

Signs to Look Out For: Signs of Abuse, Grooming and Predator Traits

Signs of Physical Abuse in Children

- flinching when touched
- inability to recall how injuries occurred
- avoiding getting changed for sporting or other activity
- reluctance to go home
- wearing trousers and shirts or blouses with long sleeves even on hot sunny days, although remember to consider this in the light of the individual child (eg some children are dressed modestly for religious or cultural reasons)
- excessively eager to please
- very aggressive or withdrawn
- attempts to run away
- sad, frequently cries
- drug or alcohol misuse
- any behaviour that is not consistent with a child's stage of development.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Physical signs include:

- stomach pains
- discomfort in walking or sitting
- sexually transmitted infections
- weight loss or gain

Behavioural signs include:

- a sudden change in behaviour
- not wanting to undress for physical education or sporting activities
- sexual knowledge, language and behaviours beyond their age
- eating disorders
- fear or avoidance of being with a person or a group of people
- withdrawn
- self-harming
- unexplained amounts of money
- disturbed sleep
- sexualised drawings
- going missing from school

- the types of questions asked (do they suggest sexual knowledge that a child should not have)
- being picked up from school by taxis or cars and people who are not known to be the child's family
- sexualised play
- faecal soiling
- enuresis (bed wetting).

Signs of Neglect: Neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing or shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment
- respond to a child's basic emotional needs.
- withdrawing their interest in the child's education as they may feel they pay the school to educate their child and withdraw from input
- allowing childminders, maids, nannies, drivers and in some cultures extended family members; for example grandparents to take over the parenting of the child and have very little input in the child's development
- allowing the child all the latest IT and 'gadge and "abandoning them" to these material goods

Grooming Behaviours

- Gaining access to children, for example, through employment at schools or daycares, volunteering at youth-aimed mission groups, marriage to a single mother
- Victims chosen based on availability, desirability and vulnerability
- 'Circle of grooming' includes identifying a target, establishing a connection, gathering information, filling needs and exploiting vulnerabilities (for example, need for attention from an adult, desire to participate on a team), lowering child's inhibitions to sexual contact
- Grooming methods include giving gifts or money, showing attention, taking the child or being with the child on travel, showing the victim pornography
- Getting the child to like the offender by using similar interests or values as the child; the offender may display a heightened affinity for childish toys and activities because these can be used to make connections with children
- Creating a sense in the child that he or she needs to pay back the offender for kindness or gifts

- Offenders who groom tend to have developed social skills and are adept at identifying vulnerable environments where they can appear as trustworthy, safe and charming
- Grooming goals are to establish trust with child, parents and community and to appear being 'above reproach, a model citizen'
- Creating a perception that the offender is in a position of authority
- Creating a scenario conducive to doubting the child in the event that he or she speaks up
- Getting adults to demonstrate trust toward the offender and thereby convincing children to do the same
- Using commitment and consistency to instill a sense of trustworthiness
- Creating the message to the child that his or her parents trust the offender and that making the offender sad or upset is 'unfriendly'—breaking down the child's innate sense of safety and self-preservation
- Grooming can be in person or online
- Offenders will commonly have multiple victims over time

Common Traits of Predators

- Antisocial in terms of disregarding social rules, as if normal rules don't apply to them
- A willing to cross lines
- not antisocial in terms of being introverted, on the contrary they may be very personable and likeable
- Any type of criminal history
- Disinhibiting behaviour, such as substance abuse
- Grooming, meaning the use of strategies over time to sway children toward sexual abuse
- Sexual deviance
- Intimacy deficits - have difficulty in maintaining long-term relationships
- Have you met or do you know their spouse/significant other?
- Is there a history of short lived romances?
- Do they follow rules?
- Do they frequently disregard or belittle policies?
- Do they have any criminal history?
- Do they show signs of remorse?
- Are they deceitful or manipulative?
- Is there substance use or abuse?
- Do they frequently show signs of denial, minimization or justification?

- Do they have an unusually high interest in childish things (e.g., video games, toys, etc.)
- Do they prefer engagement with children over peers?
- You are looking for clues of antisocial tendencies and social/intimacy deficiencies.
- Using sexually explicit language and off-colour jokes
- Giving gifts without permission
- Using secrecy
- Showing children pornography
- Isolating children from others who might observe signs of abuse or neglect
- Always wanting to be alone with a child
- Discouraging others from being around
- Arranging to be with a child without monitoring