



SAFEGUARDING BRIEFING

October 2020

Adult Grooming

What is Adult Grooming?

Adult grooming is a form of abuse that involves manipulating someone until they are isolated, dependent and more vulnerable to exploitation. It works by mixing positive behaviours with elements of abuse. At the beginning, all behaviours are positive but then slowly, abusive elements are added in amounts that can surprise the victim but do not push alarm to a high level. Over time the inappropriate comes to feel normal.

It is not named as a type of abuse in The Care Act 2014, but is often associated with those that are: physical abuse, domestic violence/abuse, sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, financial/material abuse, modern slavery, and organisational abuse. Additionally, it can be associated with risks relating to Radicalisation.

While the term is well known and often used in reference to the abuse of children, there is relatively little spoken of it in relation to adults who are targeted, as perhaps there is little understanding of the phenomenon. Sinnamon (Petherick and Sinnamon, 2017) says 'that the misunderstanding around grooming of adults is often brought about by victim blaming, humiliation, stigmatisation, reluctance to report, and the legal, social and emotional weight brought against victims by the institutions in which the adult sexual abuse often takes place.'

How does it happen?

There are firstly 3 primary goals a groomer focuses on to control the environment of a victim:

AFFILIATION : Gaining access to potential adult victims – joining groups, positions of employment etc. Predators are masters in positioning themselves in the proximity of a possible victim.

ACCEPTANCE : The next step is to manipulate the perceptions of other people in such a way that the offender is socially accepted to “the group”. It is important for the predator to be **seen as a valuable** part of the group and as a good match for the victim. Acceptance lessens the risk of difficult questions being asked by the group. Secondly, in ongoing abuse situations, the offender will manipulate the environment in such a way, that the victim will withdraw from the group in an acceptable way. The power and charm of a predator over a victim is scary. Groomers are great con people.

ASSURANCE : An offender thirdly has to assure ongoing access to the victim and seeks to ensure that the group or environment perceives them as harmless.

Sinnamon's model of adult grooming identifies the following seven stages of adult sexual grooming:

1. Select the victim.
2. Gather information
3. Gaining personal connection
4. Meeting the needs and establishing the credentials
5. Priming the target
6. Creating the victim by instigating sexual contact
7. Controlling the victim

Grooming Behaviours:

- Positive Reinforcement – praise, superficial charm, overt attention, ego stroking, 'love bombing'. Claiming that there is a special connection, which could be romantic, spiritual, intellectual etc. This bond is often reinforced by groomer asking for the victim to keep things secret.
- Negative Reinforcement – Nagging, yelling, 'ghosting', silent treatment, 'playing the victim'.
- Intermittent reinforcement – can create climate of fear/doubt.
- Punishment.
- Normalisation of behaviour.

Grooming tends to be a gradual process, as the abuser picks their target and builds trust with them. Signs that someone maybe being abused could include:

- Unexplained injuries
- Withdrawal from services.
- Weight loss.
- New items of clothing etc evidence that they are receiving gifts.
- Anxiety about a friend/romantic partner being unhappy if they don't agree to do a certain thing.
- Changes in mood.
- Bills not being paid/loss of assets.
- Changes in social group/friends.

Who is at risk?

There is particular risk for people who are perhaps already quite isolated and lonely, who have low self-esteem, those who may have 'soft boundaries' or any mental / cognitive impairment that affects their judgement but it is important to remember that there are likely to be times in all our lives when we are more vulnerable than at other times. Anyone could be the victim of a groomer.

There are different ways that grooming can occur; it is sometimes called 'mate crime' when people are befriended and then the relationship becomes abusive.

Maximising potential

It can happen by groomers making fake profiles online, and making contact with their victims. This is known as 'catfishing'. Ways to spot a 'cat fish':

- If a person you have met online is reluctant to show their face or meet in real life.
- Inconsistencies in what they are saying.
- If what they are saying sounds too good to be true.

How can we help?

For the reasons already mentioned, people often do not realise that abuse is occurring and it can be a difficult conversation to have. We can help people we are in contact with by sensitively approaching the matter and helping them understand that their friendships/relationships may not be what they seem; they will need support and guidance to help them identify the difference between friend and foe. In identifying the need that is being met by that person, we can support them to find alternatives. It may be that referral on to referral services is needed, and this will depend on the risks/care and support needs identified.

Consider if the adult would benefit from a referral to Adult Safeguarding, which would enable a multi-agency approach to sharing information, determining facts and providing support to enable safety planning. Sometimes we only get a very small view of a situation and this process can help in building understanding of what is happening in someone's life.

If the risks are related to radicalisation then a referral to Prevent.

If domestic abuse is occurring then completion of a DASH and referral to MARAC or other specialist services maybe required.

For advice, support or guidance contact the **Trust Safeguarding Team** via **0161 716 3785**

Specialist organisations do research and offer advice/support on this and related issues:

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 by a far right organisation and can be contacted on info@smallsteps.ltd

Ann Craft Trust can be contacted on **0115 951 5400**. Talk to us about your concerns, and we'll let you know the steps to take to get help.

Maximising potential

Mencap have information on their website about bullying and mate crime. They have a helpline to call if someone has concerns about their own or another's wellbeing/safety: T:0808 808 1111.

In Greater Manchester, Police are aware of the criminal exploitation of adults (many of whom are vulnerable) as well as children, and are addressing it through **Programme Challenger**. Criminal exploitation takes many forms, the most common relating to the supply and movement of drugs (often referred to as 'County Lines'), offences in relation to guns and other weapons, money laundering, violent offences and in some cases 'cuckooing' where criminals forcibly take over control of a person's home. In order to raise awareness of these issues with the public and professionals, **Programme Challenger** has developed the **Trapped** campaign resources which can be found here: www.programmechallenger.co.uk/

References, resources and further reading:

- <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/>
- "The Psychology of Adult Sexual Grooming: Sinnamon's Seven Stage Model of Adult Sexual Grooming. " Grant Sinnamon, The Psychology of Criminal and Antisocial Behavior, 2017 pages 459-487
- "A Politics of Naming and Sharing: One Therapist's Personal Journey of Traumatic Grief, Grooming and Sexual Abuse in the Workplace" - Sarah Buxton, Psychotherapy and Politics International.
- <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/catching-a-killer>
- <https://www.mobieg.co.za/abuse/adult-grooming/>
- <https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/bullying>
- <https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/mate-crime-how-to-spot-it-and-stop-it>

Maximising potential

www.penninecare.nhs.uk

