

What is grooming?

'Grooming' refers to gradual behaviours that manipulate and control a child, as well as their family, kin and carers, other support networks, or organisations, in order to perpetrate child sexual abuse.

Grooming can include a range of in person or online behaviours and communications intended to facilitate sexual contact with a child or young person, and stop victims from disclosing abuse. Grooming is not necessarily explicitly sexual or directly abusive, and may be consistent with behaviours or activities in non-abusive relationships.

Grooming is intended to:

- gain access to a child or young person to perpetrate child sexual abuse
- obtain sexual material
- obtain trust and/or compliance
- maintain the child or young person's silence, and/or
- avoid discovery of sexual abuse.

The signs of grooming

A child or young person may show signs of being a victim of grooming in different ways, including all or some of the following signs:

- developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- having gifts or money from new friends or someone that they cannot account for
- being very secretive about their phone, internet or social media use
- going missing for long periods of time
- appearing extremely tired, including at school
- being dishonest about who they have been with and where they have been
- substance misuse
- assuming a new name, having false identification, a stolen passport or driver licence, or a new phone
- being collected from school by an older or new friend.

How grooming can occur

1. The child is targeted

While any child can be sexually abused, some perpetrators may target children that are socially isolated or part of a marginalised social, economic, racial or cultural group.

2. Building trust

Perpetrators may build a child or young person's trust through special attention or gifts. Perpetrators often present as trustworthy, reputable, generous, and likeable. In some situations, whole families or organisations can be groomed.

3. Isolation

Perpetrators progressively isolate a child or young person from supportive family and friends.

4. Sexualisation

Perpetrators may gradually introduce sexualised content or discussions to a child or young person, and then encourage them to produce child sexual abuse imagery or participate in sexualised in-person or virtual chats.

5. Control

Perpetrators use secrecy, shame, blame, coercion and threats to maintain control in order to perpetuate the abuse and ensure the child or young person's silence.

How to protect children and young people from grooming

You can learn more about grooming on the National Office for Child Safety's website:

<https://www.ChildSafety.gov.au/about-child-sexual-abuse/grooming>.

You can teach children and young people what is appropriate and inappropriate contact, and understand safe and unsafe behaviours (both online and offline).

Encouraging open and honest communication, without shame or stigma, about what respectful relationships, consent, and body boundaries look like is important.

For tips and support on how to start these conversations, we have developed a conversation toolkit to support adults to have age-appropriate discussions with children and young people about sexual abuse. It is available at:

<https://www.ChildSafety.gov.au/having-conversations>.

Further information about grooming and online safety can be found on:

<https://www.eSafety.gov.au> and <https://www.ACCCE.gov.au>.

What to do about suspected grooming

It is important to understand the signs of grooming, and talk to children and young people if you notice changes in their behaviour or suspect something isn't right. They may not understand they are being groomed.

If you suspect grooming is taking place, visit <https://www.ChildSafety.gov.au/make-report> to find out how to make a report.

Get support

If you, or someone you know, has been impacted by grooming or child sexual abuse, there are services and resources available to help.

For more information, visit our get support page at <https://www.ChildSafety.gov.au/get-support>.

