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EDUCATION GUIDE

Holding Candid Conversations on Child Exploitation

EMPOWERING YOUTH
to Recognize Sexual Exploitation

Education for Middle, High School, College-aged Youth & Adults

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Quick Start Guide

I. Prepare for the Lesson

Educators: Before teaching this lesson, review the Walking Wise *School Teaching Guide* for implementation guidance. Walking Wise is designed as a prevention program; therefore, discussions about grooming, abuse, and exploitation may prompt some students to disclose past or current victimization. Before presenting the lesson, ensure appropriate support personnel and referral resources are available. Follow all mandatory reporting requirements and school protocols when responding to disclosures.

Create a safe and respectful classroom environment. *Explain that the purpose of the lesson is to increase students' knowledge and help keep them safe—not to create fear.* Remind students that they should not share personal experiences with the class. Instead, explain how they can ask for help. If appropriate, consider using an exit ticket that allows students to request a private conversation with a school counselor or school support staff for themselves or a friend. (The Student Check-In form is available in the Implementation Toolkit at WalkingWise.com.)

Parents & Caregivers: Begin by reviewing the *Home Teaching Guide* on WalkingWise.com. Talking with your child about sexual abuse and exploitation is one of the most important protective steps you can take as a parent. These conversations should continue over time to build trust, awareness, and resilience. You do not need to be an expert. What matters most is creating a safe environment where your child feels comfortable asking questions and seeking help. The Home Teaching Guide can help you create a safe, age-appropriate, and effective learning experience.

Child Disclosure: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents take every disclosure of sexual abuse seriously and contact one of the following: the child's pediatrician, a local child advocacy center, a child protection service agency, or the police. For more information, visit HealthyChildren.org. In addition, if you suspect child sex trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888.

II. Lesson Materials

Educators

- Consider completing the adult learning module for additional background.
- Download and adapt the classroom presentation to fit your students' age and school policies.
- Begin with open-ended "Let's Get Started" questions to build curiosity and engagement.
- Log in to WalkingWise.com to present the animated video during the classroom presentation.
- Measure learning with the student survey before and after the lesson when appropriate.

Parents & Caregivers

- Review the vocabulary and discussion questions.
- Begin with the open-ended "Let's Get Started" questions to help engage your child.
- Select the vocabulary words you want to review with your child before watching the video.
- Watch the animated video together.
- Use the lesson plan's discussion to talk with your child about the information shared in the video.
- Consider using the student survey to reinforce learning.

III. Legal Disclaimer

The Walking Wise curriculum and related educational materials ("Education Program") are provided for educational purposes only. Although Walking Wise strives to provide accurate and current information, it cannot guarantee that all information will remain complete, accurate, or up to date under every circumstance. The Education Program is not a substitute for legal advice, and users should not rely on it when making legal decisions. Walking Wise LLC assumes no liability for actions taken or not taken based on the Education Program or any referenced external resources.

LESSON #3

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LESSON PLAN #3

The Grooming Process

I. Objective: To provide ideas for fostering a deeper conversation about how young people can recognize the grooming tactics used to manipulate and exploit victims of sexual abuse or trafficking.

II. Suggested Timing

Typical lesson time: approximately 35–55 minutes, depending on the content and activities selected.

Lesson Component	Suggested Time
Let's Get Started	3–5 min.
Classroom Presentation (Lesson Plan Content & Student Engagement)	25–40 min.
Student Survey (<i>optional</i>)	3–5 min.

III. Let's Get Started



Directions: Select one or two introductory questions below. Have students work in pairs or small groups for 2–3 minutes to create a brief list of responses. Ask each group to share one response that has not already been mentioned. Refer to page 9 for additional possible student responses.

Let's think about how people can influence the choices others make.

1. Why do you think some people are easier to influence than others?
2. Why do you think someone might slowly try to change another person's behavior or choices?
3. Why do you think it is hard to notice when someone is trying to take advantage of others?

IV. Vocabulary

1. **Influence:** The ability to affect another person's thoughts, feelings, or decisions.
2. **Groomer:** Someone who builds trust with a person to control, manipulate, or abuse them.
3. **Opportunist:** A person who looks for chances to take advantage of others.
4. **Unsuspecting:** Not realizing that someone or something may be unsafe.
5. **Manipulate:** To influence or control someone in a dishonest, tricky, or unfair way.
6. **Brainwash:** To strongly influence a person's thoughts until they stop questioning the information given.
7. **Seduce:** To use charm, attention, or pressure to get a person to do something they normally would not do.
8. **Boundary:** A personal limit that protects a person's body, feelings, and values.
9. **Dominate:** To control another person's actions, choices, or behavior.
10. **Isolate:** To separate someone from family, friends, or other people who can help them.
11. **Tactics:** The actions or methods someone uses to reach a goal.
12. **Blackmail:** Threatening to use private information to make someone do something.
13. **Virtual Stranger:** Someone online whose real identity is unknown.
14. **Bond:** A strong emotional connection between people.

