assault, we have to focus and, and put racism aside, put beliefs aside and we have to fix the big problem of grooming and sexual assault. And so I just wanted to make the point that if someone were if someone of another race were to come up to a white man, or if a white man were to just say, like, hey, she's been weird, or they've been weird as of late, they just are lying because they are getting their way or something, they're having a tough time we're getting help for her, or them or he or anyone really, I think that's also something we need to recognize is, is something like systemic racism and not being believed, is still going to be prevalent in sexual assault.

I think like additionally, today, especially like social media really depicts like youth as like weak, if they've experienced grooming, and that they should be like, stand up for themselves, which is like completely untrue. And I also think it's really difficult to like, come out and use your voice as a youth after you've already feel like feel violated. And even like telling adults, I don't think they necessarily won't always validate youth's issues. Because like, a lot of the time, they don't believe that we're telling the truth.

Adding on to that, I think one big reason why many survivors of sexual assault don't come forward is because of -- like diminishing of self esteem. And with grooming that's especially prevalent, because when you have been violated by a mentor, right, you trusted in, an adult that you trusted, it's hard to come forward and go to another adult who you think you might trust, but you can't really, because you've kind of broken that relationship between a child and an adult. And it's really hard to actually believe that somebody might care for you again, after you've been in that situation.

I also wanted to add a point that I think Mike made, that I thought was very interesting is this idea that when we think about a lot of sexual abuse, we have preconceived ideas about who is perpetrating the abuse. And we also, especially because we grow up with so much technology, we think that a lot of abuse happens because of people that people are meeting on the internet, right, we've talked about DMs and dating apps, and how there's a lot of opportunity for people to exploit that. I also think though, a lot of grooming happens by people who are a strong force in your community. And I think that that's a factor that makes it really difficult for youth to then come forward about is because it isn't necessarily always someone that someone meets on the internet, it can be a religious leader at your church, it can be a beloved teacher, or coach or person within your community that I think does tend to make it very difficult as well, because it's not necessarily just that the youth will not be bullied because they are young, but also because



other people have interacted with this adult in many other instances, and they themselves have not experienced and that person being abusive. And so they feel as though they have this relationship that justifies them not validating these experiences.

Especially since so much abuse does happen by someone that you know, so many people don't know the signs of grooming and like don't know all these red flags that Mike was talking about. So it's very easy to brush it off and be like, oh, they're just being friendly. Oh, it was an accident. And I think that's what everyone has talked about so far about like gaslighting yourself basically, and other people doing as well. But I think especially with someone in your community, if you try to talk to a parent about it, it can often be brushed off. And I think another point to make is that I feel like that there can be a lot of shame associated with it, especially if you're not sure if they're especially if there's not cold, hard evidence. I think a lot of people feel shameful about themselves for thinking that it's their fault and things like that. And I think that's something that the media as well does a really bad job of showing and like, make making people think that it's their fault, but it's definitely not.

I think a lot of people make the mistake and ask, why didn't they come out earlier? And I think that this is another reason why we have to be talking about this is because of the reasons that we just talked about how there may still be something in it for them, or they feel like the other the groomer has more power and therefore they won't be believed, and other reasons, like we have gone over. But I think that we need to stop making the assumption of, oh, they could have just come out earlier. Like why are they coming out now and the prime moment of this person's political run, like why are they coming out now, basically, and I think we need to start making the assumption that they're just waiting for the moment to ruin this person's life. I think we just need to realize that they couldn't until this point, and they weren't comfortable until this point.

I was just going to share a quick thing that I feel like once a codependent relationship has been established and confidential things are shared, a youth may worry that parts of their past or experiences are too scary or vulnerable to share to anyone else. So through like manipulation from the adult, they may feel as though they'd be sacrificing the positive aspects of the relationship by outing that adult or the groomer, which can be scary. And then also the shame that's perpetuated, I think, by our culture, and especially, the generation above us. I know that there are a lot of instances of adult women who survived sexual assault who survived grooming that almost shame younger girls specifically for coming out because they're like, we survived this, like we, we dealt with this ourselves. And we're doing great. There's I think there's there's a lot of shame, and sort of like internalized misogyny, that is associated, I think, with the with the older generation of women and men, but specifically women, about Me Too movement and other and other younger women who's spoken out about sexual assault experiences and grooming.

