

Safeguarding Savvy

e-Bulletin

Issue 012

Online Grooming



Breck Bednar was a 14-year-old boy from Surrey who, like many boys of his age, loved technology and computer games and spent lots of time 'gaming', often playing against other online 'friends' as part of a wider virtual group. Breck came into contact with his murderer, Lewis Daynes, over the internet. Daynes ran an online server through which Breck and his friends played games. Daynes used this platform to groom Breck and over the course of 13 months, forging an online "friendship" with the teenager, gradually coming between him and his family and friends by telling him a series of lies. Daynes had promised Breck "great wealth" from a fictional computer business and managed to lure Breck to his flat on the premise of handing this business over to him. On the 16 February 2014, Breck went to Daynes' flat in Essex, after lying to his family about where he was going. The next day, Daynes called 999 claiming Breck had tried to take his own life, and while struggling to restrain him, he had accidentally stabbed him.

What is 'online grooming'?

Online grooming is where someone befriends a child online and builds up their trust with the intention of exploiting them and causing them harm.

How does 'online grooming' happen?

Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time. It can start out publicly on social media and in games but will most likely move across to private chats.

Anyone could unfortunately groom a child online, regardless of age, gender or race. Groomers are very skilled at what they do and can often befriend a child by appearing to have the same hobbies and interests as them. Using fake accounts and photos, they may also appear to be the same age as the child. However, not all groomers will choose to mask their age or gender. Some groomers may impersonate an aspirational figure, whilst others may use their age and experience to develop a 'mentor' type relationship with their victim. A groomer will use the same sites, games and apps as children in order to gain their trust and build a friendship. Children can be flattered at first by the attention given to them by this new 'online friend', particularly if they are offering support, showing understanding or giving validation. However, they may also seek to manipulate, blackmail and control the child, potentially isolating them from their friends and family. It's important to remember that children may not understand they have been groomed or see their 'online friend' as untrustworthy or abusive.

Places where online grooming can happen



Social Networking Sites



Chat rooms



Instant messaging & live streaming apps



Dating apps



Photo sharing apps & sites like Instagram



Online gaming sites

Online communities make it easier for abusive adults to contact children

NSPCC, June 2019

What harm a child may experience online?

- child sexual abuse
- exposure to radicalising content
- youth-produced sexual imagery ('sexting')
- cyberbullying
- exposure to age-inappropriate content, such as pornography
- exposure to harmful content, such as suicide content

Staying Safe online during COVID 19

Whilst most of our children and young people will be at home during this current crisis, it is important more than ever to ensure, as best as possible, that they have the knowledge and skills to remain safe online.

Social media platforms are a great way for children and young people to stay in touch with friends and relatives, especially during lockdown, but sadly negative influencers and online groomers will also be taking advantage of this unprecedented time. It is important to remember that, albeit rare, there are people who use the internet to groom, abuse and exploit children and young people. Therefore, use all methods available to your school to provide your pupils and parents with key information of how to stay safe online. Similarly, if pupils are accessing online learning, ensure there are clear mechanism in place for pupils to report back to either school, or other national organisations, such as (eg Childline, CEOP, UK Safer Internet Centre). The DfE have produced an initial list of online educational resources to help children to learn at home. [Coronavirus \(COVID 19\): online education resources](#)

What to do if you receive a report of online grooming or have concerns that a child may be at risk of online grooming

- **Step 1:** Share your concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and CPC, or deputy DSL in their absence. Even the smallest piece of information, when put together, can make a bigger picture of what might be happening to a child or young person online. **Do not be afraid to report or act.**
- **Step 2:** Record accurately your concerns using CPOMS or by e-mail to cpc@theboulevardacademy.com
- **Step 3:** Seek feedback from the DSL or CPC on actions they have taken.
NEVER copy, share or show others sexual imageries. You'll be breaking the law.

National guidance

-  DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2019
-  DfE: Teaching online safety in schools, 2019

External Sources

www.nspcc.org.uk

www.ceop.police.uk

www.childnet.com

www.educateagainsthate.com/

www.saferinternet.org.uk

This bulletin has been produced to provide a basic awareness of online grooming and how to respond to incidents. Please take the time necessary to fully read and understand.