



Ramsdens
Solicitors

How To
Protect Your Child Against
Online Grooming

What is grooming?

According to the NSPCC, grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child with the aim of gaining their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, exploitation or trafficking. Children can be groomed online or face-to-face, by a stranger or someone they know, such as a family member, friend or professional - they can be male or female and be any age.

Many children and young people do not understand that they are being groomed.

How does online grooming occur?

Groomers will hide their true intentions - and often their identity - to spend a long time gaining the trust of a child. In some cases, groomers may make attempts to gain the trust of a whole family, to allow them to be left alone with a child. If a groomer works with children, they may use similar tactics with their colleagues.



They will attempt to gain the trust of a child by:

- Pretending to be someone they are not, for example, by claiming they are the same age as the child they are talking to online
- Offering advice or understanding them
- Buying them gifts
- Using their professional position or reputation
- Taking them on trips, outings or holidays

In many cases, groomers will also:

Use intimidating tactics to control children

When trust has been established, groomers will often exploit the relationship by isolating the child from their friends or family and making them feel as if they are dependent on the groomer. It is not uncommon for them to use any means of power or control to make a child believe they have no choice but to do what the groomer wants them to.

Groomers will often blackmail the child involved, or make them feel ashamed or guilty to prevent them from telling anyone about what they are experiencing. Groomers can also introduce “secrets” as a way of ensuring the child does not tell anyone about it.

Use online social networks

Groomers often use social media websites, instant messaging apps or online gaming platforms to connect with a child. Due to the nature of such apps, the groomer can spend time learning about a young person's interests from their online profiles, and use this knowledge to help them to build up a relationship.

It is very easy for groomers to hide who they are online, and they may pretend to be a child and then chat to become friends with the children they are targeting.

When browsing social media profiles, groomers may:

- Look for usernames or comments that are flirtatious in nature or have a sexual meaning
- Target individuals who have made comments that could imply they have a low self esteem or are vulnerable

Very often, groomers will not target one child in particular, and could be sending messages to hundreds of young people in a bid to find out who will respond.


It is important to note that groomers no longer need to meet children in real life to abuse them. Increasingly, we are dealing with cases in which groomers have sexually exploited their victims by encouraging them to take part in sexual activity online.

What is meant by online sexual abuse?

Sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. It usually involves children being given money, gifts or affection as a result of performing sexual activities, or others performing sexual activities on them.

Children using the internet may be tricked into believing they are talking to someone their own age, and that they are in a loving, consensual relationship with this person.

Once they have carried out this act, abusers can threaten to send images, copies of conversations or video to their family unless they take part in other forms of sexual activity.



While using the internet, young people may be persuaded or forced to:

- Send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- Take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone
- Have sexual conversations by text or online