I think in addition to the internalized misogyny, I think there's a whole toxic masculinity culture, about how so much grooming does happen to men. But so many people don't think that and I feel like that's definitely not like respected and given as much airtime as it should. And I think that that's definitely brushed off as well about men being strong and men. This is not happening to men. It's not just women. And I totally agree with what you were just saying, but I think it's definitely like a mix of both. And it's like, oh, I was fine. I never came forward. Why are you

doing this now? I think exactly what was said before this as well. Just that like, maybe they didn't to, they didn't feel it was necessary. It's not that they were saving it up for the perfect time they were saving, not even saving it. They're just waiting until they felt that they had the power to do so.

How can boundaries be communicated with mentors? How can mentors communicate boundaries with mentees or youth? And how can boundaries be set and decided in an appropriate and timely way?

I think the first thing that comes to mind, for me is part of having a mentor, mentor and having something someone in their life is that relationship developing just over time, and I feel like maybe as much as you, you have to set boundaries, and you have to figure that out. I feel like there's something that's not really planned out. And I feel like with a lot of mentors, and a lot of people that a lot of the people that other people look up to, it's a lot of the just over time, they become more -- more and more trusting in each other, rather than being like, okay, you're my mentor, let's set boundaries, basically. And I think that, um, I think that if it's, I think if it's a good mentor and a person who respects you, I think that they will know your boundaries, as well as they will learn your boundaries, as you get to know them more. But if they're someone like a groomer, you're able to -- you'd be able to recognize that they aren't really interested in you or who you are, as much as they may make it seem, but they aren't really paying attention. If you if the victim is ever, like, hey like stop or something or trying to express how they're feeling. And he's not really respecting it, I think that's definitely a sign that you can tell. And I think that I just want to make the point as -- there may not be clear set boundaries, but there, I think if someone's an actual mentor, they are going to know what your boundaries are, if they truly respect you and know you as get to know you as you get to know them.

I think also just setting boundaries before things happen, because it's harder to set them after the fact and say, like, yeah, that happened once but it's not going to happen again. Because I feel like they can use that and guilt and manipulate you into making it happen again. So if there's a red flag and they try to get you alone, to setting the boundary before inappropriate behavior can happen, that can be really important.

I'm just thinking about the the healthy relationships with adults that I've had versus the inappropriate relationship that I've had with an adult in my past experience and comparing the differences between the two. Because I go to a school where it's really encouraged to be friends with your teachers and be friends with your adults. And there are a lot of adults on my my school's campus that I consider trusted adults. And I think the biggest difference is that I am in control of the conversation when I'm with my trusted adults were it's always I'm leading the discussion. I'm coming to them, they're not coming to me. I am -- I feel like I'm in control and when I hear things about their personal life, it's because I ask them or they're they're sharing things that I've asked because they're giving me advice. And it's part of like a larger answer that is to my benefit. Whereas like the inappropriate relationship that I've been in, wasn't like that it was it was, the other person came to me just as much as I came to them, etc. And so I think it goes back to a point we brought up earlier that was just that it's very clear in healthy relationships with adults that you are the younger person and you are the more vulnerable. And it's very clear between the both of you, that the other person has much more life experience and

much more authority and social power. And just in recognizing that the youth is learning and is still a youth and is still needing the support from the adult, rather than the other way around.

Yeah, I think adding on to that. It's exactly what Mike was talking about. He was like, you will make mistakes. And I think some of the mistakes that he was talking about are definitely more forgivable, but for an adult, to make any type of mistakes on these fronts, it's yes, it sometimes may still be a mistake. But sometimes those are not mistakes that should be overlooked. And what everyone was talking about, a lot of this is done intentionally. So I think that having a sense that everyone does make some mistakes, and everyone's human, but I think being able to have the boundaries, even if yourself even if you don't share them, but having the boundaries of like, okay, this is no longer a mistake that I'm going to allow.

What are different approaches that you think would be appropriate to intervene in an unhealthy relationship?

So I think a lot of systems are creating ways that they can protect youth. So for example, a lot of mentor mentee programs have rules in place where there has to be more than one adult if they are with a youth. And so for example, Boy Scouts of America, who Mike was a detective for supporting youth from Boy Scouts, he spoke about the fact that now Boy Scouts has policy in place where an adult cannot be alone with the youth. And I think that as these systems become increasingly available in all situations in which youth and adults are working together, I think that we will also all be really conscious about personal ways in which we can ensure that everyone involved is comfortable, especially as we go from youth to adults. And so I think part of it is, you know, there are mentor mentee red flags. But as was previously mentioned, there are also amazing relationships between mentors and mentees. And a mentor might actually be someone that a youth can go to to say, you know, I don't know if this was inappropriate or not, it made me somewhat uncomfortable, can you maybe accompany me the next time that I have to interact with this adult, if this is an adult that you're going to have to interact with multiple times? I think that that will end up being obviously beneficial to the youth. And that's not placing the burden on the youth. But so much of what prevention really looks like and I think that that's valuable, to be conscious of those things going into these mentor mentee relationships.

