

ONLINE GROOMING

How It Starts & How to Spot It

60 MINUTES · FLEXIBLE KS2–KS4 · KCSIE 2024 & PSHE ASSOCIATION ALIGNED

DURATION
60 MinutesAGE RANGE
KS2 — KS4SUBJECT
PSHE / RSE / SMSCVERSION
1.0 — May 2026

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Understand what online grooming is and why it is difficult to recognise from the inside
- ✓ Identify the tactics used — trust-building, boundary testing, isolation and platform migration
- ✓ Recognise warning signs in their own online interactions and friendships
- ✓ Know what to do and who to talk to if something feels wrong
- ✓ Understand that if grooming happens, it is never the child's fault

RESOURCES NEEDED

- ✓ This lesson plan (teacher copy, pages 1–3)
- ✓ Student reflection sheets (page 4 — print one per pupil)
- ✓ Whiteboard or display for discussion prompts
- ✓ Optional: scenario cards (page 3) printed and cut for group work

VOCABULARY — PRE-TEACH THESE TERMS

Grooming — When someone builds a child's trust deliberately in order to exploit or abuse them.

Platform migration — Moving conversation from one app to another, often to somewhere with less moderation or visibility.

Isolation — Gradually separating someone from the people who care about them.

Boundary testing — Pushing limits incrementally to see what a person will accept.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

KCSIE 2024 — KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN EDUCATION

Supports Part 1 (safeguarding awareness for all staff), Annex B (online safety requirements) and Ofsted's expectation that schools teach age-appropriate awareness of grooming, exploitation and online contact with unknown adults. Also supports the school's duty to provide a broad and balanced PSHE curriculum addressing online harms.

PSHE ASSOCIATION — CORE THEME ALIGNMENT

Aligns with **Health & Wellbeing H16–H22** (keeping safe online, recognising exploitation) and **Relationships R11–R19** (recognising healthy and unhealthy relationships, online contact, consent and trust). Suitable for delivery within RSE or standalone PSHE.

⚠ SAFEGUARDING NOTICE — READ BEFORE TEACHING

This topic can prompt disclosures. Remind pupils at the start of the lesson that some information shared cannot be kept private. If a pupil discloses something of concern during or after the lesson, follow your school's safeguarding procedures and contact your **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) immediately**. Do not investigate independently.

LESSON PLAN

ONLINE GROOMING — HOW IT STARTS & HOW TO SPOT IT

LESSON TIMELINE

0–10 mins	STARTER & HOOK	<p>THE QUESTION ON THE BOARD</p> <p>Display as pupils arrive: "If a stranger in the street asked for your home address, would you give it? What about online?" Take brief hands-up responses. Use the contrast to discuss why online interactions feel different — and why that gap matters. Introduce the word grooming gently: someone can build your trust online before you realise their intentions are harmful.</p>
10–25 mins	CORE LEARNING 1	<p>HOW GROOMING WORKS — THE FIVE STAGES</p> <p>Teacher-led. Draw a simple timeline on the board: Target → Trust → Need → Isolate → Exploit. Explain each stage plainly (see page 3 content guide). Key messages: it usually starts on platforms the child already uses. The person rarely seems dangerous at first — they seem kind and understanding. Being groomed is not weakness. It is designed to be hard to see.</p>
25–40 mins	CORE LEARNING 2	<p>WARNING SIGNS — WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?</p> <p>Use the warning signs from page 3. Ask: "Would you notice these things in your own conversations?" Encourage reflection, not confession. Key discussion points: online friends with no other connections except you; someone who guilt-trips you when you don't reply; being asked to keep a friendship secret from parents; receiving gifts or gaming credits from someone you've never met in person.</p>
40–52 mins	GROUP ACTIVITY	<p>SCENARIO DISCUSSION — WHAT WOULD YOU DO?</p> <p>Split into small groups. Give each group one scenario from page 3 (or display whole-class). Each group identifies: (1) the warning signs present, (2) what they would do, (3) who they would tell. Groups report back briefly — teacher facilitates. If a pupil says "I wouldn't want to get them in trouble," acknowledge this honestly as a real barrier before gently challenging it.</p>
52–60 mins	PLENARY	<p>ONE THING. ONE PERSON. ONE NUMBER.</p> <p>Close with three asks: (1) One thing — name one warning sign they'll watch out for. (2) One person — name a trusted adult they could go to. (3) One number — Childline: 0800 1111. Free, confidential, 24/7. You don't have to be in crisis to call. Distribute the student reflection sheet (page 4).</p>

DIFFERENTIATION GUIDANCE

FOR YOUNGER / LOWER-CONFIDENCE GROUPS (KS2-KS3)

Use the traffic light framework on page 4 as the anchor throughout. Keep scenarios straightforward — gaming chat and social media. Avoid graphic detail. Reinforce the "trust a grown-up" message repeatedly and make it feel safe to speak up. Emphasise that telling an adult is brave, not babyish.

FOR OLDER / MORE CAPABLE GROUPS (KS4+)

Explore why young people don't report — stigma, loyalty, fear of overreacting. Introduce the legal context (Sexual Offences Act 2003; grooming as a criminal offence). Discuss platform accountability — whose responsibility is it to prevent access to children? How does the Online Safety Act 2023 change that?

