



## A GUIDE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

# Recognise online grooming

### What is grooming?

When someone builds a friendship with a child, in order to trick them, take advantage of them or abuse them, this is called grooming. Grooming can happen in person, online, or a combination of both.

A person who 'grooms' a child is often called a predator.

### What do online predators do?

Generally, an online predator will join any online platform that children use. This may include social media, gaming, apps etc. They will send out a lot of friend requests, hoping that someone will accept their request. This is one of the key reasons you should never accept friend requests from anyone you don't know in real life.

Predators will create a profile which makes it seem as though they are a young person. They spend a lot of time trying to create an identity which makes them seem trustworthy, fun and a great friend to have.

At the start, an online predator may pretend that they just want to talk to a child. They will ask lots of questions and they may seem very caring. Remember, this is just an act, so they can get people to trust them.

Predators are usually looking for some kind of sexual interaction. This may include requesting nude photos, videos of sexual acts or in person meetings. They work hard to do what is called 'normalising' when they request something sexual. This is their way to make inappropriate requests seem reasonable. They might sound very caring and make comments such as "everyone feels a bit nervous at first."

### Am I being groomed?

Predators lie. They are very skilled at tricking and it can be very hard to work out that they are not actually who they say they are.

Initially, being groomed might feel like being in a genuine relationship. This is because the predator is trying to build trust.

There are, however, some warning signs you can watch out for.

- A grooming situation can become intense very quickly. A predator will make regular contact through all hours of the day and night – they don't have any boundaries. It may also continue over a period of time and seem as though it is a developing relationship.
- Predators may send a nude picture – although it's not usually a picture of themselves, because they are making up their online identity. They are very dishonest.
- Because what they are doing is a crime, predators don't want anyone else to know about it. They will tell the young person they are grooming to keep their 'friendship' secret.

- Predators may give presents to young people. They don't save presents for special occasions. Sometimes the presents they give are expensive or inappropriate. These are not gestures of friendship; they are a way to make a young person like and trust them.
- Predators are not just looking for online friendship. They expect something in return. This means that can get very intense, impatient and angry if they don't get a response, or they don't get the response they want. Sometimes they will turn to threats or blackmail to get what they were hoping for.

Remember:

- Positive and safe relationships do not involve trickery or manipulation
- Trust your instincts; if something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

### What should I do if I think I might be getting groomed?

#### Talk to someone

If a young person thinks they might be getting groomed, they might feel embarrassed or scared. That's completely understandable. Although it may seem a bit awkward, the truth is it's never something a young person should feel ashamed about.

It's really important to talk to an adult and get their help. A young person could try talking to their parents or a teacher. They should keep talking until someone listens to them, believes them and does what they can to help.

#### Collect Evidence

If a young person suspects they are being groomed, it's a good idea to collect some evidence. Before blocking anyone or deleting any material they could take screenshots (noting times and dates where possible).

However, it's best to get an adult's help with this. If anyone is 'in possession' of any material involving sexualised images it can be considered a crime – even if they just took a screenshot for the purpose of using it as evidence. The police can provide guidance about what steps to take.

#### Get professional support

A young person could talk to a school counsellor, psychologist or chaplain. There are also supportive organisations such as Kids Helpline or headspace. It's really important to remember that grooming is a form of child abuse. Child abuse is NEVER a child's fault. It is also never something a child needs to handle on their own.

It is illegal for someone to groom a child. Predators are committing a crime, and it should be reported to the police.