

# Online Grooming : Know the signs. Protect your child.

## What Is Online Grooming?

Online grooming is a form of child sexual abuse. It happens when an adult uses the internet to deliberately build trust and emotional connection with a child, hiding their true intention to exploit, manipulate, or sexually abuse them, either online or in person.

Groomers are skilled at making children feel special while slowly isolating them from family and friends. They are cold and calculated, showing no empathy for the harm they cause. Victims may be pressured into sharing intimate images, meeting in person, or even committing crimes. The impact is devastating, leading to blackmail, shame, trauma, and long-term mental health struggles. Grooming can happen on any platform, gaming chats, social media, or messaging apps, and the warning signs are often subtle.

## Groomers may:

- Pretend to be a child or teen to fit in
- Use flattery, praise, or gifts to build trust
- Gradually introduce sexual content or behaviour
- Ask for nude photos, videos, or to meet offline
- Threaten or blackmail to keep the child silent

## Who's at risk?

Groomers don't target one type of child. However, children who:

- Feel lonely, isolated, or anxious
- Are neurodivergent, have SEND, or struggle socially
- Are in care, or have difficult home lives
- Use live streaming, games, or anonymous chat apps

...may be more vulnerable.

## Where to get help or report grooming



## Other support services

CEOP (Report Exploitation) - [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)  
NSPCC Helpline - 0800 800 5000  
Childline (for under 19s) - 0800 1111 - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)  
Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) - [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)  
The Cyber Helpline - [www.thecyberhelpline.com](http://www.thecyberhelpline.com)

## Legal facts all parents should know

- Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is a criminal offence in the UK for any adult to intentionally meet or communicate with a child under 16 online with the intent to engage in sexual activity.
- It is also illegal to:
  - Send sexual messages to a child
  - Encourage a child to produce or share sexual images
  - Coerce or manipulate a child for sexual gratification (even without physical contact)

**“Even if the child agrees to talk or share things, grooming is never their fault. It is a crime.”**  
**- CEOP / NCA (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command)**

## Signs to look out for

Your child may be at risk if you notice:

- Sudden secrecy around their online life
- Staying up late to chat privately
- Unexplained gifts or new devices
- Signs of distress, anxiety, anger, or shame
- Possession of explicit content, or deleted chat history
- Using apps or accounts you haven't seen before

## What can parents do?

### Stay informed

- Learn how grooming works. Watch short guides from **ThinkUKnow** and **NSPCC Learning**.

### Create a safe space to talk

- Ask about their online life often but casually
- Reassure them: *“If anything ever makes you feel weird, scared or unsure online—you can always come to me. You're never in trouble.”*

### Set Healthy Online Boundaries

- Check apps and friends lists together
- Use parental settings, privacy tools, and screen limits
- Keep devices in shared family areas when possible

### Teach Them to Spot Red Flags

- Anyone asking for photos or secrets
- People who say *“Don't tell anyone”* or *“I'll get in trouble”*
- Grown-ups pretending to be kids
- Emotional pressure or guilt trips

## Remember

**Even if your child has shared something personal or explicit, they are not to blame. The responsibility always lies with the adult.**