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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

Walking Wise Education Center

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Parents & Caregivers

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents always treat a child’s 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](https://www.HealthyChildren.org). In addition, if there are any suspicions of child sex trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or Rescue America at 833-599-FREE (3733). For more information, visit [HumanTraffickingHotline.org](https://www.HumanTraffickingHotline.org) or [RescueAmerica.ngo](https://www.RescueAmerica.ngo).

LESSON #3



LESSON PLAN #3

The Grooming Process

Objective: To provide ideas for creating a deeper conversation that explores how young people can recognize the grooming tactics used by predators to manipulate and exploit victims for sexual harm or trafficking.

I. Emotional Readiness Acknowledgment

- A. **Educator:** To ensure readiness for exploitation prevention education, refer to the *Walking Wise Implementation Tools* and the U.S. Department of Education’s guide, *Human Trafficking in America’s Schools (ed.gov)*. Also, please review the classroom teaching tips to prepare for educating students about exploitation.
- B. **Parents:** To prepare for educating your children about exploitation, please review the home teaching tips.

II. Animated Video & Classroom PowerPoint Presentation

- A. **Educator:** Consider completing the adult learning module on this topic for additional background. Download and adapt the classroom presentation to fit your students’ age and school policies.
- B. **Parents:** Review the vocabulary words (below) with your child, then watch the animated video. After discussing the lesson, consider having your child complete the student survey in this lesson plan.

Vocabulary

1. **Groomer:** Someone who builds trust with a young person to manipulate or harm them.
2. **Opportunist:** A person who looks for chances to take advantage of others for their own benefit.
3. **Unsuspecting:** Not aware of something that could be dangerous or unsafe.
4. **Manipulate:** To control or influence someone in a clever, unfair, or tricky way.
5. **Brainwash:** To strongly influence someone’s thoughts and beliefs until they accept ideas without question.
6. **Seduce:** To persuade or pressure someone using charm, attention, or manipulation to do something they might not normally do.
7. **Boundary:** A personal limit that protects a person’s body, feelings, and values. It helps people decide what behavior is acceptable or unacceptable.
8. **Dominate:** To control or have power over someone’s actions, choices, or behavior.
9. **Isolate:** To separate or cut someone off from their support network of family or friends.
10. **Tactics:** The actions or methods someone uses to reach a goal.
11. **Blackmail:** Threats to reveal private, sensitive, or embarrassing information to make someone do something.
12. **Freedom:** To have the power to move, think, speak, and choose for yourself without restriction.
13. **Virtual Stranger:** Someone online whose true identity and intentions cannot be verified or confirmed.
14. **Bond:** A strong emotional connection that can make someone feel attached, loyal, or dependent on another person.

III. Post Video Discussion

1. **What is a groomer?**
A groomer is a person who builds trust with a young person to manipulate or harm them. They may act kind, caring, or supportive at first, but their goal is to take advantage of the other person for their own benefit.
2. **What does “hidden in plain sight” mean, and how does that apply to groomers?**
“Hidden in plain sight” means someone can seem normal or trustworthy while hiding harmful intentions. A groomer pretends to be a trusted friend or trustworthy adult. They often already know the young person and can even earn the trust of parents and others, which helps them go unnoticed.

3. Why do groomers work to gain trust?

Gaining a young person's trust makes it easier for a groomer to influence and control them.

- **Identify Needs:** They learn the young person's struggles or vulnerabilities.
- **Gain Influence:** The young person is more likely to listen to them.
- **Lower Resistance:** It becomes harder for the young person to say "no."
- **Cross Boundaries:** The groomer can more easily pressure the young person into unsafe situations.

4. What roles or positions might a groomer hold?

A groomer can be anyone, including someone a young person already knows or trusts. They may be family members, such as a parent, relative, or sibling. They could be trusted adults, like a teacher, coach, counselor, or community leader. A groomer might also be a friend, classmate, older teen, neighbor, or romantic interest. In many cases, they may be a stranger that the young person meets online.

5. Why do many victims stay silent?

Often, young people do not report abuse because they may feel scared, threatened, or worried about what could happen if they tell. Some feel ashamed or blame themselves, even though it is not their fault. In some cases, the situation or abuse has been made to seem "normal," which can be confusing. Others may not realize that what is happening to them is wrong or illegal, which can cause them to stay silent.

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

- **Online:** Groomers may connect through social media apps and gaming platforms to build a friendship.
- **Public Places:** They may meet in public places like parks, concerts, or community events.
- **Social Gatherings:** They might meet at parties or group events and pretend to be interested in starting a friendship or a relationship.
- **Someone They Know:** In many cases, they already know the young person and build trust by acting like they share the same interests or hobbies.

7. How can groomers manipulate young people to make them feel obligated?

- **Gifts or Favors:** Groomers may give gifts, money, or special treatment to make the young person feel like they owe them something or to gain their loyalty.
- **Attention and Praise:** They may give lots of compliments or attention, especially to someone who feels left out or unsure of themselves.
- **Make It Seem Normal:** They may make unsafe or risky behavior seem normal, exciting, or "grown-up."
- **Guilt or Sympathy:** They may use guilt, pity, or sensitive stories to create a strong emotional connection.
- **Favoritism:** They may treat the young person as "special" to separate them from others.

