

Keeping children safe online

Advice for libraries

Grooming is when someone builds a trusting relationship with a child in order to exploit, manipulate and abuse them. 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.

During lockdown, around 350 cases of online child sexual abuse were passed to the police every week – a 10 per cent increase from 2019 (The Guardian, 2020). We must protect children from online groomers. And we can do this by educating ourselves and children about healthy and unhealthy online relationships.

Grooming and Online Relationships

Online groomer tactics

- Hiding their age/identity – this could be lying about who they are or acting as scouts for industries like football or modelling
- Studying the child's interests before making contact, to forge a false bond
- Contacting them via social media, texts, emails, calls, video chat and on other apps
- Offering them 'special' attention, advice and understanding
- Buying them gifts, including in-game purchases or rewards
- Isolating them from their friends and family to make the child feel dependent on them
- Using blackmail and secrets to control, frighten, shame and/or intimidate them
- Threatening that they will harm themselves if the child didn't make contact or left them

Signs of grooming to look out for

[Grooming is often discovered not disclosed](#), as many children don't realise they're being groomed, so it's vital that we know what signs to look out for:

In children:

- Being secretive about what they're doing online
- Mentioning an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- Spending noticeably more or less time online

In adults, who don't have children with them:

- Spending too much time near or in children-specific areas
- An unusual interest in children's activities
- Volunteering to support with an activity but insisting no other adults are needed

What to do if you think a child is being groomed

- **If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999**
- Otherwise, familiarise yourself with the Youth Libraries Group [Safe Place for Children guidelines](#)
- Inform your line manager, supervisor or a senior staff member of your concerns **immediately**
- Contact your local safeguarding board
- You can call the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000**
- If you're worried about online abuse or the way someone has been communicating online, you can make a report to [CEOP](#)

Educating yourself and children

Helping children understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships can give them the confidence to speak out about sexual abuse and exploitation. Here are some useful resources the NSPCC recommend:

- Our [online safety elearning course](#)
- CEOP's [Thinkuknow website](#)
- Childline's advice on [healthy vs unhealthy relationships](#), including steps children can take if they feel unsafe in a relationship
- Childnet's [Project deSHAME](#) on online sexual harassment
- The [Professionals Online Safety Helpline](#) for anyone working with children and young people
- Our Talk [PANTS campaign](#) which helps parents and young children talk about sexual abuse
 - You could use The PANTS activity packs to run a library learning session
- Childnet's [Myth vs. Reality: PSHE Toolkit](#)