



# Online Grooming

## *Responding to Online Grooming*

Online grooming occurs when an adult, or older youth, targets a minor online to build trust, manipulate emotions, and gradually normalize inappropriate behavior with the goal of sexual exploitation, control, or abuse.

Grooming may happen on:

- Social media and messaging apps
- Gaming platforms and voice chats
- Forums, livestreams, or comment sections
- School or interest-based communities

Grooming can be fast or slow, subtle or overt, and often escalates over time.

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

## Online Grooming – Do This First

### Treat This as a Safety Emergency

Online grooming is not a learning moment or a discipline issue.

Act quickly if:

- Sexual topics or images are introduced
- Secrecy is encouraged (“don’t tell your parents”)
- Gifts, money, or in-game items are offered
- The person asks to move to private or encrypted apps
- Threats, pressure, or guilt are used

### Stop unsafe contact, preserve evidence, and report

- Do not allow the child to continue engaging
- Do not confront the groomer directly
- Do not attempt to “handle it privately”

Stopping contact protects the child and prevents escalation.

### Preserve Evidence Carefully

Before blocking or deleting anything:

- Preserve evidence without forwarding, reposting, or downloading explicit child images; keep account details, URLs, and messages as directed by NCMEC or law enforcement.





- Messages
  - Usernames and profiles
  - Images or videos
  - Platform names
- Record:
  - Dates and times
  - Any requests for secrecy, images, or meetings

Do not forward, repost, download, or ask anyone to send explicit child images.

## Protect the Child First

### Reassure the Child

- Tell them they are not in trouble
- Emphasize that the adult is at fault
- Keep your tone calm and supportive
- Avoid blame, anger, or interrogation

Children often fear punishment more than harm.

### Secure Accounts and Devices

- Block the groomer after evidence is preserved
- Increase privacy settings
- Review friend/follower lists
- Check for additional accounts or contacts

If explicit images were shared, do not attempt cleanup alone, report immediately.

## Report the Exploitation

### If a Minor Is Involved — Report Immediately

- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)
  - CyberTipline: <https://report.cybertip.org>
  - Phone: 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)
  - NCMEC coordinates directly with law enforcement and platforms.
- Law Enforcement
  - Call 911 if there is immediate danger
  - Otherwise, contact your local police department to file a report
- Ohio Resources
  - Ohio Attorney General – Crime Victim Services & Cybercrime
  - <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov>
  - Victim Assistance Hotline: 800-282-0515





- Ohio law addresses conduct often involved in grooming, including child exploitation, importuning, harassment, and electronic communications used for abuse and sexual exploitation of minors.
- Geauga County
  - Geauga County Sheriff's Office
  - <https://www.geaugasheriff.org>
  - Local police department (non-emergency) for documentation and follow-up

## If Explicit Images Were Shared

- This may constitute child sexual abuse material (CSAM)
- Do not forward, store, or attempt to delete everything yourself
- Report immediately to NCMEC
- Follow law-enforcement guidance exactly
- Even if the child shared images voluntarily, they are not at fault.

## Emotional & Crisis Support

Online grooming can cause fear, shame, confusion, and trauma.

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- If you may hurt yourself or feel unable to stay safe, call or text 988.

Professional counseling or victim advocacy may be appropriate.

## Recovery – Ongoing Protection

- Continue documenting any re-contact attempts
- Monitor platforms for fake or linked accounts
- Revisit privacy and safety settings regularly
- Keep open, non-judgmental communication with the child
- Groomers often attempt to re-establish contact.

## How to Reduce Online Grooming Risk

- Teach children: Adults do not ask kids for secrecy
- Normalize telling a trusted adult immediately
- Reinforce that discomfort is a warning sign
- Encourage asking questions without fear of punishment
- Adults should stay engaged, not invasive, in online activity