V. Classroom Presentation & Animated Video

Log in to WalkingWise.com to download the classroom presentation and access the animated video in the Walking Wise Learning Platform.

Plan Your Lesson: The lesson plan contains the same core instructional content as the classroom presentation. Review the lesson plan, select the content and discussion questions you want to cover, then delete any corresponding slides you do not plan to use. Allow approximately 2–4 minutes per discussion question.



Student Engagement: The presentation includes “What Do You Think?” multiple-choice questions. Before revealing the answer, have students work in pairs to discuss the choices and select an answer. Invite a few pairs to briefly explain their thinking, then display the “Answer” slide and discuss.

VI. Discussion Questions

1. What is a groomer?

A groomer is someone who builds trust with a young person to manipulate them. At first, they may seem kind, caring, or helpful. Over time, they often try to take advantage of the young person through sexual abuse.

2. What does “hidden in plain sight” mean, and how does that apply to groomers?

“Hidden in plain sight” means something is easy to see but hard to notice. Groomers often appear trustworthy and may seem like friends, mentors, or helpful adults. Because of this, people may not recognize their unsafe behavior.

3. Why do groomers work to gain trust?

Trust helps a groomer influence and control a young person.

Once a groomer gains trust:

- **Learn Weak Spots:** They look for challenges in a young person’s life that they can help solve.
- **Increase Influence:** The young person is more likely to listen to them.
- **Harder to Refuse:** It becomes harder for the young person to say “no.”
- **Cross Boundaries:** They can more easily pressure the young person into unsafe situations, such as sexual activity.

4. What roles or positions might a groomer hold?

A groomer can be anyone. They may be family members, friends, neighbors, peers, older teens, or someone the young person wants to date. They could also be a teacher, a coach, a counselor, a faith leader, or another adult in the community. Sometimes they are a stranger met online.

5. Why do many victims stay silent when in harmful situations, such as experiencing sexual abuse?

Young people may stay silent because they feel scared, confused, embarrassed, or threatened. Some blame themselves, even though what happened is not their fault. Others may not realize that what is happening is wrong or illegal.

6. How do groomers often meet the young people they target?

- **Someone They Know:** Often, the groomer already knows the young person. They can be adults in positions of authority or peers, using shared interests to build trust.
- **Online:** Groomers can be met online, through messaging, gaming, or social media.
- **Social Gatherings:** They can be introduced at parties or group events, where the groomer begins to develop a friendship or relationship.
- **Public Places:** Groomers can be met at parks, concerts, sporting events, or local events.

7. How do groomers make young people feel they owe them something?

- **Gifts or Favors:** The groomer may give gifts, money, or special treatment so a young person feels they need to cooperate with them.
- **Attention and Praise:** They may give extra compliments or attention, making a young person feel special.
- **Make It Seem Normal:** They may make unsafe behavior seem normal, exciting, or “grown-up.”
- **Guilt:** The groomer may make a young person feel bad for trying to set boundaries or saying “no” by acting hurt or disappointed.
- **Favoritism:** They may make a young person feel special or more important than others.

8. How do groomers make young people feel they need them?

- **Meet Basic Needs:** The groomer may provide food, clothing, money, rides, a place to stay, or protection.
- **Separate Them:** They may pull a young person away from friends, family, or trustworthy adults.
- **Drugs or Alcohol:** The groomer may offer drugs or alcohol to influence choices or make a young person rely on them for more substances.

9. **How do groomers change their behavior after gaining trust?**

- **Make Demands:** They may stop being kind and begin making demands, such as engaging in sexual activity.
- **Threaten to Take Away Support:** They may threaten to take away gifts, attention, affection, or support.
- **Separate Them:** They may pressure a young person to spend less time with family and friends.
- **Encourage Rule-Breaking:** The groomer may encourage a young person to break rules or go against trustworthy adults.

