



One minute guide

Grooming

Number 10 May 2019

What is grooming?

The NSPCC defines grooming as - when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking. Children can be groomed online or face to face, by a stranger or somebody they know. Groomers can be male or female and any age. Grooming can target younger or older children, many of whom will not understand that they have been groomed and are victims of abuse.

How does it work?

Grooming may be a phased, gradual process or it may take place over days. Although grooming is often considered to have stages, it doesn't always develop in the same way – some common models include the befriending model, the boyfriend model and the party model. For more detail on models click here <https://paceuk.info/about-cse/grooming-models/>

Whichever form of grooming is used, the signs aren't always obvious and may be attributed to 'normal' teenage behaviour plus a groomer will go to great lengths to hide their behaviour, often grooming the adults around the child as well.

Some common indicators in a child who is being groomed may include: being secretive (particularly about what they're doing online), have older boyfriends/girlfriends, meet friends in unusual places, have inexplicably new possessions such as clothes/mobile phone or cash and have access to drugs and alcohol. There may be changes in behaviour, personality or inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age. There may be use of language/new words previously unknown and indicating exploitation.

Changes in Behaviour – examples of unusual behaviour

Withdrawn, anxious, clingy, depressed, aggressive, problems sleeping, eating disorders, bed wetting, soiling with possible smearing, risk taking, truanting, nightmares, drugs, alcohol, self-harm, suicidal thoughts

Top Tips for Professionals

- Be curious, look beyond the first impression e.g. is it neglect or is there concealed sexual abuse
- Ask questions
- Trust yourself and have confidence in yourself
- Talk to the child on their own
- Share information with other agencies
- Test out your thinking on a colleague
- If you don't ask the question you won't get the answer.
- Don't normalise things that are out of the ordinary

How to start a difficult conversation

- Start the conversation with positivity & interest, ask how they are or what they have been up to.
- Avoid being critical, judgemental or using victim blaming language.
- Use open and honest language such as I'm wondering/I've noticed/I'm curious to know/I'm wondering if anything is happening/you can come & talk to me again
- Try to think about where you will have the conversation, who is with them at the time, what are they planning to do or where will they go afterwards, who is going to support them after the conversation.

Mythbusting

A number of myths exist in our society around grooming, that should never be taken at face value. These include:

- Sexual abuse is higher in working class, low income families
- People who are abused in their childhood are more likely to abuse children
- Children often lie about being abused
- Only paedophiles abuse children
- Children with a disability are less likely to be sexually abused
- Often the mother knows the abuse is happening but ignores or encourages it
- Media reports overestimate the real risk to children
- Only gay men abuse boys
- Sexual abuse can sometimes be harmless
- Harmful language e.g. 'she led him on', 'she was up for it' or 'she's mature for her age'.

This is not an exhaustive list, there are many more harmful myths pervasive in our society and professionals should challenge these wherever possible.

Key Contacts and Further Information

Coventry Safeguarding Children Board website - <http://www.coventry.gov.uk/lscb>

NSPCC website - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

CRASAC website - <http://www.crasac.org.uk/>

CEOP - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre>