



HOW GROOMING ACTUALLY STARTS ONLINE

IT'S NOT ALWAYS SCARY. IT'S OFTEN SUBTLE.

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship with a child online to gain their trust and manipulate, exploit or harm them.

Here's what parents need to know.



1 IN 5

young people has been contacted by a stranger online

NSPCC (2023)



35%

of young people say someone tried to befriend them online

Ofcom (2023)



67%

of victims say they thought the person was a friend

NW3C (2022)



MOST

grooming happens in plain sight, not in the "dark web"

CEOP (2023)

HOW IT HAPPENS: THE 6 STAGES OF ONLINE GROOMING

1 TARGETING

They look for someone who seems vulnerable.



- They search on social media, games, forums, or chat apps.
- They look for clues in profiles, posts or conversations.

2 FRIENDSHIP

They build a connection and gain trust.



- They compliment, listen and show "interest".
- They may pretend to be the same age.
- They move the chat to private spaces.

3 TRUST & BONDING

They make the child feel special.



- They share personal stories or "secrets".
- They say things like "You just get me."
- They give attention and validation.

4 FILLING A NEED

They identify a need and position themselves as the answer.



- They find out what upsets, worries or stresses the child.
- They say, "I'm the only one who understands."

5 ISOLATION

They slowly separate the child from others.



- They criticise parents, friends or others.
- They say things like "Don't tell anyone, they won't get it."
- They create secrecy.

6 CONTROL & EXPLOITATION

They gain power and may ask for more.



- They may pressure for photos, videos or offline meetings.
- They threaten, blame or manipulate.
- The goal: control.

WARNING SIGNS: SOMETHING MIGHT BE WRONG IF YOUR CHILD...

- ⚠ Spends a lot of time talking to someone online.
- ⚠ Gets upset when they can't go online.
- ⚠ Hides their screen or turns devices off quickly.

- Is secretive about who they're talking to.
- Becomes distant, defensive or moody.
- Receives gifts, money or asks to keep secrets.
- Talks about meeting an online friend.



WHAT PROTECTS KIDS MOST

- ✓ Open conversations
Build trust so they'll talk.
- ✓ Healthy boundaries
Set clear rules and expectations.
- ✓ Know their world
Understand the apps, games and trends.
- ✓ Teach critical thinking
Help them spot red flags.
- ✓ Be involved
Notice changes. Ask. Listen. Support.



Trust + Communication + Awareness = Protection

The goal isn't to scare kids. It's to empower them.

CONVERSATION STARTERS THAT WORK

- 💬 "Who do you like talking to online?"
- 💬 "What's fun about that game/app?"
- 💬 "Has anyone ever made you feel weird or uncomfortable online?"
- 💬 "What would you do if someone asked for a photo or a secret?"
- 💬 "I'm always here if something doesn't feel right."



SAFETY RULES THAT HELP

- 🚫 Never share personal info
No name, address, school or photos.
- 🚫 Don't share or send nudes
It's unsafe, illegal and can't be taken back.
- 🚫 Don't meet online friends
People can lie about who they are.
- 🗣 Tell a trusted adult
If something feels wrong, speak up.
- 🚫 Block and report
You don't have to respond.

RED FLAGS TO SPOT

- 🚫 Love-bombing or over-the-top attention
- 🚫 Asking for secrets
- 🚫 Moving to private chat
- 🚫 Pressuring for photos
- 🚫 Jealousy or control
- 🚫 Threats or blackmail
- 🚫 Offline meeting requests

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE WORRIED

- Stay calm and listen.
Reacting calmly helps them open up.
- Don't blame your child.
They need your support, not guilt.
- Collect evidence.
Take screenshots, save messages.
- Report and block.
Use in-app tools and report to the platform.
- Get help.
Contact CEOP or your local support services.



WHERE TO GET HELP

CEOP (UK)
ceop.police.uk

Report online abuse or worrying contact

Childline
0800 1111
childline.org.uk

Talk about anything

The Mix
0808 808 4994
themix.org.uk

Support for young people

Internet Matters
internetmatters.org

Advice and guides for parents



In an emergency, contact the police.



Your child's safety starts with trust. Stay close. Stay curious. Stay their safe place.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. YOU JUST HAVE TO BE THERE.



NEED TO TALK? CHILDLINE 0800 1111
You're not alone. Help is always available.