

## Grooming

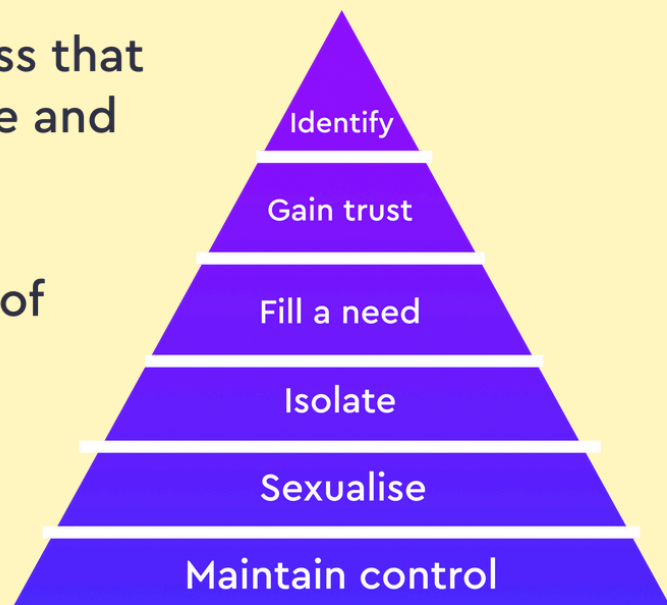
**Grooming can be defined as a person engaging in certain behaviours to prepare a child or young person for sexual activity. The groomer normally seeks to build a trusted relationship with a child/young person and/or their family.**

It can be difficult to spot, as it can look like normal caring behaviour until after the abuse happens. Groomers are skilled at trying to make young people feel comfortable, and so the young person believes they are in a normal safe relationship.

It's important to know that it can happen in person and/or online. Social media and online gaming sites have become a common place for groomers to identify and begin to groom children and young people.

Grooming is a process that takes place over time and has different stages.

The different stages of grooming are:



Groomers are often older than the child/young person or in a position of authority. They often choose children/young people who they see as being vulnerable – this may be children/young people who are seen to be "trouble-makers", or who are shy/quiet, or who are known for "telling stories". Groomers will likely size up a child/young person's vulnerability, looking for factors such as emotional neediness, isolation, and lower self-confidence.

Groomers will work to gain the child/young person's trust and to fill a need in the child/young person's life. They may give the child/young person special attention, play games, give gifts/special treats and/or make them feel different and special. Often, the family is groomed, too, and the groomer will also work to gain the trust of parents/carers.

Once trust has been gained, groomers will isolate the child/young person. This could be through emotional manipulation; they may try to turn the child/young person away from trusted adults by convincing them that "they don't understand you", or they may use secrets against the child/young person or convince the child/young person to keep a secret, or they may use bribes.

Groomers will then begin to initiate an unsafe relationship. They may begin to sexualise the relationship by sharing photos and/or inappropriate stories, and they may start with physical contact that initially appears casual, such as their arm over the child/young person's shoulder, before introducing more sexualised touching. From there, they will maintain power and control by using secrecy, blame, shame, guilt, and threats to manipulate the child/young person into silence.

### **How can I know if my child is being groomed?**

#### **Some red flags that may indicate a child/young person is experiencing a difficult situation are:**

- Someone becoming very secretive about how and who they spend time with
- Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- Having money or new things that they can't (or won't) explain
- Underage drinking or drug taking
- Being upset, withdrawn, or distressed
- Spending more time away from home or going missing for periods of time
- Withdrawing from friends
- Being very secretive about their phone and social media use
- Being dishonest about who they have been with and/or where they have been

## Noticing red flags in others

Some red flags that you may notice that something is wrong with a friend or another student include:



Someone becoming very secretive about how and who they spend time with, this could also include when online.



Being upset, withdrawn, or distressed.



Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend.



Age-inappropriate sexual behaviour.



Having money or new things and mobile phones that can't or won't explain.



Spending more time away from home or going missing for periods of time.



Underage drinking or drug taking.



Withdrawing from friends.

### Conversation starters

- Ask about online friends and whether your child talks to people online that they don't know in real life. For young people who spend a lot of time online, they won't necessarily consider people "strangers" if they talk to them all the time (even if they've never actually met them) and many young people consider their online friends to be close friends.
- Talk about what to do in certain scenarios – for example, ask your child what they would do if an adult at their sports club started to buy them gifts, or if someone they didn't know messaged them on social media, or if someone they play online games with started to give them gifts or money in the game. Talk about the safest ways to respond to these kinds of situations.

**Further information, resources and support for parents**

**Are you concerned that your child may be vulnerable to grooming? Are you looking for more information about grooming and what to do if you suspect it is happening? The following websites and organisations provide useful information and support.**

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/issues-and-advice/grooming-or-unwanted-contact>

[The Daniel Morecombe Foundation](#)

[National Office for Child Safety](#)

[Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation](#)