

National Safeguarding Adults Week

Adult Grooming and Exploitation



Grooming is a form of abuse that involves manipulating someone until they're isolated, dependent, and more vulnerable to exploitation.

Grooming itself is not listed as one of the [10 categories of harm in The Care Act](#). But many of the types of harm listed in The Care Act, including modern slavery, physical, sexual and financial abuse, can happen as a result of grooming. When most people think about grooming, they think about children. But adults are vulnerable to grooming too.

What is Adult Grooming?

It's a gradual process. The abuser picks their target, build up trust, and the actual abuse, which is usually sexual or financial, doesn't come until much later.

It often starts with friendship. The groomer will look for ways to gain their target's trust, often with gifts or promises. Eventually they'll start to ask for something in return, and this eventually leads to abuse. Because groomers work to befriend their victims, some organisations refer to it as ["mate crime"](#).

Grooming can happen in person, or it can happen online. Online grooming might be referred to as "catfishing", where the groomer pretends to be someone they're not in order to gain trust.

Why Does Adult Grooming Happen?

There are many reasons why someone might groom an adult at risk.

Some cases of grooming result in [financial abuse](#). In these cases, the groomer's motivation is clear – financial or material gain. Many cases of grooming lead to sexual abuse. Again, in these instances it's clear to see what the groomer's getting out of the arrangement. Grooming can also result in radicalisation, in which case the groomer is simply working to win someone over to their cause. But in some cases of grooming it might be difficult to identify a motive. Unfortunately, some people just enjoy having power over others.

Signs of Grooming

Here's some of the signs of grooming you should look out for:

- The person becomes withdrawn, or they may seem troubled by something but unwilling to talk about it. Alternatively, their emotions might become more volatile.
- You notice them using or wearing something new, that you didn't buy for them.
- Groomers often aim to isolate their targets from their family or friends. If they seem reluctant to see you, or they refuse a visit, it might be because someone's manipulating them.
- You notice that sums of money have disappeared from the person's bank account, or the person claims they cannot pay for food or bills.
- The person might be spending more time on the phone, or online, than usual. But they won't say what sites they're visiting, or who they're talking to.
- They start talking about a new "friend", "boyfriend" or "girlfriend", and it's not clear who they are or how they met them.

Grooming can also lead to radicalisation. In which case, you might notice that the person starts talking about an issue or a cause that's never really interested them before.

What To Do If Your Suspect Grooming is Happening

The problem is that victims of grooming often don't feel like they need help. Also, some instances of grooming have all the appearance of authentic romances or relationships, until it's too late.

If you suspect someone close to you is being groomed, either online or in person, there are plenty of ways you can get the support and guidance you need.

- [Respond](#) is an organisation that provides a range of services to people with learning disabilities who have suffered from sexual abuse. You can call their helpline on **0808 808 0700**.
- [Operation REPEAT](#) is a campaign to address the problem of doorstep crimes and scam prevention. Not many people realise that these issues count as grooming. But you can report a crime, or share your concerns, by calling **101** or **999** in an emergency.
- [Small Steps](#) can help you if you suspect that someone close to you is in danger of being radicalised. You can email them at info@smallsteps.ltd