Factsheet

Grooming

BB1 BB2 PEOPLE BB3 BB4
Building blocks of safeguarding culture.

www.bbsafe.com.au | info@bbsafe.com.au

Content Warning: ***This resource includes references to abuse, sexual abuse and trauma.*** *Please read at your own pace and stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Support is available through Blue Knot (1300 657 380), Lifeline (13 11 14), Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) and 13 YARN (13 92 76). Your organisation may also offer support through its Employee Assistance Program*

What is Grooming?

Grooming refers to actions designed to create opportunities to abuse or exploit another person. Grooming behaviour often begins as friendly or caring, for example taking an unusual interest in someone's wellbeing and providing additional care or attention.

It often gradually escalates into boundary-crossing and ends in abuse or exploitation of the victim. Grooming is usually subtle, ambiguous, and often only recognised in hindsight.

Specific grooming behaviours may include:

- Spending time with a victim's family and friends outside the work context – this can include online
- Giving treats, gifts, or special privileges
- Spending time with the victim away from protective people
- Sharing secrets or encouraging rule breaking (even minor)
- Giving significant time and attention to individuals, including on social media
- Talking about relationships or sex; telling sexual jokes or exposing the victim to sexual material
- Taking photographs
- Unnecessary physical contact such as hugging, tickling, or lap sitting
- Volunteering for toileting or nappy changes of children or intimate care of adults
- Trying to isolate or be alone with the victim
- People who groom may threaten or offer rewards to maintain control and discourage disclosure.

Check out our website ***www.bbsafe.com.au*** *for more information and tips.*

Why it's important to act early

Grooming behaviour may not look like criminal behaviour – particularly in the early stages.

This is why vigilance and strong systems are critical to ensure red flags can be identified before abuse occurs.

You do not need to make a judgement about whether grooming is occurring or have proof of the grooming or abuse – speaking out early can help stop grooming before it escalates.

Act on any behaviour that:

- Breaches your organisation's Code of Conduct
- crosses professional boundaries or
- doesn't look or feel right.

A strong safeguarding culture relies on every person recognising concerns, reporting them, and responding in ways that uphold safety at all times.

What are the signs?

Grooming can be difficult to identify — a great educator, worker or volunteer can look very similar to someone who is grooming.

People who groom seek to build trusting relationships and emotional connections not only with the victim, but also with the people, organisations and communities around them.

Boundary crossing behaviours to watch for

People who are grooming may show 'red flag' behaviours or overstep professional boundaries. This includes:

- Contacting clients or families outside the usual service channels (including via social media)
- Focussing on a particular client or clients – including by offering additional care and attention; favours, babysitting, or additional private support
- Sharing a lot of information about their personal lives with clients or becoming overly involved in a client's personal life
- Disregarding policies, procedures, or protocols e.g. about supervision
- Minimising or dismissing rule breaking as 'no big deal' if challenged
- Using charm or aggression if questioned about their actions.

Signs that someone is being groomed

Victims may show changes in behaviour that signal something is not right, including:

- Fear, anxiety, or avoidance of a particular person
- Behaviour changes or withdrawal
- Increased secrecy
- Becoming defensive or protective about a particular person
- Drop in school or other performance
- Sexualised or aggressive behaviour
- Self-harm, bed-wetting, sleep problems, depression, anxiety
- Having money or items that are unusual for them.

Things to remember

- Grooming isn't limited to the target (child or adult); perpetrators may also groom the victim's ecosystem, including parents, supporters, staff, organisations, and even entire communities.
- Not all grooming ends in sexual abuse. Perpetrators may groom victims for other reasons, such as gaining access to financial or personal information for exploitation, emotional manipulation, or financial gain.
- Grooming often takes place over weeks, months, or even years, as perpetrators invest significant time in building trust with the victim and those around them.
- Grooming can appear as caring or generous behaviour, such as giving gifts or extra attention.
- There is no single profile of perpetrators, and they may use charm or authority to manipulate people.
- Grooming often continues even after the abuse, as perpetrators try to maintain secrecy and control to keep the victim compliant and prevent disclosure.

Contact us if you have questions or would like to discuss safeguarding in your organisation
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