

Case Study:

A Real-Life Situation to Consider

It's important to be observant as others spend time with your child. Perpetrators use grooming patterns that gradually intensify over time. Keep in mind that grooming can look like normal, healthy interaction. The key is to notice concerning patterns of behavior. Read through the following case study and talk about your insights with a partner, co-parent, or trusted friend. Also, watch the companion video that discusses some things to think about.

Jackson had been looking forward to his birthday because when he turned ten, he could play soccer. Ryan was a long-time family friend who coached. In fact, he had coached Jackson's older brother. From the beginning, Jackson liked spending time with Ryan at practice. Jackson didn't think he was as good as the other players on the team, but Ryan always made sure that he got to spend some time playing. Ryan often gave him rides home from practice because they didn't live too far from each other.

Jackson's parents started to notice that Ryan was nice to everyone on the team, but he was particularly encouraging to Jackson. In one game where Jackson scored a big goal, Ryan gave him a high five. In another match when they beat a challenging team, Ryan gave everyone a high five and then hugged Jackson. Jackson's dad observed that Ryan hugged Jackson after every match, and the hugs got longer.

After a practice session focusing on passing the ball, Ryan asked if he could get Jackson's phone number. "There's a YouTube video that will really help with your technique," he said. "I'll text it to you. We want to get you up to speed with everyone who's been playing longer." Later that day, Ryan texted Jackson the video he was talking about and said, "Don't tell anyone I'm texting you. We don't want your teammates to be jealous."

Ryan sent soccer videos every few days. One day, Jackson's mom saw that he was watching a video over and over on his phone. When she asked him what it was, he casually explained it was a video from Ryan. His mom wondered how Ryan had gotten his phone number and asked if they communicated often. Jackson explained that Ryan just sent stuff now and then to help him with his soccer skills.

On one of their rides home, Ryan showed Jackson something a friend had texted. It was a joke that had some mild sexual language in it. The joke made Jackson feel uncomfortable, but he acted like it didn't bother him because he wanted Ryan to think he was mature. A few days later, Ryan showed Jackson a text that contained an inappropriate picture of a woman. Jackson felt uncomfortable again.

Jackson's parents noticed that he started losing interest in soccer. He also always wanted one of them to come and pick him up from practice. They wondered why he had lost his enthusiasm.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some red flags that Jackson's parents might have noticed?
- When should Jackson's parents have interceded?
- How should Jackson's parents have reacted when Jackson started losing interest in soccer?