

APPENDIX 17: GROOMING

What is grooming?

Grooming occurs when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them.

Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know. This could be a family member, a friend or someone who has targeted them – like a teacher, faith group leader or sports coach. Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked.

Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender or race. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time – from weeks to years. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative.

Types of grooming

The relationship a groomer builds can take different forms. This could be:

- a romantic relationship
- as a mentor
- an authority figure
- a dominant and persistent figure.

A groomer can use the same sites, games and apps as young people, spending time learning about a young person's interests and use this to build a relationship with them. Children can be groomed online through:

- social media networks
- text messages and messaging apps
- email
- text, voice and video chats in forums, games and apps.

Whether online or in person, groomers can use tactics like:

- pretending to be younger
- giving advice or showing understanding
- buying gifts
- giving attention – paying compliments
- taking them on trips, outings or holidays.

Groomers might also try and isolate children from their friends and family, making them feel dependent on them and exercising power and control over them. They might use blackmail to make a child feel guilt and shame or introduce the idea of 'secrets' to control, frighten and intimidate.

It's important to remember that children and young people may not understand they've been groomed. They may have complicated feelings, like loyalty, admiration, love, as well as fear, distress and confusion.

Signs of grooming

It can be difficult to tell if a child is being groomed – the signs aren't always obvious and may be hidden. Older children might behave in a way that seems to be "normal" teenage behaviour, masking underlying problems.

Some of the signs you might see include:

- being very secretive about how they're spending their time, including when online
- having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- having money or new things like clothes and mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- underage drinking or drug taking
- spending more or less time online or on their devices
- being upset, withdrawn or distressed
- sexualised behaviour, language or an understanding of sex that's not appropriate for their age

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

If a child reveals abuse

- listen carefully to what they're saying
- let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it's not their fault
- say you'll take them seriously
- don't confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you'll do next
- report what the child has told you as soon as possible.

The Impact of grooming

- anxiety and depression
- eating disorders
- post-traumatic stress
- difficulty coping with stress
- self-harm
- suicidal thoughts
- sexually transmitted infections
- pregnancy
- feelings of shame and guilt
- drug and alcohol problems
- relationship problems with family, friends and partners.

How to prevent grooming

There are steps we can all take to keep children and young people safe from grooming.

- Talk to children about staying safe. Teach children and young people about healthy relationships
- Teach children how to stay safe online. Encourage transparency in what your children are doing online. You can keep gaming devices and computers and laptops with webcams in the living room or family spaces. Use parental controls and keep up-to-date on the apps and games children and young people are using. These foundations can be laid from a young age (see the NSPCC [PANTS](#) initiative).
- Make sure children and young people know there are trusted adults, including outside of the home that they can speak to about their worries, such as school or [Childline](#).
- Teach children about good and bad secrets
- Listen, listen, and listen some more.
- Teach children how to be assertive – they need to be able to say “No!”
- Teach children about consent
- Make sure children know what is healthy and unhealthy touch
- Know where children are and who they are with
- Be present physically and emotionally

Report grooming

Share your concerns with the church's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), pastor or responsible person ([see Appendices 14, 15 & 16](#))

[Child Exploitation and Online Protection](#) (CEOP) make reporting online grooming easy. Whether you're a parent, carer, worried adult or young person, you can make a CEOP report online.

You can also contact your local child protection services or the police to report your concerns about any type of grooming - whether it's happening online, in person or both.

Support for parents and carers

Finding out your child has been groomed and exploited can be frightening and distressing. But there's help for you and your family.

[lvision Trust](#) (formally PACE) works with parents and carers of children who are, or at risk of, sexual exploitation. You can call them for confidential help and advice on 0113 240 5226 or fill in their online form.