

Grooming and manipulation

Grooming is a process where someone builds an emotional connection with another person to gain their trust and lower their defences. While the general tactics of manipulation can be used against anyone to exploit them for money or information, it is important to note that the term "grooming" is most commonly used to describe the way predators target children and young people. In those cases, the perpetrator builds a relationship to prepare a child for inappropriate or harmful activity. Whether it affects an adult or a child, the goal is always to create a false sense of security in order to take advantage of someone.

Awareness is your strongest defence. Scammers and manipulators often rely on their targets being polite or unaware of the tactics being used. By understanding the "playbook" they use, you can spot the warning signs before any harm is done. It allows you to maintain control over your online interactions and ensures that your kindness and trust are not taken advantage of by those with poor intentions.

What it could look like

Grooming and manipulation often follow a pattern of behaviour. It is helpful to be mindful if you notice a new online acquaintance doing any of the following:

- **Overwhelming Kindness:** They may shower you with compliments, attention, and "gifts" to make you feel special and indebted to them.
- **The "Us Against the World" Narrative:** They might try to create a sense of secrecy, suggesting that "others wouldn't understand our special bond" or encouraging you to keep your conversations private from your family.
- **Testing Your Boundaries:** They may start with small, seemingly innocent requests to see if you will comply, gradually moving towards more personal or risky requests.
- **Creating an Emotional Bond:** They often share "personal secrets" or "sad stories" about their own lives to gain your sympathy and encourage you to share your own vulnerabilities in return.

- **Sudden Urgency or Crisis:** Once they feel they have your trust, they may suddenly experience an "emergency" or a stroke of bad luck, hoping your emotional connection will prompt you to help them financially.

If you would like to explore this topic further and see more detailed examples of how to stay safe, we highly recommend this excellent guide by eSafety: [Unwanted contact and grooming factsheet](#). For more general information, you can browse through the [eSafety website](#) and search for content on grooming in the search bar.