

Grooming describes the preparatory stage of child sexual abuse, undertaken to gain the trust and compliance of the child or young person and to establish secrecy and silence to avoid disclosure. Grooming may occur in person or online.

Often, the child's parents, carers and other significant adults (including organisations) are also groomed by the person intending to sexually harm the child. This can make it challenging for parents and caretakers to establish if a child is being groomed, as grooming behaviours often look similar to genuine caring behaviours.

Being aware of the signs of grooming better equips us to understand the steps we can take to keep children as safe as possible.

GROOMING MAY TAKE A NUMBER OF FORMS:

- **Building the child's trust:** Using presents, special attention, treats, spending time together and playing games with non-sexual physical contact.
- **Favouritism:** The offender treats the child as an adult; treating them differently and making them feel more special than others.
- **Gaining the trust of the adults around the child:** Careful to be seen as a close, caring and reliable relative or friend of the family.
- **Isolation (from family, friends):** To ensure secrecy and lessen chances of disclosure or belief.
- **Intimidation and secrecy:** The offender may use coercion e.g., threatening looks and body language, glares, stalking and rules of secrecy.
- **'Testing the waters' or boundary violation:** 'Innocent' touching, gradually developing into 'accidental' sexual contact.
- **Shaping the child's perceptions:** The child is often confused as to what is acceptable and can take on self-blame for the situation, as his/her viewpoint can become totally distorted.

GROOMING MAY CAUSE A CHILD TO:

- feel as though they have an important and special relationship with the person who is harming them;
- experience confusion over the nature of their relationship;
- internalise the abuse as their fault, feeling responsibility for any harm experienced and fearing they will be blamed, punished or not believed;
- fear that they will be separated from their family or home if they speak out; and/or
- believe that disclosure will cause harm to someone or something they love and care for, such as family members or pets.

ONLINE GROOMING

Online grooming can take place through phones and on interactive platforms including chat and instant messaging apps, social media, and gaming. Perpetrators use interactive platforms as a gateway to initiate contact with a child.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS BEING GROOMED OR ABUSED

Sometimes a child's behaviour may lead you to suspect that child is unsafe or being harmed. In this situation, it is important that you:

- Do not frighten the child by getting emotional or angry.
- Do not ask confronting or leading questions of the child.
- Let the child know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk.
- Record your concerns including any behavioural observations or conversations you may have had with the child.
- Report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

If you have any concerns and wish to talk with one of our trained staff, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.



If you think your child (or a child you know) is being groomed or abused, please report to Police on 000 or child protection services.



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FOR PARENTS & CARERS -
PROTECTING CHILDREN & YOUNG
PEOPLE FROM SEXUAL ABUSE**