I feel like if it's someone that you go to see or someone that comes to see you, you if you just stay at school, so you have an extra club, I know this sounds really like, Oh, it's just easy way to slip right by this person. I think that, um, I think that one way that you could kind of disrupt it is kind of just to make, make the other person feel like you're unhappy. And I think that that's one that could be one way to do it. Because as a mentor you when you're with a mentor, you may feel really happy and excited to see them. But maybe little clues like I'm starting to become unhappy or just showing, not being very excited or happy to see that person anymore kind of gives the person the clue that like, oh, they're figuring it out or something I don't really know. But I think just trying to show that person that you're unhappy is one is one way you can try to slowly but disrupt the relationship.

Youth protection policies for many organizations require two youth and one adult so they do not allow for one on one relationships between a youth and an adult. What are your thoughts on these policies? Do you feel like they protect youth or that they inhibit their ability to make these

relationships with mentors? In addition to the question, I asked if you guys would be willing to consider this and share any thoughts positive or negative you have on this policy?

Well, I think what Jon brought up in the chat and what Celeste were talking -- was talking earlier about, are very similar. I think that this is a way of like, I think this is the way -- is a positive direction for youth protection. And I think that having, not being able to have like those one on one relationships where those power dynamics can kind of manifest, and those situations can happen, I think that is a way to help the youth feel not as vulnerable.

Yeah, I agree. I also think it allows for more people to like, witness like signs, and the actions of the adult and youth and be able to, like, have an outside perspective and see what is going on and maybe pick up on things that people and like the one on one relationship wouldn't have been able to pick up on as well. And then like, bring in more trusted adults into it and like, just like, it allows for people to check in on one another and like, make sure that everything is going smoothly.

I feel like this policy could still allow for healthy mentor mentee relationships, because we've talked about how those are still possible and still really valuable in a youth's development. So just having another youth there could prevent grooming from occurring, but still allow for a healthy relationship.

I think also with the two youth, I think that it's important that the other youth is someone you can trust. Someone who is around you, is your peer, who is someone you can trust someone you're friends with. Because if you're just stuck there in a room with someone you don't really like want to open up with and then a person you want to be your mentor, it's not going to work. And so I think it's important that whenever these times are set up, it's set up with people so they can talk about things together and feel comfortable around each other as the youth just to make sure that the healthy mentor relationships still can still be exceeded.

So Jon, put something in the chat that I think is really important because we talk about the value of having another youth in the room. But that is only valuable if the youth is able to intervene and is able to practice bystander intervention. And so what suggestions do you have about intervening in the process once it is started from a bystander perspective. So for example, if you recognize that a teammate or a classmate or someone in another aspect of your community might have an inappropriate relationship with an adult, how would you suggest going about that?

I feel like getting a third party involved maybe going to your own trusted mentor can be beneficial because they can kind of look at it from an outsider perspective. And if you really trust them, you know that they're going to get your friend help. So I think that could be a good course of action.

I think just checking in with the youth that you're worried about. And asking them like what they appreciate about the relationship like getting a perspective of like, of the relationship from the youth from the youth point of view and then sort of evaluating for yourself like what that person is saying if that sounds healthy to you if that sounds like something you've been a part of, if that

sounds like just sort of comparing it to your own life and your relationship similar to what has already been said. But then just checking in with that youth continuously while also taking action to either inform a third party adult or someone that knows the adult that is grooming the youth I think that could be also be important as well. But but making sure that you're not making sure you're continuously checking in with the person that may be experiencing grooming.

Kind of adding on to that point, I think there can also be a difficulty sometimes with approaching a peer or a youth member about like a potential grooming with the minor because they might get like nervous or feel kind of cornered or confronted because they like haven't seen those signs or they were or like initially kind of confused with like the changes in the mentor mentee relationship. So I think that there could be some pros but also some cons with confronting a peer.

What is an effective way that this information can be taught in schools? And also do you have any other main takeaways or final questions?

