

APPENDIX 7: Grooming and Entrapment

Although an uncomfortable area to consider, this appendix is included to heighten staff's awareness of possible indications of 'grooming' and thus to help inform their conduct so that it cannot be misconstrued in such a way.

In the NSPCC briefing on Grooming and Entrapment (July 2012), grooming is defined as *"a process by which an individual prepares a child for abuse. This is usually perpetrated by a significant adult in the child's life either at home or somewhere else in the child's environment."*

Grooming is a conscious, purposeful, and carefully planned approach used by the offender to gain access to the child, gain the child's trust and compliance and maintain the child's secrecy to provide opportunities to abuse and reduce the likelihood of being reported or discovered.

Evidence demonstrates that, in the context of education, those who sexually abuse tend to give attention to and show affection to potential victims, behaving in a manipulative and coercive manner rather than using violence. They use and abuse their position of trust and authority to befriend pupils and gradually desensitise them to sexualised behaviour, facilitating offending and reducing the likelihood of disclosure.

The process of grooming can begin when an abuser targets or selects a victim. The selection of the victim is often influenced by the compliance of the pupil and the likelihood of secrecy. Offenders tend to target pupils who they can control. Most children respond to positive attention from a teacher or member of staff, and the praise of teachers can have a huge influence. Victims are often selected because the offender perceives them as vulnerable, isolated, and/or emotionally needy.

Pupils who are not getting on well with their parents or who are experiencing some type of emotional difficulty can be targeted not only because they might be responsive to the initial approach from someone in a position of trust, but also because they may be more likely to maintain silence. The offender may begin grooming by giving the pupil special attention, support, or rewards. The power of such rewards to affect the pupil should not be underestimated. Rewards from a teacher or other member of school staff may have a significant impact on the pupil's motivation and understanding. Rewarding for the purposes of grooming may take place in the context of providing the pupil with additional help, mentoring, advice in relation to a project, or other opportunities for one-to-one contact time.

The offender can use these legitimate aspects of their role to subtly introduce and increase sexually-related communication. This could be done by bringing up sexual matters in discussion, leaving materials related to sex out where the victim can see them or exploiting the victim's natural curiosity or uncertainty about sex. Touching and physical contact with the victim tends to be gradually increased to test the child's ability to maintain secrecy and to desensitise the child through progressive sexual behaviours. The offender may also strive to provide the pupil with experiences that are valuable so that the pupil will be reluctant to lose or damage the relationship.

Grooming may also involve the parents of the victim so that the offender can gain their trust and approval. This will allow the offender to have greater access to the victim and enhanced ability to spend time alone with them. Parents can often be pleased about the extra attention a teacher is giving their child, perceiving them as a positive authority figure and role model for their child. An offender may, however, also carefully groom victims by systematically separating them from family and peers. The offender may come to represent the closest relationship the victim has, particularly if the victim is socially isolated or emotionally vulnerable. In such cases, the victim may be reticent to give up what he or she views as a "loving" relationship. Once isolated, victims are more easily exploited and manipulated into sexual relationships.

Below is a list to supportively advise staff of some potential warning signs of grooming as a precursor to sexual abuse. They include:

- a pupil receiving special attention or preferential treatment
- excessive time spent alone with a pupil outside of formal lesson time
- frequently spending time with a pupil in private or isolated areas
- transporting a pupil possibly to or from school
- making friends with a pupil's parents and visiting their home
- acting as a particular pupil's "listening ear"
- giving small gifts, money, toys, cards, letters to a pupil
- using texts, telephone calls, e-mails or social networking sites to inappropriately communicate with a pupil
- overly affectionate behaviour with a pupil
- making suggestive remarks or comments of a sexual nature around a pupil
- other pupils are suspicious and make jokes or references

Staff should be aware that internet-based communications and forums increasingly provide a means for adults not currently known to pupils to establish contact and to groom them online. At School, pupil access to computers is closely monitored and portable devices with internet capability are not permitted. If staff feel, however,

there are any indications that a pupil may be at risk of internet grooming – perhaps through snippets of overheard conversations – they should discuss this with the DSL at the earliest opportunity.