Keeping your child safe online

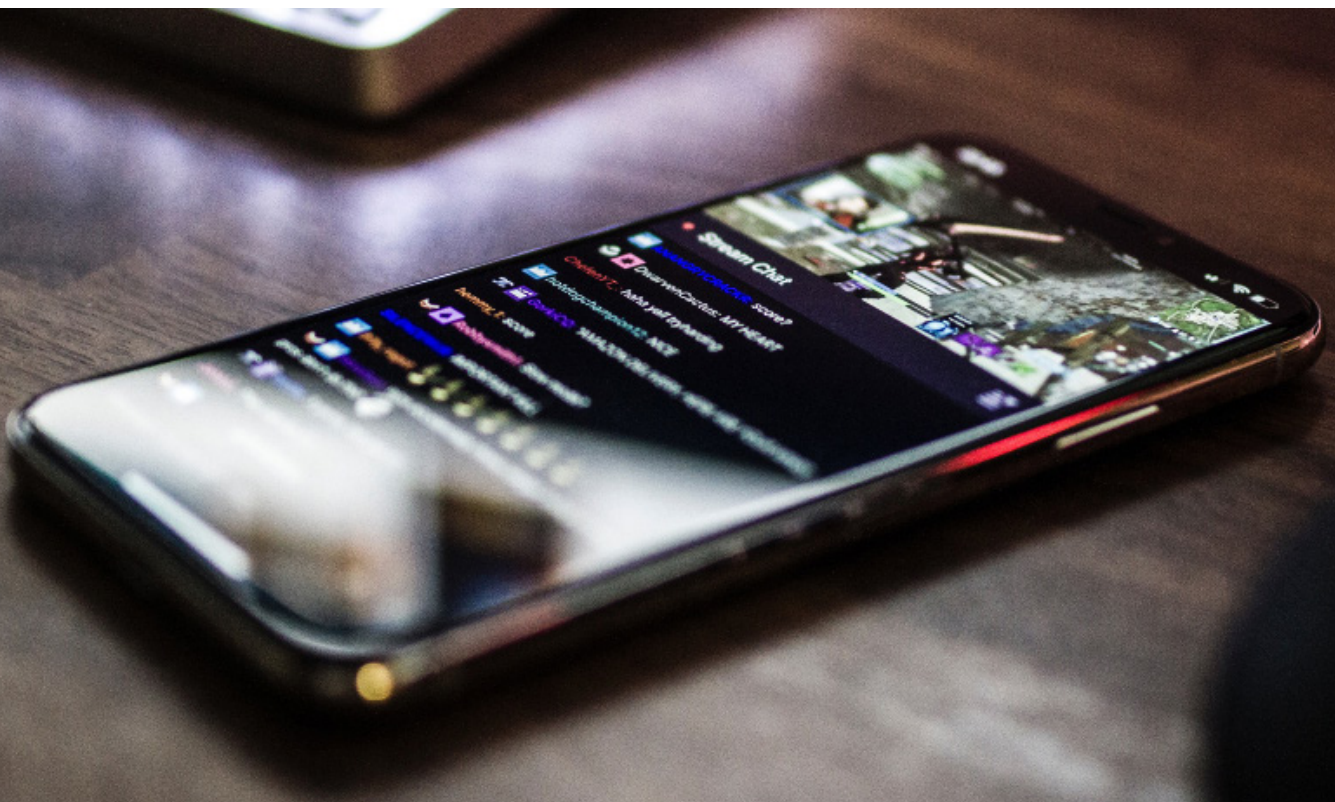
Young people and children go online for many reasons, including to make new friends and communicate with their classmates, they browse the internet, chat with others and play games.

Other popular online activities include:

- Searching for content using search engines, such as Google, Bing or Yahoo
- Creating, sharing, commenting on or posting 'likes' on images or videos through apps such as Instagram and Snapchat
- Keeping up-to-date with friends and celebrities by using social networking websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram
- Communicating with others using voice or video chat, as well as instant messenger. This can be carried out through messaging apps such as Whatsapp and in some games
- Play games through websites, apps or games consoles. They can watch other players or stream their own game through sites such as YouTube or Twitch
- Live stream videos through Facebook Live and Instagram Live
- Creating, sharing and watching videos on TikTok

Children and young people can also use the internet to learn new things, get help with homework and connect with their friends and family.

There are risks associated with going online, but by talking about the dangers, it is possible to keep your child safe.



Using connected technology and toys

The increasing popularity of connected toys and technology means that parents should familiarise themselves with how they work. Chances are, you may have already bought an internet-connected gift for your child, so you should be aware of the potential risks.

The Internet of Things

This term may sound confusing, but the Internet of Things - or IoT - refers to everyday objects that connect to the internet. IoT devices can be activated using voice commands, and can often be controlled remotely using an app. Many of these devices are Bluetooth-enabled, which means they can connect to nearby devices without having to connect to the internet.

Examples of IoT devices includes:

- Smart speakers - such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home
- Wearable technology - such as the Apple Watch

The Internet of Toys

As well as the devices outlined above, many toys now connect to the internet. This can be referred to as the Internet of Toys.