I think just making sure there's representation for who is teaching, about grooming about sexual assault, making sure it's, it's not a particular demographic. Usually people who have power and usually people who are people who haven't experienced sexual assault themselves. So I think it's really important to learn from people who've had personal experiences or who have been affected by it. And also like making sure there's that intersectionality and, and race and gender and class is also taken into account. Because I think there is a very specific lens in which sexual assault, rape, in general is taught in a very it's, it's, it's taught, like very explicit and very stereotypical examples. And I think making sure that, like I said, there's representation but also that the stories of sexual assault, the stories of grooming are really comprehensive, and that people who are learning about it know that it can be a huge range of different things. And there's not one type of grooming one type of sexual assault, there's really a range is, I think, really important. So making sure that it's inclusive. So it's discussions not just about heterosexual relationships, not just about a man and a woman, not just about, it can be non binary people, etc, etc. So just making sure that it's inclusive, comprehensive and, like, in depth, while also including personal experiences.

I think another way to make this information more, more accessible in schools is to start teaching kids as early as like kindergarten, even preschool sometimes, so that they can recognize their own boundaries, and recognize other people's boundaries and their like peers. So they can get comfortable with that kind of communication. And then like, as they get older, like starting to talk about grooming, and like recognizing those signs and those red flags, so that when they get into high school and young adults, that they are like, able to have those tools and recognize them and implement that into their peers as well.

Yeah, that's an amazing point. Because I think that an issue that so many schools have with their sex education programs about consent, or bystanders, or even teaching about like porn and so many different things. They're always like, oh, like, they're too young, like, they'll learn about it later, oh, their brains aren't ready. But I think it's so important. And there are so many different ways that kids can be taught as young as like kindergarten, you're not going to be





saying things the same way, you're going to tell it to a senior in high school. But I think it is very, very important to start at that young age.

Super brief, and I've already spoken, but making sure that you're also reaching audiences, like the adults or the parents, guardians of younger children. So I think it's cool that like the next generation of adults are a lot of like, becoming more socially aware millennials. And I think that's really cool, making sure you're reaching those audiences as well, and educating parents on how to teach their children about this, and educating teachers about how to teach kids this. Because I think, like everyone else has said that the education around sexual assault is really becoming more comprehensive and becoming more talked about. So just emphasizing that more, and making sure that parents know what they're saying, and know that they're actually talking about this with their kids. Because I know for me, and for a lot of my friends, like these haven't always been like normalized discussions in your home and in your house, so.

I agree. And I think the thing about teaching this kind of stuff in school, is there's so many different ways we can do it, and so many different ways that we can make it better. But I think the big problem is, is there's going to be a lot of kids at the school, who are just gonna think this class is a joke. And I'm scared for that. And I think that the fact that I even have to think that some kids will think it's a joke is horrible. But I think that's what's going to come to it for some people. And so I think just making sure that the kids know, the importance is what we need to really recognize. Because this is just, there's so much more like, like we've said and and I think the other I don't not to be a downer or anything, but I think that there's going to be so so many. I just, I feel like it's going to be something almost like people aren't going to want to have their kids being taught that. And I think I feel like I was I read something about the Utah schools district was saying that you could have your kid pulled out of Black History Month teaching. And so I feel like there could be bad things like that happening where your kid is in turn doesn't turn out to be informed. And and I think that's where we need to make sure that kids take it seriously. And kids are informed. And and not, I'm not taking it as a joke, or something that doesn't happen.

I think equally as important. We do need to educate youth about grooming and stuff like that. But I think it's also important to educate adults on how to be trusted peers and mentors for youth. Because I think it's majorly important that the youth actually have, like, they know that this happens, and they also know that there are ways that they can be protected.

The next question we have for you guys today is talking about how some people suggest that doctors and annual physical checkups should ask about sexual abuse experiences of their young patients. And this would also include checking on grooming behaviors, as well as other health risks like drugs and alcohols. So our question is, what do you think about this? And do you think that there's a way that this can be done well, or what do you think are some of the negative aspects of this?

I think the point that John brought up, would be really beneficial to youth earlier, and it's kind of a side note, but I did some volunteer work with Planned Parenthood, and we went down to the Capitol and lobbied for a bill, I forget the exact name. But the main opposition to the bill, their main point was that -- Well, basically, the bill was advocating for universal sex ed to be taught in

grades K through 12. And the opposition's main point was that they didn't want younger kids learning about sex, when actually in reality, the curriculum is more focused on talking about grooming and healthy power dynamics between adults and kids. And I think, but as it was mentioned earlier, parents still have the option to opt their kids out of that curriculum. So I think that having the doctor ability, and that mandatory check in could be really beneficial to youth.

