

# GROOMING



**Grooming** is when a person engages in manipulative, patterned behaviour to gain access to and prepare a child or young person for sexual abuse and exploitation.

Groomers take a lot of time to develop relationships, building trust and rapport, learning about their victim's vulnerabilities, likes and interests. They use this knowledge to lower the child's resistance, gain and maintain control and trust, and then slowly introduce sexual content and physical contact. Groomers may rely on mobile phones, social media, and the internet to interact with children in inappropriate ways and will often ask the child to keep their relationship a secret so the crime is less likely to be discovered.

## Grooming can happen anywhere, including:

- online
- in organisations
- in public spaces (also known as street grooming)

**Almost anyone can be a groomer.**

**Almost anyone can be vulnerable to grooming.**



The key to grooming is a power dynamic within the relationship: age, gender, physical strength, economic status, or another factor.

## Grooming can include:

- communicating or,
- attempting to befriend or,
- establishing a relationship or,
- other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

Young people are often 'groomed' before they are sexually abused.



## Examples of grooming behaviour may include:



Giving gifts or special attention to a child or young person, or their parent or carer, making the child or young person feel special or indebted to an adult.



Openly or pretending to accidentally expose the victim to nudity, sexual material and sexual acts (this in itself is classified as child sexual abuse but can also be a precursor to physical sexual assault)



Making close physical contact sexual, such as inappropriate tickling and wrestling or play fighting.



Controlling a child or young person through threats, force or use of authority making the child or young person fearful to report unwanted behaviour.



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Although grooming can take many different forms, with child sexual exploitation it often follows a similar pattern.

- **Victim selection/targeting:** Groomers often seek out possible victims in places such as schools, clubs, other places young people frequent and select them based on ease of access to them or their perceived vulnerability. Valuable contact information is also sourced namely social media and phone numbers.

- **Gaining access and isolating:** Groomers will check the relationship strength with friends, family, and networks to separate and isolate a potential victim physically or emotionally from their supportive networks.

- **Trust development and keeping secrets:** Groomers may show an interest in the child and perhaps fulfil a need. Groomers offer the child or young person something, for example, a cigarette, food and drink, a lift, to pay a bill or simply be someone to talk to for support, gaining their trust. Groomers share "secrets" and ask for a similar secret to be shared in return. This may lead to the child spending less time with their friends and family.

- **Desensitisation to touch and discussion of sexual topics:** Victims may enter a fake loving relationship or friendship with the groomer. Groomers will often start to touch a victim in ways that appear harmless, such as hugging, wrestling, and tickling, and later escalate to increasingly more sexual contact, such as massages or showering together. Groomers may also show the victim pornography or discuss sexual topics with them, to introduce the idea of sexual contact.

- **Control and reinforcement:** The groomer may attempt to consolidate and entrap the victim by getting them to do things that can be dangerous or against the law like underage drinking, taking, or selling drugs or other forms of criminal activity. This may lead to the child or young person being forced to do sexual favours in return for not being hurt or exposed. This may include violence or threats of violence.

- **Victimisation:** The child or young person may be forced into having sex with others for something they need or want, by either force or persuasion. Groomers can persuade their victims to undertake sexual activities like being filmed performing sexual acts, by using emotional blackmail, and by making it sound normal.

## How to Help

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, or you have immediate concerns for the welfare of a child, call "000" or local police on **131 444**.

If your concern is about online child exploitation and abuse you can report directly to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation at **[www.acce.gov.au/report](http://www.acce.gov.au/report)**

If you would prefer to report in-confidence visit Crime Stoppers at **[www.crimestoppers.com.au](http://www.crimestoppers.com.au)** or by phoning **1800 333 000**.

24 hour support is also available for children and young people at Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800** or **[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)**