

WHAT IS GROOMING?



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A Guide for Parents
and Caregivers

UNDERSTANDING GROOMING

Grooming is a process used by predators to gain a child's trust and build a relationship with the intention of exploiting them for personal, financial, or sexual gain. Grooming can happen in person or online, making it more difficult for parents and caregivers to recognize.



WHO CAN BE A VICTIM?



A person who's being groomed usually doesn't have one specific "look." Grooming is about behavior and influence, not appearance. The signs tend to show up in how someone acts, feels, or how their relationships change over time. It's important to remember: someone being groomed often doesn't realize it's happening. The person doing the grooming usually builds trust slowly and manipulates emotions. Here are some patterns that can show up:

Emotional & behavioral changes

- Becoming unusually secretive, especially about a specific person
- Sudden mood swings—anxiety, irritability, or withdrawal
- Acting more mature or sexualized than is typical for their age
- Defending or being overly loyal to someone whom others feel uneasy about



Changes in relationships

- Pulling away from friends or family
- Spending a lot of time communicating privately with one person (texts, DMs, calls)
- Referring to that person as "the only one who understands me."

Unusual gifts or attention

- Receiving gifts, money, or special treatment without a clear reason
- Talking about someone who gives them lots of compliments or makes them feel "chosen."

Boundaries shifting

- Becoming more comfortable with secrecy ("don't tell anyone about us")
- Gradually accepting behavior they previously would have found uncomfortable

Possible distress signals

- Increased anxiety, depression, or confusion
- Changes in sleep, appetite, or school/work performance



THE GROOMING PROCESS



○ Targeting a Victim

Groomers often target children who have low self-esteem, family conflict, lack of supervision, recent emotional distress, and/or unmet needs or vulnerabilities.

○ Gaining Trust

Groomers often appear friendly, supportive, and understanding. They may bond with children over shared interests, offer encouragement and attention, and position themselves as someone the child can talk to.

○ Meeting Needs

Once trust is established, the groomer may begin fulfilling the child's tangible and emotional needs, including but not limited to: money, food, clothing, a place to stay, attention, affection, validation, and a sense of belonging.

○ Isolation

Groomers often attempt to distance the child from family, friends, or trusted adults. They may encourage secrecy, create conflict between the child and loved ones, and convince the child that others "don't understand".

○ Exploitation

Groomers use the trust gained from their victims to manipulate, pressure, threaten, or force the victim into performing acts they are uncomfortable with in exchange for their unfulfilled needs being met (i.e., money, food, belonging).

○ Maintaining Control

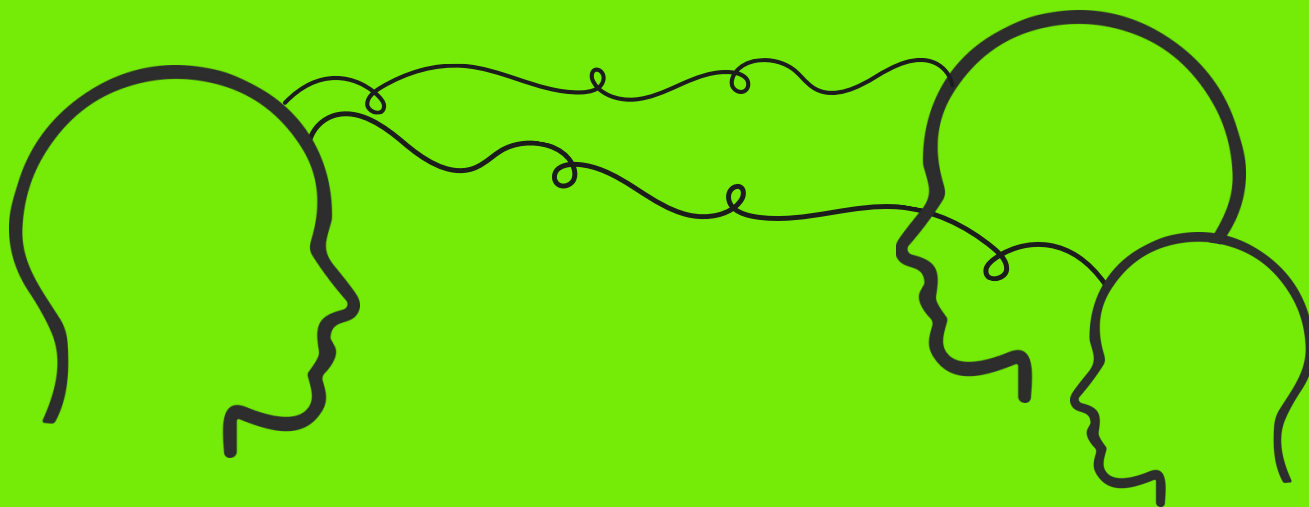
Once exploitation begins, the groomer works to maintain control over the child and pressure them into compliance. They may use intimidation, violence, guilt, bribery, or continued isolation to keep the child compliant.