Right, I think, as well, talking about drugs and alcohol might be okay, so I can see that you've been drinking, obviously, this is a space in which you can say that and you won't be in trouble for saying that. Where is it that you are getting access to these drugs and alcohol because as Mike pointed out, this is a really, really this is a huge red flag is adults who are giving drug and alcohol paraphernalia for, for youth. And I think that this is something to also bridge like this, that's typically where a lot of grooming can start is giving youth access to things that make youth feel as though they are more adult more mature, and that they feel as though they have the same maturity level and experience as the adult. And so and this also creates a big division between the groomer and the parents, right, because the groomer's doing something that they know the parents would be uncomfortable with. So it creates this division there as well.

I think it's also making sure that there's a trusted relationship between the doctor and the youth and making sure that the doctor is asking the question in a really like, respectful, sensitive and appropriate way, because I can imagine a scenario where a youth is really vulnerable and really scared. And a pediatrician says something very like says in a very nonchalant way that doesn't make the youth feel inclined to talk about their personal experiences, because there isn't that trust and even if you don't even know this doctor, and they're asking you that there has to be like engagement and eye contact and training from that pediatrician to really like have the qualifications and to, for it to be appropriate for them to ask them about this. So I think that is a really cool idea. But I also think that the pediatrician needs to be very well educated on what's appropriate.

To having to establish the trusting relationship, I feel like for me, in my experience, I never really trusted my doctors since I moved around so much. So I never really built up that rapport or had the same doctor for a long period of time. So I think having that change in the policy can be beneficial to some youth. I think we should also change the sex education in school. So kind of attack this issue from multiple what's the word kind of multiple techniques or multiple areas so that if people don't really trust their doctors, there's another area or another person who can help.

I think that I'm hate to play the devil's advocate here, but I am kind of wary about how effective this might be, because I feel like a lot of patients and youth don't actually have the chance to establish that kind of relationship with their doctors, especially if it's just like an annual checkup every, like every year. And also, mostly at these appointments, a parent or guardian is there. And that's kind of an uncomfortable situation to put yourself in when you're talking about such a sensitive topic with your parent in the room. So I am kind of a bit wary about how helpful this policy might be.

I'm kind of going off of what you were saying, when you talk about having a parent in the room in a doctor's appointment. I feel like in a lot of way, that's also like, for safety reasons for a lot of

people. And then you'd get the same argument coming back if a parent wasn't in the room. Because there's so much stigma now, especially with what happened with US gymnastics team about doctors being sexual predators. And looking at that, like if a parent wasn't in the room, there'd be a lot of issues happening there with sexual predators, being doctors and being people you can't trust even more. And I think while it can be uncomfortable having a parent in the room, when that when questions are asked, especially personal questions, I think that it is important that you have a figure there so it can prevent someone from taking advantage of you also, who's in a power position.

I think as well. Speaking to that point as well is this idea that obviously, mentors may be a great outlet to talk about abuse that you may be experiencing. But what we talked about earlier in this discussion about fear and being fearful of what how people will react, whether people will believe you, sometimes some of that fear may be eliminated by telling someone that is outside of your community, who may not know the person who is grooming or abusing you who may not have the same, you might not have the same fear attached to them not taking you seriously, or feeling as though their experience with the groomer has been so radically different that it's not possible that the groomer could be a groomer. And so I think that in this case, it may be beneficial for doctors to take on this role. Because sometimes an outside outlet may be more beneficial, or that the youth may be more comfortable disclosing to them. But I agree with everyone's points. And I think that those are all really incredible things that we need to take into account. And it really highlights the nuance of these issues. And it shows how difficult it is to also be a bystander to these issues and to know how to be the best resource. And hopefully these discussions will have that effect of bringing this nuance to light and have people thinking about this.

I was just gonna say a lot of times with pediatricians and especially people who are asking you like pretty private and vulnerable questions about yourself, it's, in my experience, it's always been helpful for the person to like, look like me or have similar experiences, experiences to me, even if it's superficial. So I've always been more inclined to share with women about certain experiences that I've had. And I think sometimes, just if, like, if I was asked about my grooming experience, or sexual assault by a man I didn't know, in a really nonchalant way, I wouldn't be inclined to do that. So I think this is sort of what I was saying earlier is just making sure that the pediatricians are like always in the child's best interest and isn't just out of routine. And it's making sure that the youth is really treated with with utmost respect, and obviously, like cared for first and foremost. And I think sometimes that does mean that the pediatrician has to take into account how they present themselves to the kid and what -- that relationship could feel or look like.

So that's all we have for you guys today. Thank you so much for joining us. All of your thoughts were so so amazing. You can find this video on the Joshua Center's website or at our Instagram @uwjoshuacenter. Thank you so much for joining us and thank you for watching.