

A photograph showing a person's hands holding a smartphone, sitting on a blue quilted blanket outdoors. The person's hair is visible, and the background shows green grass.

RECOGNIZING GROOMING TECHNIQUES

What Is Grooming?

The grooming process occurs when a trafficker manipulates someone in order to sexually exploit, abuse, and traffic them. A trafficker will pick a victim, such as a child, teen, or young adult, and build a relationship with them, fill a need, and gain their trust. The purpose of grooming is to trick, confuse, or coerce the victim into believing they are not being victimized. This keeps the victim compliant.

Who Traffickers Target

First, they will look for vulnerabilities in their victims. The most common age of a grooming victim is around 11 to 17 years old, but victims can be as young as an infant or even an adult.

Vulnerable Groups

- Young child
- Bullied youth
- Domestic violence victim
- LGBTQ+ community
- Child living in a single-parent home
- Someone going through a difficult divorce
- Foster child
- Young or teen parent
- Individual with disabilities
- Individual with low self-esteem
- Someone who has been abused physically or emotionally
- Individual who is depressed or suicidal

Why Kids and Teens Are Targeted

There are many reasons children, teens, and young adults are targeted. They can be easily manipulated because of their stage in development and circumstances. They are also more likely to be lacking certain needs, as it is harder for a minor to get food, shelter, and other needs on their own.

LEARNING GOOD JUDGMENT



Development and Judgment

A child and teen's brain hasn't fully developed. The frontal lobe is in charge of problem solving, judgment, and impulse control. This part of the brain is not fully developed until the age of 25. This means that a child or teen's brain hasn't matured enough to make good, safe decisions. Because of that, they can make poor decisions, have poor self-management, and poor future planning. These factors can make them vulnerable to traffickers. You have the ability to help your child develop good judgment that will not only help them be less vulnerable, but help them later in life.

Tips for Teaching Your Kids Good Judgment

- Talk to your children about your family's values, morals, and ethics. What is right and wrong in your family may differ from what is right and wrong in other families.
- Explain what a good choice looks like and how they will know they



have made one. If your child makes a bad choice, walk them through why it was wrong and what a good decision would have looked like. Be sure to model the choices you want them to make. Children learn by watching.

- Know and discuss what natural and logical consequences come with negative behaviors. For example, a teenager who is driving erratically and gets a ticket may have two consequences: They pay the ticket (natural consequence) and you ground them from driving (logical consequence). Always have clear consequences to your child's negative actions.
- Be consistent. Consistency teaches children what to expect and makes them feel safe.
- Remember children, and even teens, are still learning and maturing, so making good decisions is a process for them. Give your child the space to learn and be there for them when they make a mistake.

TRAFFICKING TACTICS

After they choose a target, traffickers begin to build a relationship with their victim. The victim starts to trust them and the perpetrator gains information to use against the victim. They use this information to drive wedges between friends, family, and anyone else who can help the victim. This information also helps traffickers know how to groom the

victim. If the victim has low self-esteem, the trafficker tells them how beautiful they are. If the victim feels lonely, the trafficker says they'll always be there for them. **Depending on the situation, here are a few tactics traffickers may use.**

Fill a Need

- Parental role or role model
- Romantic interest
- Love and attention
- Money
- Gifts (e.g., purses, clothes, new phone)
- Housing
- Drugs or alcohol
- Transportation
- Food

Isolate

- Meet regularly with the victim to monopolize their time, keeping them away from others
- Create an urgency to hang out with the victim over friends and family
- Make the victim feel as if the trafficker is the only person who can provide for them, so they must do as they're told
- Urge the victim to stay in constant communication with the trafficker

Abuse

- Begin to demand payment for gifts or services the trafficker has provided, such as rides, favors, or cigarettes
- Blackmail, or using information the victim has shared or sexual photographs the victim has sent
- Make the victim feel like they will lose the trafficker's love if they don't do as they're told
- Begin to manipulate the victim into having sex with the trafficker's friends or strangers

- Demand sex or explicit photos as payment
- Threaten physical harm to the victim's friends or family
- Physically harm the victim or threaten them



Maintain Control

- Form a cycle of abuse and then fill a need to keep control
- Hold information or the victim's trust over their heads
- Make the victim believe they are dependent on the trafficker
- Convince the victim that *they* are the criminal, not the trafficker
- Use victim's experiences with corrupt police officers or fake officers to make all law enforcement seem bad
- Make the victim feel as if they have to earn love or that no one else loves them
- Give the victim drugs or alcohol

WHAT CAN I DO?



Can Grooming Be Stopped?

Yes, grooming can be stopped by acting, engaging, and intervening. If you notice something out of character, speak up.

Questions to ask if you suspect grooming or trafficking in a friend, family member, or student.

- Are you ok? You don't seem yourself lately.
- You seem to be falling asleep in class lately. Are you getting enough rest?
- What have you been up to? I've noticed that you've stopped doing (a hobby, hanging out with regular friends, etc.)?
- Is there a new friend or boyfriend in your life? Tell me about them.

Tip: They may be afraid of talking because their trafficker has threatened, blackmailed, or made them rehearse answers. If you feel they are lying, the best thing to do is call in a tip to the Human Trafficking Hotline or call the police if they're in immediate danger.

National Human Trafficking Hotline

1-888-373-7888 or text "Help" or "Info" to 233733

Remember to always S.P.E.A.K to your kids

S Start the conversation with your kids and keep open lines of communication between you and your child. Create an environment that is open so your child feels safe and able to talk to you.

P Prepare and educate your kids about the reality of human trafficking, signs of trafficking, and predators, both online and in public.

E Expectations - Talk with your kids about what you expect of them. Set up rules and expectations when using social media and the internet, gaming, texting, and dating. Create a contract that you and your child sign.

A Awareness - Be aware of where your child is, who they're with, and what they're doing. Pay attention to changes in friends, behavior, dating, clothing, or new possessions.

K Keep the conversation going. Connect, talk, and listen to your child daily. Remind them of their value and how much you care about them.

