

Fact Sheet

Online Grooming

Online grooming is conducted in a similar fashion to grooming in the real world and is often a preliminary step to procuring, where the adult through the words and actions attempt to loosen the child's inhibitions regarding sexual activity or heighten their curiosity by sending pornographic material or talking about sexual matters. The aim of the predator is to eventually meet the child in person for the purposes of sexual activity. The process often starts with the sending to the child of pornographic images so as to normalise the requests, and then moves to requesting the child send naked images of themselves or perform a sex act on a web cam.

There are risks for all children who use the Internet or online services. Teenagers are particularly at risk because they often use the computer unsupervised and are more likely than younger children to participate in online discussions about more personal issues such as sexual activity. Young people are naturally curious and will engage in online discussions about things that they would not openly discuss in the real world.

Online predators use all forms of technology in order to connect with children. E-mail, instant messaging programs, bulletin boards, chat rooms, social media and gaming sites are all used to connect with a child and gain their trust. They are supremely clever and have an ability to connect with those who are vulnerable or who make poor online decisions about whom they allow into their online lives. Children believe that those who are 'nice' online will be the same in the real world and of course this is not always the case. Young people firmly believe that they have the ability to identify a paedophile online and would never talk to one. The reality sadly is very different. Children take risks and can be quite naive. It can be exciting for them to chat to people they did not know before. Many are on social networking sites where they like to share personal information, which provides a fertile hunting ground for those waiting to identify a victim and gain their trust. Online offenders are increasingly adept at 'targeting' those who were making themselves vulnerable online, by not having for example, privacy settings.

Talking to your child about these issues is very important so that they know that you are aware of the issues that they may confront in their online lives. Let them know that they can tell you about any problems that they are having or if someone online makes them feel uncomfortable. Let them know it is OK to trust their instincts and if something feels odd or strange then it probably is. 'Good friends' don't make them do things that make them feel uncomfortable and check that your child has all the security settings in place for social networking sites to protect their online privacy.



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Signs your child could be at risk:

- ✚ You find pornography on your child's computer. Online Paedophiles will often send pornographic images in order to 'normalise' their requests for pictures
- ✚ Your child is receiving or making calls to numbers that you don't recognize • Your child is spending an increasing and / or an excessive amount of time online
- ✚ Your child is receiving unexplained gifts (mobile phones or extra credit vouchers are common) • Your child is becoming withdrawn and there is a distinct change in their behaviour
- ✚ Your child is becoming more secretive in what they are doing online and is trying to 'hide' what they are doing online
- ✚ There a people on your child's 'friends' list that you do not know and your child does not really know in the real world.

If you are at all concerned about the possibility of your child being a victim please contact your local Police Station for advice and assistance. If you believe your or any child is in immediate danger please phone 000.