

# IS IT GROOMING?

## Directions:

Discuss the process of grooming and the tactics that predators use with your teen. Explain that there are common characteristics of grooming tactics. Remind them that there can be victims and abusers who do not fit these descriptions. For example, victims may be described as isolated from family and friends. However, that does not mean that someone who is very close with his or her family and who has a lot of close friends can't be a victim. Abuse can happen to anyone.

The grooming process usually starts with the abuser finding a victim who they think may be vulnerable. The abuser looks for someone who may be emotionally vulnerable, has low self-esteem, may seem lonely, or has a need — such as being in a family that is going through a difficult divorce or financial hardship.

Next, the abuser develops a relationship with the victim and, many times, with the family, too. The abuser is often very nice and likeable. The abuser finds out what the victim needs and then works to fill that need. For example, if finding out the victim feels alone and wants attention, the abuser may provide that needed attention. It may be more than just spending time together; the abuser may give gifts or take the victim places. Secrecy is an important tactic that a predator will use in the grooming process. The predator usually tells the victim to keep gifts, attention, special favors, and trips a secret.

Once the relationship has been formed, the abuser will begin to isolate the victim by setting up situations where they are alone together. A critical part of the grooming process is testing the boundaries and the reactions of the victim. Once there is a trusting relationship in which it is common for the victim and abuser to be alone together, the abuser will begin to introduce a sexual relationship.

Finally, the abuser will establish and maintain control through secrecy, blame, intimidation, and threats. The abuser often convinces the victim that terrible things will happen if the victim tells.

**Reinforce to your teen that telling someone, being heard, and being helped will stop the abuse.**

Complete the activity on the next page with your teen. Read each scenario together and discuss if the interaction is okay and a normal situation for someone their age or if they think it is a potential grooming situation. Underline the clues. If they think it is grooming, ask what they think the person in the scenario could do to stop the abuser from continuing the grooming relationship.

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Scenario	Safe or Grooming?	What can you do?
<p>Kelly is 14, and she often goes over to her best friend Mandy's house. Mandy's college-age sister Meghan is frequently at the house even though she has her own apartment. Meghan and Kelly often talk about school, shopping, and boys. Kelly doesn't have any sisters, and her mother works long hours, so she enjoys having someone to talk to and spend time with. Meghan begins inviting Kelly over to her apartment. She takes her shopping and buys her new clothes. She encourages Kelly to keep it a secret because she doesn't want Mandy to get jealous. She then begins to invite Kelly to spend the weekends with her.</p>		
<p>Miles is on the swim team. Usually he is very talkative and jokes around before practice. Today, he is quiet and keeps to himself. His coach walks over and asks if anything is wrong. Miles explains that he just found out his parents are splitting up. His coach says, "Yeah, my folks split up when I was young, too. It can be rough, but you will get through it. I remember it really helped me to talk to someone, so if you need help getting together with your school counselor, let me know."</p>		
<p>Keisha has always gone out for burgers after the basketball games with a group of friends. She starts to make excuses about why she can't go with them. She stops sitting with them at lunch. She doesn't talk to her friends before school. One friend tries talking to her to find out what's wrong. Keisha denies anything is wrong, but she gets a text from J.T. that reads, "See you after school. I have something special for you."</p>		
<p>Antonio's neighbor offers to pay him to do some work around the house. He tells Antonio that he knows money has been tight and he just wants to help out. However, he doesn't want Antonio's mom to know that he is paying him because he doesn't want to hurt her pride. Antonio starts out helping with the yard work. Then he is asked to come inside and help with some painting. One day, Antonio misses the bus for school and decides to stay home. His neighbor notices and says he will tell Antonio's mom that he skipped school unless he agrees to keep helping out around the house.</p>		