

Grooming

- Grooming is when someone tries to build trusting relationships with children or families with the aim of child sexual abuse.
- Grooming can happen face to face or online.
- Children who are being groomed might have unexplained gifts. Or groomers might take a special interest in children's families.
- If you're concerned about grooming, trust your instincts and check in with your child.

Grooming: what is it?

Grooming is when a **person tries to build a trusting relationship with a child** or a child's family so that they can sexually abuse the child.

Grooming involves the person building connection and trust with a child and family over days, weeks, months or years. For example, the person might befriend a family and seem to have an amazing connection with the child. The person might gradually spend more and more time with the child. This lays the groundwork for sexual abuse at a later time.

Who might be involved in grooming?

Anyone can be a groomer – man or woman, friend, stranger or professional.

A groomer could be a relative, family friend or someone from a family's place of worship. Or a groomer could be a sporting coach, teacher or child care worker.

How and where does grooming happen?

Grooming can happen face to face or online.

If grooming is happening **face to face**, the person might find ways to get to know a child and the child's family and offer to take the child on outings. The person might buy the child or family treats or gifts. Or the person might give the family and the child compliments and make them feel special.

If grooming is happening **online**, the person might pretend to be a child of the same age or a celebrity. The person might use text, instant messaging, online chat and so on to build a relationship with the child.

Signs of grooming in children aged 0-11 years

Many of the signs of grooming can look like **normal adult-child relationships**, which is why grooming is difficult to spot.

But here are some signs that might indicate that your child or the child you're caring for is being groomed.

Your child:

- has unexplained gifts like new toys or clothes
- doesn't want to talk about where the gifts came from
- is getting lots of messages from someone they only know online
- talks a lot about a particular adult or older child or wants to spend a lot of time with them
- wants to go alone when they meet a particular adult or older person
- doesn't want to talk about what they've been doing
- stops telling you about their day or asking for your advice
- spends more time alone in their room.

Signs of grooming in teenagers

These signs might indicate that your teenage child or the teenage child you're caring for is being groomed.

Your child:

- is in a relationship with a much older boyfriend or girlfriend
- has unexplained gifts like clothes, jewellery or electronics
- doesn't want to talk about where the gifts came from
- doesn't want to talk about what they've been doing, or lies about it
- is skipping school or sporting activities
- is spending less time with friends or changes friendship groups suddenly
- is getting lots of messages from someone they only know online
- doesn't want other people around when they're with a particular girlfriend or boyfriend
- doesn't talk with you about thoughts or feelings anymore.

Signs someone is grooming parents

Grooming often involves gaining the trust of a child's family or carers.

These signs might indicate that someone is grooming you or your family with the aim of sexually abusing your child or the child you're caring for.

The person:

- offers to take your child to sports or other activities, or offers to babysit or take your child camping
- offers to mentor your child, individually coach your child, and so on
- buys gifts for your family
- offers to do things for your family, like repairs or gardening
- shows an interest in your child's activities, wellbeing, school grades or other areas of your child's life
- compliments your family and parenting
- plays innocently with your child and touches your child in a non-sexual way while you're around – this gets you and your child used to the idea of physical contact

- tries to start a flirtatious or romantic relationship with you.

What to do if you're concerned that someone is grooming a child

Grooming isn't always obvious. Groomers work hard to gain trust and respect from children and families. So it's important to **trust your instincts if something doesn't feel right**.

It's also important to:

- watch out for signs that you or your child is being groomed
- stop the person from being alone with your child
- avoid letting the person do favours for your family
- ask other families who know the person what their relationship with the person is like
- find out how your child feels about the person by asking questions like 'Do you like the way cousin A acts around you?' or 'Mr G likes a lot of your Instagram posts. Does he follow you on any other social media?'
- encourage your child to talk by asking questions like 'Is anything worrying you?' or 'Are you OK?'
- contact the [National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service](#) for advice by calling **1800RESPECT** or **1800 737 732**.

This can help you make the best possible decisions to keep your child safe.

Source: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/safety/online-safety/grooming-signs>

Further information:

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/understanding-online-grooming>