CONTENT GUIDE & SCENARIOS

ONLINE GROOMING — HOW IT STARTS & HOW TO SPOT IT

WHAT IS ONLINE GROOMING?

Grooming is a process, not a single event. It describes the way someone — usually an adult — deliberately builds a relationship of trust with a child in order to exploit them. It can unfold over days, weeks or months and often begins on platforms children use every day: games like Roblox or Fortnite, social media, or messaging apps.

The groomer is rarely who children imagine. They tend to be patient, friendly and attentive — making the child feel understood, special and valued, often more than their real-life relationships do. That is what makes it so difficult to recognise from the inside.

THE FIVE STAGES OF GROOMING

1 — TARGET

They identify a child who appears vulnerable — lonely, seeking attention, having friendship difficulties, or highly active online. Public profiles and open gaming chats make this straightforward.

2 — TRUST

They invest time. Compliments, shared interests, listening to problems. They become the child's most reliable, understanding "friend." This stage can last weeks or months.

3 — NEED

They position themselves as essential — the one person who truly understands. They may give gifts, gaming credits or money to reinforce a sense of debt or obligation.

4 — ISOLATE

They undermine other relationships: *"Your friends don't really get you."* They ask to move to a more private platform — from a game chat to Discord, then WhatsApp — away from monitoring.

5 — EXPLOIT

Once trust is established and other supports are weakened, they begin exploitation — requests for images, meetings, or other harmful behaviours. By this stage the child often feels unable to refuse or disclose.

WARNING SIGNS — WHAT TO WATCH FOR

NEW ONLINE "FRIEND"	Adult or older teen showing intense interest with no mutual connections
REQUESTS FOR SECRECY	"Don't tell your parents" — one of the clearest red flags
PLATFORM MIGRATION	"Can you add me on Snapchat?" — moving away from monitored spaces
GIFTS OR MONEY	Gaming credits or vouchers with no explanation — creates obligation
EMOTIONAL PRESSURE	Guilt, anger or upset when the child doesn't respond or refuses
WITHDRAWAL	Child becoming secretive with devices, changing behaviour, distancing from family
REQUESTS FOR IMAGES	Any photo request — starting innocently, then escalating — is serious

DISCUSSION SCENARIOS

SCENARIO A — GAMING

Kieran is 13 and plays Fortnite. He's been chatting to "ProGamer99" for three weeks. ProGamer99 is 19, very good at the game, and has sent Kieran V-Bucks twice. He says Kieran is the most talented player he's ever met. This week he asked Kieran to add him on Discord because "the game chat is laggy."

Discuss: What are the warning signs? What should Kieran do next?

SCENARIO B — SOCIAL MEDIA

Amara is 14. She got a follow request from someone she doesn't know on Instagram — 2 followers, 0 posts. They DM'd saying they'd seen her in a group photo and she seemed "really mature for her age." They've been messaging daily for a fortnight. Last night they said "don't mention me to your friends — they'll just be jealous."

Discuss: Why might Amara find this flattering? What are the red flags?

SCENARIO C — A FRIEND'S SITUATION

Your friend tells you they've been talking to someone online who is "really kind" but they don't want to tell their parents because they're worried it'll be taken away. They're not sure if it's weird or if they're just being paranoid.

Discuss: What would you say to your friend? Who could you both go to?

MY ONLINE SAFETY REFLECTION

ONLINE GROOMING — WHAT I KNOW, WHAT I'LL DO

This sheet is for you — not to be marked or collected unless you choose to share it. Be honest with yourself.

ONE WARNING SIGN FROM TODAY I'LL WATCH OUT FOR IN MY OWN ONLINE CONVERSATIONS:

IF A FRIEND TOLD ME THEY WERE TALKING TO SOMEONE ONLINE WHO MADE THEM FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, I WOULD SAY:

ONE TRUSTED ADULT I COULD GO TO IF SOMETHING ONLINE FELT WRONG:

THE TRAFFIC LIGHT CHECK — RATE YOUR ONLINE CONTACTS

Think about someone you talk to online. Honestly, which column do they fall into?



GREEN — FEELS SAFE

I know who they are in real life. My parents or friends know about them. Nothing about our conversations feels weird or secret.



AMBER — NOT SURE

I'm not completely sure who they are. Some of the conversation has felt a bit strange. I haven't told anyone about them.



RED — SOMETHING'S WRONG

They've asked me to keep things secret. They've asked to move to a different app. Something about it doesn't feel right.

IF YOU'RE IN THE AMBER OR RED COLUMN — TALK TO SOMEONE. TODAY.

You are not in trouble. You haven't done anything wrong. The person who made you feel unsafe is responsible — not you. Telling a trusted adult is the bravest thing you can do. You don't have to figure this out alone.

CHILDLINE — FREE. CONFIDENTIAL. AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY.

You can call, chat online or send an email. You don't need to be in crisis. Call because something doesn't feel right and you're not sure what to do. **No one will judge you.**

childline.org.uk · Operated by the NSPCC · Free from all phones including mobiles

HELPLINE

0800 111

Free. Any time. Any reason.