



# Online Grooming

Young people are quick to embrace and explore the online world, but parents should be aware of the risks.

## What is online 'grooming'?

**Online grooming** occurs when an adult uses electronic communication (including social media) in a predatory fashion to try to lower a child's inhibitions, or heighten their curiosity about sex, with the aim of eventually meeting them in person for the purposes of sexual activity. This can include online chats, sexting, and other interactions.

The process may start with sending pornographic images to 'normalise' the discussion of sexual activities, and then move to requests for naked images or to perform a sex act on a webcam.

Any site, game, app or platform that allows one person to communicate with another can be used for grooming. Those that are particularly popular with young people will also be popular with online predators



## Who is at risk?

All young people who use technology are at risk, some of course more than others. Online predators are very clever and will focus on those who are happy to respond when contacted. Social networking sites and gaming platforms are designed for communication and many allow the sharing of personal information, providing an easy way for online offenders to find their next victim.

Young people are naturally curious and trusting and will engage in online discussions about things that they would not openly discuss in the physical world.

Children may make poor decisions about allowing people into their online lives, believing that those who seem 'nice' online will be the same in person. Many will refer to a random online acquaintance as an "online friend", dropping their guard and allowing the grooming process to take place.



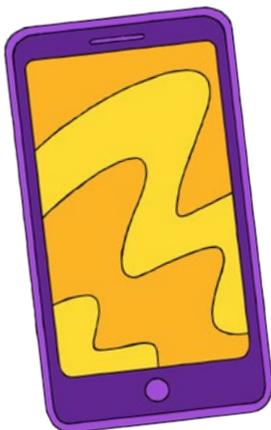
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## What to do

It is very important to talk to your child about these issues, so that are aware of things they may confront in the digital space. Do not avoid talking about predators for fear of upsetting them, as the potential harms can have far greater consequences. Let them know:

- they can tell you about any problems they are having or if someone makes them feel uncomfortable online
- they should only engage online with people they personally know and trust in real life to reduce risk
- it is okay to trust their instincts: if something feels odd or strange then it probably is
- 'Good friends' don't make them do things that make them feel uncomfortable.

Check that your child has appropriate security settings in place for social networking sites to help protect their online privacy. Visit [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au) for more information.



## Warning signs

Signs of grooming might include the following:

- You find nude images or pornography on your child's computer. Online predators may send pornographic images first to 'normalise' their requests for pictures.
- You see sexualised search results as your child 'googles' what they have been asked.
- Your child engages online with people they don't know personally.
- Your child uses sexualised language.
- Your child spends an increasing and / or an excessive amount of time online.
- Your child receives unexplained gifts (e-vouchers are common).
- Your child displays mood changes (hyperactive, secretive, hostile, aggressive, impatient, resentful, anxious, withdrawn, depressed).
- Your child is excessively secretive about their use of communications technology, including social media.
- There are people on your child's "friends' list" that you do not know and your child has never met offline.

## Police Assistance

If you believe your or any child is in immediate danger please phone 000.

If you are at all concerned about the possibility of your child being the victim of an online sexual predator please contact the police for advice and assistance.

If you are at all concerned about the possibility of your child being the victim of an online sexual predator please contact your local Police Station or your local Sex Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT).