



What is online grooming?

Online grooming involves a person trying to set up a sexually abusive situation through the use of cyber-technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones. Online groomers might find and choose their victims online, or might encourage an offline situation to go online (e.g., asking a child in a shopping centre for their email address, and then beginning to groom them online).

Groomers try to establish a 'relationship' with the victim.

In most cases they want to be seen as a trusted and respected peer or caring and understanding older person. Sometimes they might pose as someone needing help, or being in distress. Being in this relationship with the groomer can make the victim less suspicious of their actions and intentions. It can be confusing for the victim, when they are in a trusted relationship with someone who begins to do things that make them feel uncomfortable.

Some victims may ask, 'how can this be sexual abuse when they are so nice to me?'

Not only do groomers aim to get victims to believe things which are not true (lies), but they also try to manipulate them to *suspend their disbelief*, and abandon their usual sense of caution and skepticism.

- ***Groomers try to find out more information about their potential victims.***

For example, how old they are, what they look like, their mobile phone number, when they are home alone, if they are emotionally vulnerable, lonely, feeling neglected by parents and caregivers, have been abused in the past, and if plying them with gifts, money, drugs or alcohol is an option. Some groomers use viruses or Trojan programs to control aspects of their victim's computers in order to get more information. Some have even used a virus to turn on their victim's webcam, so that they can watch and take pics and videos of their victims without them knowing!

- ***Groomers try to establish the risk in going further with their plans.***

For example, they might try to find out if there are adults around who might intervene, and how likely the victim is to report the grooming. Children and young people who have physical and or psychological challenges (special needs) might find it more difficult to report abuse. Children who seem neglected, alienated from immediate family, are not easily believed by adults, or have been abused before, may also be particularly vulnerable and attractive as victims.

- ***Groomers might try to establish what the consequences will be of their victims 'telling on them'.***

Potential victims who feel that reporting online abuse will lead to their parents or caregivers taking away their computer or mobile phone, will probably be far less likely to report the grooming and abuse. This makes them more attractive as potential victims for the groomer. In addition, if a young person has been told not to engage in chat because of the potential dangers, yet does so anyway, they might not tell a parent or caregiver if they feel that they are being groomed, so that they do not get into trouble.

- ***Groomers often try to isolate their victims from those around them.***

This not only makes the victim more reliant on the groomer, but also reduces their opportunities to talk to others about what is happening. Groomers might try to do this by sabotaging the victim's friendships with peers and family members.

'Your school friends probably don't really like you anyway, and talk behind your back'

'Your parents don't really care about you and how you feel. I care about you more than they do'

- ***Groomers might use threats and blackmail to achieve compliance and control.***

Some common examples are threats to hurt or kill family members and pets if the child does not comply or tell, or threatening to tell parents that the child has acted inappropriately (e.g. sexually) online.

- ***Groomers are sometimes interested in their victim's social networks.***

The initial victim might serve as the 'index victim', in that they are used to access others (e.g. friends and younger siblings).

- ***The process of grooming itself might be exciting and stimulating for the groomer.***

Grooming might be something they enjoy and find rewarding, regardless whether it leads to abusing the victim in person or not. This has been termed 'hit-and-run' grooming.

- ***Groomers can expose their victims to inappropriate and illegal sexual material.***

Such materials might include: pornographic images (pics), videos, drawings and animations, text messages, emails, stories, sound bites and music. Some of this material will be age restricted (i.e. illegal to show or sell to those under a certain age) or illegal for all people. [You can click here for more information on what is legal, age-restricted, and illegal or "objectionable" in New Zealand.](#) Some sexual material which is not illegal or age-restricted, may still be offensive, upsetting and traumatising for some people. It must be remembered that although the exposure of the victim to such materials might be part of a process designed to facilitate further sexual abuse, the process itself is abusive, and might be a crime.

- ***Groomers can initiate cyber-sexual abuse online.***

This might be a uni- or bidirectional interaction between the groomer and their victim (e.g., a one or two way exchange of sexual pictures or text), and might involve the victim engaging in sexual behaviour in response to, and at the request of the groomer. The groomer might do

this exclusively via the keyboard (by text) or might use video, web/phone cam or audio technology to observe or exhibit the sexual behaviours.

- ***Groomers might actually believe that they are establishing genuine, caring and 'normal' relationships with their victims.***

Some believe it is quite appropriate and healthy (and legal) for an adult to have a sexualised relationship with a child. They are very wrong!

Note: Bear in mind that many of the behaviours listed here will also apply to offline grooming.