Grooming

Information for parents and carers of primary-aged children

NORTHUMBRIA POLICE

What is grooming?

Grooming is a process that "involves the offender building a relationship with a child, and sometimes with their wider family, gaining their trust and a position of power over the child in preparation for abuse." Many people's understanding of "grooming" is limited to sexual exploitation. However, the grooming process can also be applied to other situations, e.g. gaining a child's trust so that they commit crimes such as theft or drug dealing, or **radicalising them**.

A groomer may identify a child's vulnerability; for example, they may notice they are often by themselves at the park and will prey on their loneliness, or that they are hungry and may offer a meal from a local takeaway. Grooming can occur online too, with the perpetrator striking up a conversation, perhaps giving compliments on their profile picture or how well they play an online game. **It is really important to recognise that the groomer may be someone you know – it isn't always a stranger.**

Why do I need to know about this? My child is so young.

Unfortunately, children can be especially vulnerable to grooming as they may lack the life experience to recognise when they are being taken advantage of. Many young children have access to social media and the internet therefore the opportunity for online grooming is ever-present. It's important for parents and carers to have an overview of what their children do online: who do they talk to, and who are their online friends? It's also important to know how to guide your children in the safe use of devices and the internet. Visit **Use Parental Controls to Keep Your Child Safe - NSPCC** for more information.

What does online grooming look like?

Groomers don't always target a particular child. Sometimes they'll send messages to hundreds of young people and wait to see who responds. It's important therefore that young people understand they shouldn't reply to messages from strangers. Grooming behaviour can include: the groomer acting as a friend pretending to know the child, compliments, attention, buying gifts, pretending to be someone they are not (e.g. a 50 year old man saying they are a teenaged girl), controlling others' actions and behaviours, asking for relationships/conversations to be kept secret, sending inappropriate messages or images, and forcing someone to do something they don't want to. Once they have established trust, groomers will exploit the relationship by isolating the child from friends or family resulting in the child feeling dependent on them. They will use any means of power or control to make a child believe they have no choice but to do what they want.
This video gives some more information about online grooming for a sexual purpose

How do I protect my child, and what are the signs that they could be being groomed?

Be curious about their friendship groups and where they are when they're not at school or with you. Make sure they know they can come to you if they are approached by new 'friends' when they are out and about, especially older people. Remind them about **Childline** as a source of support, too. If you have concerns, share them with family members and the Designated Safe-guarding Lead (DSL) at your child's school. There are many signs that a child may be being groomed and/or exploited, including a change in their behaviour, having gifts/money that cannot be accounted for, being very secretive about their phone or internet use and lying about where they have been and who they have been with. Be conscious of any changes in presentation: they may begin to take more interest in their appearance and in the clothes they wear. (There could be genuine reasons for any of these but it is important to be open minded about any changes you might see.) Visit **Grooming - NSPCC** for more information.

Support and Report

NSPCC Helpline | NSPCC
Help and advice if you have concerns about a child's welfare

Police website
You can report any information to the police: 999 in an emergency, or otherwise via 101 or our website

Crimestoppers
If it's not an emergency, visit Crimestoppers to report your concerns anonymously

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