10. **How can young people help protect themselves from a groomer or an abuser?**

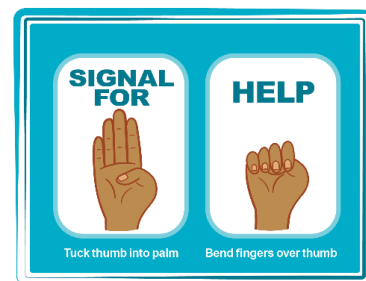
- **Trust Your Feelings:** If something feels wrong, pay attention to that feeling.
- **Set Boundaries:** Do not let others pressure you into doing something that creates uneasy feelings.
- **Speak Up:** Clearly say “no” when something makes you feel uncomfortable.
- **Recognize Tricks:** Learn to notice when someone uses gifts, pressure, guilt, or threats to get their way.
- **Stop Responding:** Stop talking, texting, or messaging anyone who makes demands using pressure or threats.
- **Save Information:** Keep messages, images, or threats that trustworthy adults may need to provide protection.
- **Ask for Help:** Tell a trustworthy adult right away. If the first person does not help, keep telling others until someone listens and takes action to provide help.

VII. How to Ask for Help

There are safe ways to get help if you or someone you know is being threatened or harmed. Sometimes it's important to speak up for a friend because they may not be able to ask for help on their own. Remember, if something doesn't feel right, trust your gut feelings and take action.

Options:

- If you are in immediate danger, dial 911.
- If you are experiencing harm, tell a trustworthy parent or caregiver.
- If the person causing harm is a family member, tell other trustworthy adults.
- If you are a student, tell a trustworthy counselor, nurse, social worker, teacher, school resource officer, coach, or principal.
- If using the internet is unsafe, use a computer at school or a public library.
- If you are in public, consider hand-motioning the “Signal for Help” to quietly alert others that you need help. Someone nearby may recognize it and call the police.



Keep Asking: If the first trustworthy adult cannot provide help or protection, keep telling other trustworthy adults until someone listens and takes action. Everyone deserves to be safe, including you.

24-Hour Hotlines for HELP

National Human Trafficking Hotline 1-888-373-7888 or TEXT: “BEFREE” or 233733
National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [Hotline.RAINN.org/online](https://hotline.rainn.org/online)
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children..... 1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678)
National Domestic Violence Hotline..... 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TEXT: 88788
National Runaway Safeline 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929) or TEXT: 66008

VIDEO SCRIPT #3

The Grooming Process

Note: Log in to [WalkingWise.com](https://www.walkingwise.com) to watch the video. The bolded words are defined in the vocabulary list.

Ever seen a magic trick and wondered how they did it?

A trained magician can fool us into believing something that's not real.

Similarly, a **Groomer** is a person who is skilled at tricking young people into sex trafficking.

Groomers and sex traffickers are often the very same person. Hidden in plain sight!

They aren't always "old and creepy." Groomers can be anyone and any age – a man, woman, neighbor, or family member. They can even be a peer or friend!

Groomers are tricky **opportunists**! They're always on the lookout for **unsuspecting** kids.

They try to connect through social media apps, video game chat rooms, and in public places like concerts and shopping malls.

Here are ways Groomers might **manipulate** and **brainwash**:

- They often want victims to feel rescued by working to fulfill their every need.
- Sometimes...Groomers **seduce** young people with expensive gifts to make them look older and more glamorous.
- They may try to become a trusted companion, push **boundaries** with sexual advances, or promote experimenting with drugs and alcohol.
- Groomers might disguise themselves by developing a close friendship with a child's parents.
- They often profess a deep love for their victims, making them feel like the luckiest person in the world.

But then!

- A. They'll slyly begin to **dominate**! Convincing the victim that life cannot be lived without them.
- B. They often dislike the child's family and friends and eventually **isolate** them.
- C. These dangerous traffickers create strict rules and dictate who victims are allowed to talk to.

Once in control, sex traffickers use all kinds of **tactics**:

- They will often command a victim's daily schedule.
- Demand money or require the performance of sexual acts for cash.
- Shame kids...convincing them their drug use and sexual encounters will be exposed.
- Use **blackmail**! Threatening to hurt the victim's family if they tell anyone.
- Take the child's freedom, sometimes through violence and drug addiction, claiming them as their private property.
- Traffickers often label victims as prostitutes, drug addicts, and criminals, convincing kids they'll go to jail if found out.

What traffickers don't want kids to know is that they're being set up for child sex trafficking.

If this is your experience, reach out to a trustworthy adult.

Dial 911 if you're in immediate danger.

Or hand-motion the 'Signal for Help' to alert bystanders.

Otherwise, contact a 24-hour hotline for help.



