

Factsheet: Grooming

Understanding grooming can help adults recognise the risk of child sexual abuse earlier and respond in ways that better protect children.

The Facts

Grooming is the general term used to describe the process a perpetrator may follow in order to commit child sexual abuse. This term encompasses acts and behaviours which occur before, during and after the perpetrator has committed abuse.

Grooming is a series of intentional and deliberate acts or behaviours by the perpetrator which manipulate the child and those around them and cause harm.

Stages of Grooming

- 1. TARGETING:** An offender deliberately chooses a child, often one who is already isolated, disadvantaged or lacking confidence, to reduce the risk of disclosure.

Example: Focusing attention on a child who seems lonely, excluded or in need of support.

- 2. TRUST:** The offender builds trust by appearing kind, supportive or helpful to the child and those around them. This stage often looks like care, safety or friendship.

Example: Giving gifts, spending extra time with the child, or becoming a trusted adult to parents and caregivers.

- 3. FILLING A NEED:** The offender positions themselves as the solution to an emotional or practical gap, creating dependence and leverage rather than genuine care.

Example: Acting as a mentor, confidant or substitute caregiver when other support is missing.

- 4. ISOLATION:** The child is gradually separated from their support network, making the offender their primary source of connection and reassurance.

Example: Encouraging secrecy, private messaging or discouraging contact with friends and family.

- 5. DESENSITISATION AND SEXUALISATION:** Boundaries are slowly eroded through inappropriate conversation, behaviours or exposure, making abuse feel normal or confusing over time.

Example: Introducing sexual jokes, content or excessive physical contact under the guise of education or affection.

- 6. CONTROL:** The offender uses shame, secrecy, fear or rewards to silence the child and maintain control.

Example: Suggesting the child will not be believed, blaming them, or alternating threats with affection or gifts.

Myths about Grooming

1. Myth: Grooming isn't that common for offenders.

Reality: Grooming is extremely common. Grooming behaviours and tactics are employed by 80% of offenders. The majority of instances of child sexual abuse involve grooming.

2. Myth: An offender will only groom the child they are targeting.

Reality: As grooming is a form of manipulation and coercive control, the offender will use similar behaviour and tactics with other adults in the child's life. The result is that other adults may unwittingly allow abuse to continue, as they have been manipulated to do so.

3. Myth 3: Grooming happens in a set order and all stages must be present for it to be considered grooming.

Reality: While there are 6 distinct stages of grooming, they may not occur in a set order. Stages may occur concurrently, and some stages may be missed altogether. Importantly, not matter what order the stages occur, or how many stages are present, it is still considered grooming.

Know the Signs

Grooming can be difficult to spot and can involve both the child and others around them.

While tactics can vary, the goal of each stage is the same. Offenders often tailor their behaviour to a child's specific vulnerabilities and natural need for care, safety and connection.

Understanding how grooming works is a critical step in prevention. Awareness helps adults recognise the risk earlier and better protect children.

Grooming is never the fault of the child.

More Information

If you would like more information, you can contact The Grace Tame Foundation via info@thegracetamefoundation.org.au