

## Sexual Grooming

### What is sexual grooming?

Grooming refers to the behaviours that a person deliberately does over a long period of time to befriend and create an emotional connection with a child to manipulate and trick them into a sexual relationship. Sexual grooming also involves manipulating people related to the child, and the environment in which the child is found for the sexual abuse of the targeted child. This process involves gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance, and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. Sexual offenders also use tricks and manipulation to justify or deny their actions, which strengthens their abusive pattern.

### Factors that may facilitate grooming

- **Respecting Elders:** Often, children are taught to “respect their elders”. With this on their mind, if an adult does something that makes them feel uncomfortable, children are likely to ignore how they feel and not protest because they believe that the adult is always right.
- **Poor Education:** Children are often not educated properly about their bodies and appropriate sexuality.
- **Feelings of Shame:** After coercing a child into a specific act that the child feels ashamed of, such as viewing pornographic pictures, the offender will use the child's feelings of shame to keep them silent about the abuse.
- **Taboos:** Many environments regard talk about sex as taboo, which makes disclosing sexual abuse difficult.
- **Different gender sexual expectations:** Many cultures normalise sexual passivity in females, whilst for males, pursuing their own sexual needs is normalised. This also leads to the expectation that men cannot control their sexual impulses. This may ‘normalise’ situations where males actively seek and manipulate younger females into sexual activity. This would make it difficult for girls to disclose sexual abuse, because they think that they are responsible for stopping the man from manipulating them into sexual activity.

## Where does sexual grooming happen?

Sexual grooming can happen in different places, and online. Offenders would seek out places where children are present in order to gain access to the children and target a child. Sexual offenders for example may work at camps or at schools, where they can approach children. Another way that offenders approach children is through social networks (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), online gaming, and chat rooms. The offender often assumes a fake identity, such as pretending to be the child's age. The offender would then study the child's likes and dislikes through the child's posts and use this information to establish a connection and trust with the child.

## What are the stages of the grooming process?

<p><b>Stage 1</b> Targeting the child</p>	<p>This is when the offender targets a child. The offender may target a child that they are in close proximity to, such as the neighbour's child. Otherwise, the offender may actively seek places where children would naturally be present, such as at camps or on social media such as Facebook.</p>
<p><b>Stage 2</b> Gaining Access to the child</p>	<p>The goal is to isolate the child physically and emotionally from their families, protective adults, and friends. For example, they may offer to help out around the house to get closer to the child while gaining the trust of the parents or guardians. Here, the offender will also be grooming the child's family or group that the child is associated with (e.g., the gym the child attends). This process is made easier on-line as the child is already isolated from family while they are engaged with a phone app or in social media.</p>
<p><b>Stage 3</b> Developing trust with the child – regarded as the central role of the grooming process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is when the offender tricks the child into trusting them. The offender appears helpful and friendly in order to develop relationships with the child and their family so that neither the family nor the child know their intention of sexual abuse. The offender accomplishes this by for example, showering the child with gifts and attention. The offender may also use secrecy by using the child as a "confidante" and sharing statements such as "Mum wouldn't understand how special we are together". The offender may also buy the child gifts, food, electronic devices (e.g., I Phone). With teenagers, the offender would make the teenager feel like she is in a romantic relationship with him. This serves the purpose of alienating the child from the non-offending parent so</li> </ul>

	<p>that the child no longer feels close to their family and which further strengthens this ‘special connection’. Once the child’s emotional needs of (false) connection and safety are met by the offender, the child may start to idealise the perpetrator thinking the perpetrator cannot harm them. The offender changes grooming strategies based on the age and the needs of the child.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-line, the offender gathers as much information about the child (e.g., where they live) by looking through their social media profile or asking them direct. They also visit the same websites the child visits to learn about the child’s interests. This helps the offender begin conversations that interest the child, and thus build an online relationship with the child. Through direct communication with the child, the offender will also try to identify the child’s needs so that the offender can begin to fill those need and create an emotional bond with the child.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 4</b> Desensitizing the child to touch / sexual abuse</p>	<p>The offender increases physical contact to prepare the child for the sexual abuse.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts with seemingly accidental touch, seemingly innocent hugs or pats on the back.</li> <li>• Throughout the process, the perpetrator measures whether the child has been “groomed” enough, by seeing if the child shows interest in the hugs for example, whether the child will not protest, or whether the child will keep a secret.</li> <li>• When the offender notes that the child is emotionally dependent on them and trust them enough, he will progressively sexualise the relationship by touching the child more intimately or introducing them to more sexualised behaviours.</li> <li>• On-line, the offender will desensitize the child by showing them photos and videos, and talking to them about inappropriate things online.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 5</b> Maintaining Control</p>	<p>The offender works at maintaining the abuse by gaining the compliance of the child. This is done by threatening to harm the child or others if the child tells others about the abuse. The offender may also tell the child that no one will believe them, which will increase the child’s feelings of isolation, fear, and confusion. The offender will also use their authority as an adult to control the child.</p>

## Grooming behaviours

<p><b>Stage 1</b> Selection of the child</p>	<p>This stage does not include any contact with the child or her/his family.</p>
<p><b>Stage 2:</b> Gaining access to the child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out situations where children are readily available (shopping centres, schools, parks, pools, markets, internet... etc.).</li> <li>• They may work on being welcome in child's home as a means of getting closer to the child: They may help out around the house, assume a "father figure" role, or offer to babysit.</li> <li>• They may seek jobs that involve contact with children (teachers, camp counsellors, bus drivers, religious leaders).</li> <li>• When children are family members, they are easily accessible in the home environment. For example, the offender may sneak into the child's room.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 3:</b> Developing trust with the child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Befriending the child.</li> <li>• Being helpful.</li> <li>• Showering the child with gifts and attention.</li> <li>• Learning about the child's interests.</li> <li>• Sharing secrets with the child.</li> <li>• Playing games with younger children.</li> <li>• Talking about sexual matters with adolescents.</li> <li>• May offer money, treats, gifts, or fun trips to develop a relationship that feels special to the child.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 4:</b> Desensitizing the child to touch.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts with seemingly accidental touch, or innocent hugs or pats on the back.</li> <li>• The physical contact increases to wrestling, tickling, or back massages, and sexual contact.</li> <li>• Playing hide and seek in the dark, massaging an injury, playing physical games, cuddling, talking about sex, or showing the child pornography.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 5:</b> Maintaining Control</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assuring the child that what is happening is "right", by for example saying "this is a way we can show we love each other".</li> <li>• Assuring the child that the act will not hurt them.</li> <li>• Threatening to harm the child or others if the child chooses to disclose.</li> <li>• Letting the child believe that they were "free" to choose and that the child has consented to the abuse.</li> <li>• Telling the child that no one will believe them.</li> <li>• By using bribes, or punishment.</li> </ul>