



GROOMING:

How to spot it and how to stop it

What is grooming?

Grooming is a tactic in which someone methodically builds a trusting relationship with a child, young adult, or someone in a vulnerable position to manipulate, coerce, or force them to engage in sexual activities. It can take place in any type of relationship, but it occurs most often in cases where there is a power imbalance. It is important to remember that those who cause harm often start with grooming family and community members which can increase the likelihood of disbelief when a child discloses.

Typically, by the time abuse occurs, the individual has gained trust from the family and community and has access to alone time with the child or young adult. Due to the manipulation, victims can often struggle to recognize and/or report the abuse. Because of its insidious nature, grooming often goes unnoticed. Some survivors of sexual abuse explain that the grooming process was just as harmful to them as the abuse itself.

Signs that might indicate someone is grooming

- Targeting a specific individual or “type” of individual (particular age, gender, appearance, etc.)
- Building trust with families and communities to gain increased access to the child or young adult
- Building trust with the child or young adult
- Finding excuses to spend time alone with the child or young adult
- Isolating a child or young adult from caretakers, peers, and friends
- Requesting that the child or young adult keeps secrets from other caregivers and friends
- A pattern of unnecessary touch, such as back pats or massaging, putting an arm around them, etc.
- Giving gifts to the child or young adult without an appropriate occasion
- Frequent contact with the child or young adult via social media or text
- Emotionally identifying with youth
- Taking excessive interest or engagement in children’s media
- Spending an excessive amount of time around youth
- Expressing unusual interest in youth’s sexual development such as commenting on body changes during puberty

About 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys will experience sexual abuse before they turn 18.

In 91% of incidents, the person abusing a child is someone the child’s family knows and trusts.

Signs that someone may be experiencing grooming abuse

- Extreme mood swings and changes
- Sleep disturbances, such as nightmares
- Inappropriate and/or excessive sexual behaviors, conversations, or knowledge
- Avoidance or fear of specific places, people, or activities
- Decreased interest in school, work, friends, or hobbies
- Change in academic performance or behavior
- Increase in unexplained health issues, such as frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Being overly or fearfully obedient to other caretaker or people in positions of power
- Pain or infection to the genital areas of youth, especially if this occurs frequently
- Regressive behaviors, such as thumb sucking or bedwetting in youth

Even if you are not a mandated reporter of child abuse, we all have a responsibility to take action when we suspect or identify child abuse. Child abuse is preventable, and every member of our community has a role in keeping kids safe. Here are some ways you can help to respond to and prevent child sexual abuse.

- Trust your gut. If a situation does not feel right, it might not be right.
- Ensure that any program where adults interact with youth or vulnerable populations has a thorough screening process and strong internal policies regarding those interactions. For example: most child sexual abuse occurs in one-on-one situations. Organizations can develop policies that limit one-on-one interactions between adults and children or between older and younger children.
- Advocate for organizations to create, update, and enforce policies outlining appropriate staff boundaries with those they are serving.
- Engage in ongoing training efforts to build an understanding of grooming and sexual abuse in order to recognize red flags and intervene appropriately.
- Be present and active if something concerns you, and insert yourself to diffuse the situation and support the person you're concerned for if it's safe to do so.
- Voice your concerns directly if you see inappropriate behavior and speak with peers and supervisors to ensure your concerns are addressed.
- Check in with a child if you see someone pushing their boundaries, and leave the door open for more conversations in the future.
- Model healthy relationships and uphold boundaries to demonstrate healthy interactions in your community.
- Ensure that any older youth supervising younger children are adequately trained and supervised, and that youth engaging with their peers at any age are also properly supervised at all times. It's important to note that 30-50% of child sexual abuse cases involve one child harming another.

“The grooming was the most devastating part of it. I was so young when it started. Psychologically, it had a huge effect on my personality and how I viewed myself.”

- Gail, RAINN Speakers Bureau,
rainn.org/survivor-stories

If you suspect or know that a child is being abused, call the DCF Careline at 800-842-2288. If you are a mandated reporter, become familiar with that responsibility, as well as any other reporting mandates or policies that exist in your workplace.

Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence | 96 Pitkin Street, East Hartford, CT 06108
860-282-9881 | 860-291-9335 (fax) | info@endsexualviolencect.org | endsexualviolencect.org

Statewide 24 Hour Toll Free Hotline
1-888-999-5545 English (Call or Text) | 1-888-568-8332 Español