

## What is Grooming?

- Grooming is the term used to describe the steps and actions an offender takes to manipulate a child, their family and/or their community to create an opportunity to abuse the child.  
These calculated actions can occur over a long time (months or even years) before offending occurs.
- An offender that has groomed a child can then continue to abuse the child over a long period of time.
- Grooming is about an offender gaining power and control over a child (and their family).
- Grooming behaviour can be targeted towards the parent / carer of the child with the intention of getting the carer's trust to gain access to the child.
- Child sex offenders are very good at managing impressions of themselves and, when grooming, seek to be seen as caring, good people.
- Through the process of grooming, the offender is making decisions about whether a child has been 'groomed' enough. Will the child keep a secret? Will the child protest? This is why grooming usually takes place over a long period of time.

## Grooming Behaviour ~ Part One

### TARGETING THE VICTIM AND THEIR FAMILY:

- Offenders are good at targeting children: They may identify children due to their vulnerabilities e.g lower self-esteem, social isolation. Some offenders target children with disabilities who cannot communicate, as this makes it harder for children to complain.
- Offenders may also target single parent families as the offender recognises that the family's need for support can be exploited.

### GAINING THE TRUST OF THE VICTIM AND THEIR FAMILY:

- Offenders are good at finding out what the child needs by watching them physically or on social media, talking to them, then filling that need. The offender tries to become an important person in the life of the child they have chosen.
- They may do things such as spend 'special' time with the child, give them compliments and gifts.
- The child CAN start to feel special, loved and close to the offender. Caregivers may unknowingly assist the offender by telling the child "how lucky they are to have a special friend".
- Offenders may begin to test out the child to see if and how they will react, examples include:
  - Encouraging inappropriate physical contact (even where it is not overtly sexual) such as brushing hair, rubbing their shoulders.
  - Undressing in front of a child.
  - Talking about sex, 'accidental' intimate touching; and/or exposing a child to pornographic material.
  - Asking a child to keep secrets such as asking them to not tell caregivers about presents.
  - Getting a child to break family rules (e.g. if a child is not allowed to eat sweets, buying them sweets).

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*There are things that can be done to make it harder for offenders to groom:*

- Educate children about safe touching
- Tell children that if any adult does something that makes them feel uncomfortable they can say "no" and tell a trusted adult
- Inform children on who they should talk to if they are uncomfortable about an adults behaviour
- Encourage a family culture of not keeping secrets.
- Teach adults to look out for warning signs
- Report unacceptable behaviour that you notice of other adults
- Train adults to speak up if they have concerns about other adults behaviour.

*It is never the child's fault that they have been abused*



## Grooming Behaviour ~ Part Two

### ISOLATING THE CHILD:

- The offender may isolate the child by trying to restrict their time with family or significant others in their life by saying things like:  
"Mum wouldn't understand how special we are together" or "You are a very special person to me", "we have something special, let's not tell anyone".
- Other children in the family or group may be jealous about the attention the targeted child is getting, making it harder for the child to talk to others.
- Offenders may seek alone time with the child (e.g. taking them on trips [like shopping], tutoring them, babysitting) to make the child feel special.

### GROOMING TOWARDS SEXUAL ABUSE:

- Grooming can extend to sexual abuse. Offenders may start with behaviours that aren't very sexual, such as taking the child swimming, (where both may be naked when they are getting changed) or they may start touching the child as they help them with activities such as bathing, dressing or getting ready for bed. They aim to make it all feel very natural and exciting for the child.
- They may try to convince the child the behaviour is normal and acceptable, by telling them "You are lucky that I am teaching you about this stuff" or "this is how we can show each other we love each other".
- They deliberately shape the child to accept the sexual behaviour as normal, however, they should not tell others they are doing it.

### MAINTAINING CONTROL:

- The relationship at this stage is very confusing for the child. They may have very mixed feelings about the offender. The child may have 'yucky' feelings or feel scared about the sexual activity or they may not realise there is a problem. The child may also be deeply attached to the offender. The child may not want the good parts of the relationship that make them feel special to stop.
- The offender will be working hard to make sure the child keeps the secret. They may give them extra gifts or manipulate them in other ways.
- Offenders may threaten the child with harm to them or someone else if they tell anyone. They may blame the child, telling the child that they agreed or gave consent to the behaviour or the child was 'free to choose' the behaviour.
- The child can often be concerned that the offender will get into trouble or may go to jail. This concern can help stop them telling anyone.
- The child may feel guilty because they know they have broken rules (such as not accepting sweets or keeping secrets about gifts) and be scared that they are going to get into trouble. The child may be scared that they (the child) are going to be shamed and humiliated about what has happened.

### RELATIONSHIP ENDS:

- Sometimes the child gets too old for the offender causing the offender to end the relationship. This can leave the child feeling very upset at the loss of this special person in their life. The child may wonder what they have done wrong and increases the child's feeling of loneliness, guilt and self blame.
- The relationship may end after either grooming and/or sexual abuse.



### Action

If you have concerns that a child or young person is being groomed, or concerns about another personnel in relation to their interaction with children and/or young people, you must:

*Discuss your concerns with your line manager, another senior member of TSA at your site or a Safeguarding Consultant.*

### Safeguarding Operations Team

☎ 03 8878 4500

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