

HOME LEARNING ACTIVITY FOR PARENTS/CARERS AND CHILDREN

LEARNING ABOUT SAFER ONLINE INTERACTIONS AND ONLINE GROOMING

YEAR 7–8
(AGES 13–14)

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KNOW

The content within this activity pack discusses online child sexual exploitation and online grooming.

The activity itself is age appropriate, however the context and information behind it may raise concerns for some readers.

If you need help or support please refer to the end of this activity pack.

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How to use this home learning activity

This home learning activity provides background information for parents/carers to assist them guide their child through learning about online interactions and help them identify suspicious behaviour and online grooming.

The audio case study provided is designed for co-viewing, with discussion points and conversation guide to assist with learning.

What parents/carers need to know

Online grooming is when an adult makes online contact with someone under the age of 16 with the intention of establishing a relationship to enable their sexual abuse. The offence occurs in the online communications, so no physical contact need ever occur for police to become involved.

Online child sex offenders are manipulative. They may create several online identities with some pretending to be another young person in order to build and maintain trust, while others are upfront about their age or intentions and manipulate the young person into thinking their relationship is okay.

Some may be sophisticated, using multiple platforms and multiple identities. Others will simply contact as many children as possible, hoping some will give in to their demands. Some may only target a single child.

They might pretend to have things in common with a child to try and get more information. They can often say all the right things, make a child feel special and even offer to buy things.

Online grooming can take place on any interactive app, game or site. This includes instant messaging, social media and in chat rooms. Anonymous chat in particular can provide a platform for online child sex offenders to target young people. There have also been many instances where offenders have also used 'in game' chat to contact children.

It is important to know that all websites, apps, games or sites have the potential to be misused or cause harm, however, they also have the potential to be positive, and foster creativity, problem solving skills, socialisation or even just downtime for a young person.

ThinkUKnow is pro-technology, and we focus on the importance of providing education and the tools for young people to use the internet safely.

To help empower young people it is important to build knowledge and critical thinking skills to help them navigate these issues. The below activity includes a case study to bring awareness of the tactics offenders might use. This is so young people can identify suspicious behaviour and seek help, should they find themselves in a similar situation.



CO-VIEWING ACTIVITY

Online child sex offenders may use a variety of tactics to groom children and young people.

One of these tactics is by setting up a social media account pretending to be an 'agent' by offering 'modelling' jobs where victims must provide images in exchange for clothing, money or other benefits like gift cards.

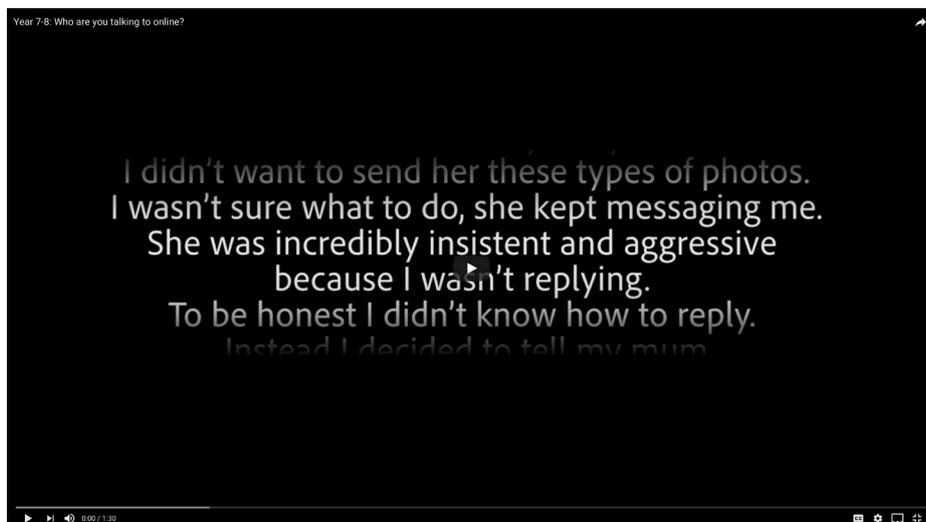
The following case study is about someone who was contacted online by another user through an image sharing social media app.

The victim in this case study was approached by someone operating a fake online account to convince her to send images of herself. As you will hear, it started off as a seemingly legitimate interaction but quickly escalated into something more.

This case study is taken from a real police report that was made to police in the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation.

Click on the link to watch the case study

<https://youtu.be/LbV3lzdv6hM>



Discussion points

Use the below discussion points to start open communication with your child about online grooming and how to begin identifying suspicious behaviour:

- **How did the interaction start?**

Answer: The young person was contacted by someone online, posing to be a model scout.

- **What did the offender do and say to manipulate the victim?**

Answer: Offering a modelling opportunity by requesting specific images. The offender complimented the young person and asked for "normal" images to begin with. The offender became very persistent and aggressive to pressure the young person into sending "naughty" images.

- **If you are using social media, and you receive random friend requests, or someone starts chatting with you on direct message that you don't know, what steps can you take to ensure your safety?**

Answer: Not accept the request/ignore the message and block; not disclose any personal information to the person; like address, school, contact information etc; speak to a trusted adult if they say anything inappropriate or that makes you uncomfortable.

- **What should you do if you come across a suspicious account or user? How would you verify an offer from a company or agent on social media?**

Answer: If it seems too good to be true, it probably is – go with your gut instincts; seek credentials and do some research on the account. Suspicious accounts will normally have generic images, few friends/followers and have not been active for long. If you are approached by a modelling agent, always research and verify the company they claim to be representing before sending any images. Always seek support and assistance from a trusted adult.

TOP TIPS AND GETTING HELP

HERE ARE SOME PREVENTION TIPS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD FOR SAFER ONLINE INTERACTIONS:

- Understand the difference between public vs private information. If you have a public account, restrict the type of information you are posting: including personal, biographical and contact information
- Question suspicious friend requests or random followers
- If someone is pressuring you to share intimate images, it is okay to say no. Don't let their persistence change your response
- If you feel uneasy about the conversations being had online with someone, report it to a trusted adult straight away
- If something doesn't seem right trust your instincts and seek help.

Most importantly, there is always someone you can talk to if you have an online interaction that you are concerned about. It is never too late to seek help and support.

A note for parents/carers sharing images online

It is critical to support your child if they come forward to report an online issue. Research suggests that many parents/carers indicated they would respond negatively or in a way that would exacerbate the issue in the instance of online child sexual exploitation. It is important to remember that these situations can be complex and a child may be reluctant to seek help if they fear they may be in trouble for their actions¹.

GETTING HELP

- **Kids Helpline** is a free and confidential 24-hour online and phone counselling service for young people aged 5-25 years and even parents. You can call them, or chat to them online.
- Grooming, sextortion and online child sexual exploitation can be reported to **Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation**.
- The **ThinkUKnow** website has online resources and information on how to report and get help if things go wrong online.
- The **eSafety Commissioner** can help with removing content and has advice on what to do if you are a victim of image based abuse.

If a child is in immediate danger, please call Triple Zero (000).

¹ <https://www.acce.gov.au/news-and-media/understanding-online-child-exploitation>

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