STUDENT SURVEY #3

The Grooming Process

<i>Please mark an X in the box next to the best answer:</i>	
1. Groomers can appear kind, caring, and even trustworthy at first.	
☐	A. True
☐	B. False
2. Which of the following is NOT something groomers typically do?	
☐	A. Try to build trust with the young person's family.
☐	B. Try to limit the time a young person spends with their family and friends.
☐	C. Openly admit harmful intentions to trustworthy adults.
☐	D. Act like a trustworthy adult or friend.
3. Which action do groomers NOT use to gain control?	
☐	A. Encourage risky behaviors
☐	B. Respect boundaries
☐	C. Make threats
☐	D. Create dependence
4. Groomers can gain control without the young person realizing it at first.	
☐	A. True
☐	B. False

Answer Key: See page 9.

LET'S GET STARTED RESPONSES & STUDENT SURVEY KEY #3

The Grooming Process

Student Survey – Answer Key

The survey can be administered either after the lesson discussion or as a pre- and post-survey before students watch the video.

SURVEY KEY #3

- 1) A
- 2) C
- 3) B
- 4) A

Let's Get Started – Possible Student Responses

The following are examples of responses students might provide:

1. Why do you think some people are easier to influence than others?

Possible responses:

- They don't think someone would trick them.
- They want others to like them.
- They want to fit in.
- They think most adults and peers are trustworthy.
- Everyone can be influenced sometimes.

Discussion Opportunity: Explain that everyone can be influenced. Learning how people use influence helps us make safer choices.

2. Why do you think someone might slowly try to change another person's behavior or choices?

Possible responses:

- To get their way.
- To make someone agree with them.
- To get something they want.
- To control another person.

Discussion Opportunity: Explain that some people try to influence others for helpful reasons, while others do it to gain control or take advantage of young or vulnerable people.

3. Why do you think it is hard to notice when someone is trying to take advantage of others?

Possible responses:

- They seem friendly or safe.
- It happens a little at a time.
- You trust the person.
- You don't notice it at first.
- It can be confusing.

Discussion Opportunity: Explain that unsafe situations often develop gradually. Paying attention to changes in someone's behavior can help people recognize warning signs earlier.

RESOURCES #3

The Grooming Process

Research Studies & Reports

Winters, G. M., Jeglic, E. L., & Kaylor, L. E. (2020). *Validation of the Sexual Grooming Model of Child Sexual Abusers. Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 29*(8), 855–875.

Free Article: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/WorkGroups/House%20Judiciary/Bills/H.173/Witness%20Testimony/H.173~Elizabeth%20Jeglic~Validation%20of%20the%20Sexual%20Grooming%20Model%20of%20Child%20Sexual%20Abusers~3-2-2023.pdf>

Craven, S., Brown, S., & Gilchrist, E. (2006). *Current responses to sexual grooming: Implications for prevention. The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 45*(3), 287–299.

Subscription Required: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2006.00413.x>

Varela-Portela, C., et al. (2024). *Victims of child grooming: An evaluation in university students. Societies, 14*(1), 7.

Free Article: <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/14/1/7>

Bennett, N., & O'Donohue, W. (2014). *The construct of grooming in child sexual abuse: Conceptual and measurement issues. Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 23*(8), 957–976.

Free Article: https://docslib.org/doc/173865/the-construct-of-grooming-in-child-sexual-abuse?utm_source=chatgpt.com

McAlinden, A.M. (2012). *'Grooming' and the Sexual Abuse of Children: Institutional, Internet, and Familial Dimensions.*

Subscription Required: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/grooming-and-the-sexual-abuse-of-children-9780199583720?cc=us&lang=en&>

Jeglic, Elizabeth, Winters, Georgia Mae, Johnson, Benjamin N., Steedman, Lillian A., and Rasol, Abigail. *Examining Sexual Grooming Behaviors of Children: Variations by Relationship to the Perpetrator.* Available at SSRN.

Free Article: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=6380290> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6380290>.

Professional Organizations & Government Resources

US Department of Education – *Human Trafficking in America's Schools*

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE-2021HumanTraffickingGuide-508.pdf>

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network – RAINN.org: *Grooming: Know the Warning Signs*

<https://rainn.org/get-the-facts-about-sexual-violence/get-the-facts-about-grooming/>

Lucy Faithfull Foundation – *Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: What is grooming?*

<https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/advice/understanding-child-sexual-abuse/what-is-grooming/>

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) – United Kingdom

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/types-of-abuse/grooming/>

Broken link? Please notify us at support@WalkingWise.com. **Thank you!**

Links accessed on 7/12/2026.