

## THE GROOMING PROCESS

### **Finding the victim. Who do groomers target?**

Groomers and traffickers will look for people who are vulnerable, for example, teenagers who are alone during school hours and who seem 'lost'. Groomers will often target people in places such as shopping malls, bus & train stations, cafes and parks. They will 'read' the body language and they will target people who look tired, hungry, afraid, or lonely. Grooming also takes place through social media. Read below for more information on fake accounts.

### **Making friends & building an emotional connection**

The groomers will make the victim feel 'loved and special'. The groomer wants to gain the victim's trust and to build a close emotional relationship. Special gifts may be part of the process. This friendship, however, is just a strategy. It is part of a long-term process that will probably result in violence, emotional abuse and exploitation. Human traffickers will invest time and money to groom their victims because they know that in the long term, exploitation of the victims will mean profit.

### **Isolation and threats, debts**

Once the friendship is established, things start to change. The groomers are preparing to exploit the victim. Threats and blackmail may be used here. 'If you tell anyone about this, we will hurt someone in your family' or 'You owe us money for all the gifts we gave you.' If grooming is online, personal photos might be used to scare, blackmail, and control the victim.

### **Exploitation and abuse**

Next, groomers and traffickers will try to control everything about the victim's life: where they go, who they meet, what they do. The victim of the crime may be forced to carry out illegal activities or forced into commercial sexual exploitation. Often the victim is too afraid to tell anyone. They also may feel helpless or that it is their fault this is happening. It is NOT their fault. They have been part of a very carefully planned process. It might take one week or one year.

## IF YOU OR A FRIEND ARE IN THIS SITUATION

- TELL AN ADULT that you trust. If they do not believe you, find someone who does believe you. Adults are often so shocked by this crime, they cannot believe it is happening.
- DO NOT BLAME YOURSELF. THIS NOT YOUR FAULT even if you agreed at first.
- GROOMERS or TRAFFICKERS will change facts and give the impression that you were responsible, that you wanted this happen. This is a lie and it is part of the grooming process.
- THIS IS A CRIME. Victims may be embarrassed to talk about this crime, but it isn't their fault.
- CALL THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING HOTLINE in your country and explain the situation.

### IMPORTANT!

- Both men and women can target, groom, and exploit victims.
- Victims can be of any age, including adults.
- A romantic adventure and 'true love' is often used to groom people.
- Groomers might be family members or people in positions of trust and authority.
- Groomers might target the whole family, 'Trust me, I will look after your son. Don't worry!'
- Secrecy and isolation are part of the grooming process, 'Let's keep this our secret. Let's meet privately. Don't tell your friends or family. They won't understand.'
- Grooming happens on social media accounts. Watch out for FAKE friends with FAKE accounts. Often FAKE accounts have been created recently. They might have very few but very similar photos, have few friends, or have many photos that all look the same.
- DO NOT give personal information on social media, such as your home location, phone number, work or school location.
- DO NOT tell anyone you don't know about your family, their names, their ages, their jobs.
- DO NOT send photos of your personal life. Be suspicious if they never want to talk face to face online.
- DO NOT MEET UP in person. If you do this, make sure you tell a parent, an adult or several friends where you are. **DO NOT GO ALONE.**