8. How can groomers manipulate young people to make them feel dependent?

- **Provide Basic Needs:** Groomers may give money, food, clothing, rides, a place to stay, and even protection so the young person begins to rely on them.
- **Isolation:** They may try to separate the young person from friends, family, or trusted adults.
- **Substances:** They may offer alcohol or drugs to influence decisions or create dependence.

9. How do groomers change their behavior after gaining trust to take control?

- **Make Demands:** Groomers may stop being kind and begin making demands or applying pressure.
- **Threaten to Take Away Support:** They may threaten to take away things they previously provided, like attention, love, gifts, or basic needs.
- **Isolation:** They may have once pretended to enjoy the young person's family and friends but now pressure them to pull away from their support system.
- **Encourage Rule-Breaking:** They may push the young person to break rules or go against trusted adults like parents, teachers, or coaches. Sometimes they even pressure the young person to break the law.

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

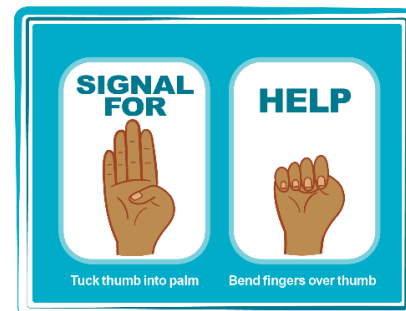
- **Trust Your Feelings:** If something feels wrong, trust your instincts. Groomers might try to make you feel obligated, but feeling uncomfortable is a valid signal.
- **Set Boundaries:** Communicate your boundaries and stick to them. Do not let anyone cross the line to pressure you into doing something that makes you uncomfortable.
- **Be Assertive:** Practice saying “NO” clearly and confidently. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, you are not required to explain the reasons.
- **Recognize Manipulation:** Be aware of tactics groomers and unsafe people use, such as gifts, pressure, guilt, or threatening to hurt someone you love, to influence your decisions.
- **End Communication:** Victims should discontinue all communication, even if feeling frightened by threats or embarrassed.
- **Save Evidence:** Keep all messages, images, or threats, even if they're upsetting or embarrassing, because evidence can help adults or law enforcement provide protection.
- **Ask for Help:** Tell a trustworthy adult right away. If the first person doesn't help, continue telling others until someone listens and takes action to provide protection. You may also call the help line listed below.

IV. How to Ask for Help

There are safe ways to get help if you or someone you know is being threatened or harmed.

Options:

- If you are in immediate danger, dial 911.
- If the sexual predator is NOT a family member, tell a parent or guardian.
If the sexual predator IS a family member, tell a trustworthy adult.
- If you are a student, tell a trustworthy teacher, coach, school nurse, social worker, officer, principal, or guidance counselor.
- To gain internet access for help, use a computer at school or a public library.
- If you are in public, consider hand-motioning the “Signal for Help” to alert bystanders to call the police.



24-Hour Hotlines for HELP

- National Human Trafficking Hotline 1-888-373-7888 or Text “BEFREE”: 233733
- Rescue America 833-599-FREE (3733)
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [Hotline.RAINN.org/online](https://www.hotline.rainn.org/)
- 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)

VIDEO SCRIPT #3

The Grooming Process of Child Sex Trafficking

Note: The bolded words are defined in the video vocabulary list under section II.

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 whom 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

*Please mark an **X** in the box next to the best answer:*

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 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

STUDENT SURVEY #3

The Grooming Process

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

ANSWER KEY

KEY #3

1) A

2) C

3) B

4) A

RESOURCES #3

The Grooming Process

Visit us online at [WalkingWise.com](https://www.walkingwise.com)

Other Resource Links – Websites accessed on 8/7/2025.

US Department of Education – *Human Trafficking in America’s Schools*
<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE-2021HumanTraffickingGuide-508.pdf>

OnWatch™ – [iamonwatch.org](https://www.iamonwatch.org): Video Module 9 – *Prevention and Protecting Your Community*
<https://www.iamonwatch.org/training/overview>

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network – [RAINN.org](https://www.rainn.org): *Grooming: Know the Warning Signs*
<https://www.rainn.org/news/grooming-know-warning-signs>

Coalition for Children – [safecild.org](https://www.safecild.org): *Understanding Grooming*
<https://safecild.org/understanding-grooming/>

Ann Craft Trust – [anncrafttrust.org](https://www.anncrafttrust.org): *Signs of Grooming in Adults – What to Watch Out For*
<https://www.anncrafttrust.org/signs-of-grooming-in-adults-what-to-watch-out-for/>

VIRTUS® Online – [virtusonline.org](https://www.virtusonline.org): *Grooming: Psychological, Physical and Community*
https://www.stjosephdg.org/documents/2019/10/2019_10%20VIRTUS%20Monthly%20Bulletin.pdf

ECPAT International – [ecpat.org](https://www.ecpat.org): *Launch of an educational simulation ‘game’ to combat online grooming & sex...*
<https://ecpat.org/launch-of-educational-simulation-game-to-combat-online-grooming-sex-trafficking/>

The Ohio State University – [OSU.EDU](https://www.osu.edu): *The Grooming Process and Warning Signs*
<https://u.osu.edu/swk5005/sample-page/>

Urban Institute – [Urban.org](https://www.urban.org): *Impossible Choices*
<https://apps.urban.org/features/food-insecurity/>

Recovering Grace – [RecoveringGrace.org](https://www.recoveringgrace.org): *The Characteristics of a Sexual Groomer*
<https://www.recoveringgrace.org/2015/06/the-characteristics-of-a-sexual-groomer/>

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