These products include:

- Toys with voice or image recognition
- App-enabled robots, drones and other mechanical toys - such as Dash & Dot

Many parents may not realise that IoT devices pose any dangers. However, they collect personal data and can be vulnerable to hacking, as there are no safeguards in place for internet-connected objects.

When using internet-connected devices, parents should:

- Read the manual
- Consider purchasing from renowned brands that offer greater security
- Use parental controls
- Check that connections are safe
- Protect items with a password
- Talk about online safety with their child
- Ask professionals for advice

How do I set up parental controls?

Parental controls are an essential method of keeping your child safe online. They can be used to block harmful content, control in-app purchases and manage how long your child is permitted to stay online. Parental controls are becoming increasingly easy to set up.

Let's start with the basics...

What are parental controls?

Parental controls are software and tools that can be installed on phones, tablets, games consoles and laptops. They can also be set up on home broadband and TV packages.

Parents can use these to block or filter the content that their child is exposed to when searching online.

Parental controls are available to:

- Plan what time of day a child can go online and how long they can stay on for
- Stop them from downloading apps they are too young for
- Manage the content that different members of the family can see

You should set up parental controls on the following devices:

- Mobiles and tablets
- Games consoles
- Home broadband
- Search engines
- Other apps

If your child is regularly using any of the above, it is important to read the instruction manual or contact the provider in a bid to ensure they are secure.

Online gaming

As with other online activities, there are a number of dangers associated with playing games online. And, due to the growing popularity of this technology, it can be very difficult for parents to know how to keep their child safe.

What are the risks of online gaming?

Children may view inappropriate or upsetting content if they play games that are not suitable for their age group. This could include sexual or violent content that may be in-game content or produced by other players.

Children may play with adults they do not know. Some adults may exploit this and try to build an emotional connection with a child for the purpose of grooming.

Some players can be abusive towards others, or hack another user's account or try to destroy their virtual possessions. This can be incredibly upsetting for some children.



Ways that parents can ensure their child is playing safely include:

- Checking the game's content
- Knowing how to mute, block and report
- Activating the game's safety settings
- Ensuring you are talking to your child regularly about their online habits

Keep the conversation going

Talking to your child is one of the most effective ways you can keep them safe online. You may want to do this by having a family discussion to set boundaries and agree what is appropriate. Or you might need a more specific conversation about an app or website that your child wants to use.

During this conversation, it could be a good idea to explain that you understand the internet is a great place for them, and that you are looking out for their best interests. Encourage them to speak up and not keep secrets if something is worrying them.

Reassure them that you are interested in knowing about all aspects of their life, and that you'd like to talk about things they have seen online, along with the sites they visit and any apps they use.

Talk to your child about their 'personal information' such as their full name, phone number, address and school name, and tell them it is important not to disclose it to anyone.

Discuss with them that certain images and photos are not appropriate to send, and help them to understand how sending certain photographs can give people the wrong impression. Explain that it is not easy to identify someone online, and that people are not always honest about who they are.

Parents should always make it known that if their child is in any doubt, they should talk to them first.



What to do if you think your child may be being groomed

If you are worried that your child is being groomed online, or exploited sexually, you should report your concerns to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP). Spotting the signs of grooming can be extremely difficult, but if you have any issues at all about someone your child is speaking to, you are advised to contact the organisation.



CEOP is an arm of the National Crime Agency and can investigate the events that have taken place, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of your child is protected at all times.

You can make a report to the CEOP using the [CEOP safety centre](#). Here, you will need to complete an online form, where you will be asked to add your contact details and information about what happened.

The form should be completed as fully and with as much detail as you can. You cannot make a report anonymously. Parents and guardians should remember that it can be tough for a child to come forward and tell an adult about what has been going on. Be sure to tell the child that whatever has happened to them, you are there to offer support.



Ways that parents can ensure their child is playing safely include:

- Read the report and assess the risk to the child
- Make contact with you to make next steps
- Give safeguarding advice and support



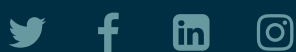
Exploited

An 18-minute film which helps young people learn to stay safe from sexual exploitation

[View on YouTube](#)

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