"I met a girl named T*****. She eventually asked me if I wanted to go to Houston. I'm like yea okay. We then hung out on Bourbon Street. We were drinking and smoking. [The student is clearly under the age of 21]. I was introduced to this guy [while on Bourbon]. The guy asked me if I wanted to make some money. I already knew what it was about, so I got out of there as fast as I could."

- A student who shared her experience with an attempt to be recruited into human trafficking while Safe Schools Louisiana was conducting a human trafficking presentation with the Covenant House.

GROOMING DOESN'T ONLY TARGET CHILDREN

Perpetrators often groom parents and caregivers as well. They may present themselves as helpful, trustworthy, and supportive in order to gain access to the child.



COMMON TACTICS INCLUDE:

- Building a friendly relationship with parents
- Offering to help with childcare or transportation
- Volunteering in youth organizations
- Positioning themselves as a trusted mentor or role model

The goal is often to gain unsupervised access to the child. Research shows that most child abuse victims know their abuser. In many cases, the perpetrator is a relative, friend, acquaintance, or neighbor. Recognizing warning signs early can help prevent serious harm and trauma.



WARNING SIGNS AND RED FLAGS



Identifying a Target

A target could be a child who receives little or no adult supervision, is struggling with low self-esteem, or whose basic needs are not consistently met



Acquiring Access

The groomer becomes heavily involved in youth organizations or activities. They insist on spending time alone with the child (sleepovers, overnight trips, camping) and present these opportunities as “helping the parents.”

Building Credibility and Likeability

The groomer has a strong reputation in the community. They show favoritism toward a specific child and give them special attention, gifts, or privileges. They frequently communicate with the child.

The Abuse

The groomer asks a child about their sexual knowledge or experiences, shares explicit sexual stories, exposes themselves or observes the child undressing, shows them pornography, and gradually introduces inappropriate touching.

Damage Control

After abuse occurs, perpetrators often attempt to prevent the child from telling anyone by: encouraging secrecy, using threats or intimidation, offering bribes or rewards, and blaming the child for what happened.



HOW CAN WE PROTECT OUR CHILDREN?



Parents and caregivers can take proactive steps to protect children:

- Learn about grooming and child exploitation.
- Teach children about personal boundaries and safe vs. unsafe touch.
- Help children identify trusted adults they can talk to.
- Monitor online activity and digital communication.
- Maintain open and honest conversations with your child.

The first step to keeping your children safe is **AWARENESS**. Knowing what apps your child is using, educating them about online safety, and setting boundaries can help prevent problems before they even start.

1 Bark

- Monitors texts, emails, and social media - Alerts user for signs of cyberbullying, depression, inappropriate content, and predators



2 Google Family Link (Android)

- Manage screen time - Approve or block apps - Track location

3 Apple Screen Time & Family Sharing (Apple)

- Monitor screen time - Set app limits - Restrict purchases
- Manage content filters

4 OurPact

- Set screen time schedules - Block apps - Filter websites
- GPS locator



Crimestoppers Safe Schools Louisiana offers educational presentations on cyber safety and human trafficking awareness for parents, students, and educators to help recognize risks and stay informed. Remember, open communication, awareness, and supervision are some of the most effective ways to keep children safe.

ABOUT US

Crimestoppers Safe Schools Louisiana is an anonymous reporting software, specifically developed for schools to provide a flow of information about crime and potentially dangerous situations on campus. Students who use this software are not required to register or provide any identifying information, keeping the tipster anonymous.

WHERE CAN I REPORT?

The **Safe Schools LA** app allows you to report any incident or future incident that threatens students' safety. This includes bullying, human trafficking, child abuse, mental health issues, and many more.



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Made Available By CrimeStoppers, Inc.

CONTACT US

We hope that this “What is Grooming?” informative packet has educated you on how to keep you and your children safe. If you want more information, please visit our sites at CrimeStoppersGNO.org or SafeSchoolsLA.com

Call Our Office at 504-837-8477

Email us at SafeSchoolsInfo@CrimeStoppersgno.org

GET THE APP

Download the Safe Schools LA App to
ANONYMOUSLY report a crime or potential crime.



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