



ONLINE GROOMING

What is it?

Online grooming refers to the deliberate actions taken by an adult to form a trusting relationship with a child with the intent of facilitating sexual contact.

What are the risks?

Child sex offenders find the Internet an attractive medium because they are able to remain virtually anonymous. They are able to form and participate in online networks with other child sex offenders to increase their collections of child abuse images and share techniques on grooming.

Grooming can take place via chat rooms, instant messaging (IM), social networking sites and email. Once contact has been established online, child sex offenders will request more personal information so they can communicate via more traditional methods such as phone calls, text messages, letters and sending gifts. A child can be groomed for months before contact is attempted.

The anonymity of the Internet makes it easier for child sex offenders to pretend to be someone else, often another young person. These people will often target children who appear to be trusting, craving attention or vulnerable. They are also quite knowledgeable in teenage pop culture and use this knowledge in their grooming techniques.

Common signs to look for if you think your child is being groomed online:

- Excessive use of the computer.
- Aggression around computer usage.
- Secretive behaviour.
- Change in the use of sexual language.
- Unexplained gifts or cash.
- Finding pornography on your computer.

How to stay safe?

- Talk to your children: stay aware of what they are doing online, who they are talking to and what social networking profiles they have. Establish communication so that if your children need help they will be comfortable coming to you.
- Learn about the Internet: understanding how young people use the Internet and what they enjoy doing will help you to recognise any suspicious or inappropriate behaviour. It will also help you to talk to your children about their online activities if they think you understand the online environment.
- Reinforce that your child should never meet anyone in the real world they have met online, particularly without being accompanied by an adult, family member or friend.

If you are concerned about online behaviour that involved the sexual exploitation of a child you can report it online to the AFP at www.afp.gov.au/online_forms/ocset_form

If you believe a child is in immediate danger or risk, call 000 or contact your local police.

For more information visit www.thinkuknow.org.au



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