Sexual assault is a crime. It can happen to anyone and is never the fault of the victim.

The experience and impact of sexual assault is different for everyone but whatever the reaction, it is a normal response to an extreme emotional and physical violation.

Sexual assault is an abuse of power and an act of control that is generally enforced by men on women and children.

This is not to say that all men are violent. In fact most men are highly ethical in their behaviours toward women and children. Unfortunately there are a small group of men who use violence to hurt, humiliate and gain power and control. Women can also be sexually violent, in fact in 2% of sexual assaults the offender is a female. While most victims of sexual assault are women and children, adult men also experience sexual violence. In about 7% of all sexual assault cases, victims are men, and generally they are assaulted by other men.

Some offenders think they have the right to treat others in this way. Most use a range of excuses to justify their behaviour. Some think that those they assault, their partners and children, belong to them so they have a right to abuse them. Others think that what they want is all that matters.

Sexual Assault is an extreme and violent product of patriarchy.

There are two broad groups of sex offenders, those who are opportunistic and those who plan their attacks.

Those who are opportunistic will, when confronted with a set of circumstances that worked for them last time, reoffend. Those who plan their attacks use deliberate tactics, and select and groom their victim/s based on their own perceptions of the person's vulnerability. Vulnerability may be as simple as having easy access, or it may be a much more complex set of measures often involving use of sexual assault myths to justify their behaviours.

Grooming behaviours will depend on the relationship the offender has with those they are planning to assault. For a child the offender may establish trust by spending time with the child, listening to them, treating the child as ‘special’, giving them presents and compliments and gradually increasing their invasion of the child’s personal space. With adults it may be offering assistance and friendship. Grooming may include breaking rules and then agreeing to keep the activity a secret. For example, giving the child sweets before tea, or assisting an adult to cover up a mistake in the workplace. Where the abuser is not a family member they may be in a position of trust, e.g. the boss. Some will seek to establish a trusting relationship with family or friends, so that if the victim tries to say what happened, many will find the report hard to believe.

Grooming behaviours are rarely unusual behaviours. They are generally everyday activities that are a common part of a co-operative family or community. Sex offenders use these ordinary everyday behaviours to gain access to their intended victim and commit their act without interruption or witnesses.

Through grooming the offender engages their intended victim in behaviours which they may later use to make their victims feel responsible for the attack. This may also stop them from reporting the violence they have experienced.