

Online Grooming and Cyber risks

What is Online Grooming?

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can **manipulate, exploit** and **abuse** them. Children and young people who are groomed can be **sexually abused, exploited** or **trafficked**.

Online grooming is when someone uses the internet to **trick, force** or **pressure** a young person into doing something sexual - like sending a naked video or image of themselves. Someone who's grooming others online will sometimes build their trust before talking about doing anything sexual.

With the government's advice that we need to stay indoors and with the closure of our schools, children are spending more time on their computers, phones and tablets than they normally would so it is even more important to be aware of the dangers.

Warning signs - WHO should we look out for?

Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender or race. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time – from weeks to years. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative.

The relationship a groomer builds can take different forms. This could be:

- a romantic relationship
- as a mentor
- an authority figure

A groomer can use the same sites, games and apps as young people, spending time learning about a young person's interests and use this to build a relationship with them. Children can be groomed online through:

- social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok)
- text messages and messaging apps, like Whatsapp
- email
- text, voice and video chats in forums, games and apps

Whether online or in person, groomers can use tactics like:

- pretending to be younger than they are
- giving advice or showing understanding
- buying them gifts
- giving them attention
- taking them on trips, outings or holidays

Groomers might also try and isolate children from their friends and family, making them feel dependent on them and giving the groomer power and control over them. They might use blackmail to make a child feel guilt and shame or introduce the idea of 'secrets' to control, frighten and intimidate.

It's important to remember that children and young people may not understand they've been groomed and may feel scared and confused. They may have complicated feelings, like loyalty, admiration, love, as well as fear, distress and confusion.

Warning signs - WHAT should we look out for?

It can be difficult to tell if a child is being groomed – the signs aren't always obvious and may be hidden. Older children might behave in a way that seems to be "normal" teenage behaviour, masking underlying problems. Some of the signs you might see include:

- being very secretive about how they're spending their time, including when online
- having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- having money or new things like clothes and mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- underage drinking or drug taking
- spending more or less time online or on their devices
- being upset, withdrawn or distressed
- sexualised behaviour, language or an understanding of sex that's not appropriate for their age
- spending more time away from home or going missing for periods of time

What can you do if you think a child may be being groomed?

Below is some advice on what you can do if you think a child is being groomed. For further useful websites that provide information, advice and support on online safety, please refer to the earlier communication that was sent out to you "Signposting to support".

CEOP make reporting online grooming easy. Whether you're a parent, carer, worried adult or young person, you can make a CEOP report online <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>



You can also contact your **local child protection services** or the police to report your concerns about any type of grooming - whether it's happening online, in person or both. You can find their contact details on the website for the local authority the child lives in.

It's important to remember that it's against the law to make or share images of child abuse. If you see a video or photo that shows a child being abused, don't comment, like or share it. Instead, you can report it to: the website it's on, the police or contact the **NSPCC** and they will report it to the police for you <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

NSPCC

You can also report videos and images of child sexual abuse to the **Internet Watch Foundation** <https://www.iwf.org.uk/>



Call 999 if the child is at immediate risk or call 101 if you think a crime has been committed call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or online

Additional Cyber Risks to be aware of:

As children may be spending more time on their electrical devices it is important to be more aware of additional cyber risks and how you can protect yourself online. Common cyber risks include:

- **Posting personal information-** ensure that you're not posting any personal information online as this can be used by scammers.
- **Phishing-** this is the use of emails that try to trick people into clicking on malicious links or attachments. You should avoid clicking on any links that look 'odd' or that you are unsure of.
- **Viruses-** ensure that your devices are protected and you have appropriate cyber security.