

# Guide for the prevention of Grooming



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Keeping  
Children  
Safe



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## Why should the church be aware of grooming?

Sexual assault of children occurs across all areas of society including churches and other faith communities. It often begins when an adult forms a special relationship with a child. Grooming a child under the age of 16 with the intention of facilitating a sexual relationship is against the law.<sup>1</sup>

Within church (and other community) settings, there are abundant opportunities for adults to form special relationships with children. We know that children and young people build resilience by having healthy relationships with adults. However, we need to ensure these relationships are safe. Procedures, practices and monitoring should be in place to ensure such relationships are not and do not become exploitative. It is essential to be aware of the signs that grooming is occurring.

Although children, parents and the church should be aware of 'stranger danger', most people who sexually abuse children are known to the victim through family, friends, school, sports groups, church and other community-based activities.

There is no clear 'profile' of a likely sex offender. They could be a friend, someone who is married with children or grandchildren, or a person who is well-liked and educated. They could be male or female.

## What is grooming?

Grooming (sometimes called sexual grooming) is the process of preparing a person—usually a child or other vulnerable person—for sexual assault. It includes establishing a 'special' friendship with the child or vulnerable adult. Sexual grooming can include conditioning parents, other adults and church leaders to consider the relationship with the child to be 'normal'. Grooming often begins with what appears to be a legitimate, condoned relationship with a child. Initially, conduct might appear to be innocent—even commendable—but it progresses over time and escalates.

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria: Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014; Tasmania: Criminal Code (TAS) s 125D; NSW: Crimes Act 1900 - Sect 66EB

### **What are the signs of grooming?**

Indicators of grooming include an adult or, sometimes, an older adolescent/youth doing things such as:

- Giving extra praise and attention to a child
- Making a child feel special through gifts and treats
- Sending text, voice, email, or online messages to a child on a regular basis
- Asking the child for personal information
- Spending time alone with a child
- Talking about sex and sexuality with a child
- Sharing secrets with a child

### **What is the impact of grooming?**

The impact of grooming is often not immediately apparent. It is not uncommon for a range of adverse impacts to take days, months or even years to emerge as a groomed child grows and develops. Among effects might be:

- Loss of trust in adults, because the child (and other people) may like and trust the person who is grooming, and may even like certain aspects of the interaction.
- Social isolation, because over time, the child can become isolated from peers and siblings and become dependent upon the groomer.
- If sexual assault actually occurs, the child may feel confused, ashamed and may even blame themselves. They may be afraid to speak out due to a fear of not being believed or due to possible consequences for themselves or the abuser. Some children, due to their developmental stage, may not understand the nature of the abuse or have the language to describe it.

### **What can I do if I suspect grooming?**

While most people have normal interactions with children, all parents, congregation members and leaders should be aware of the possibility of grooming.

If an adult feels a sense of unease or concern about a person's interaction with a child, they should discuss this with a qualified person. This could be someone they know such as the Minister or a lay leader, the Culture of Safety Contact Person or the Synod Safe Church Educator.

If a child reports a concern about a person's interaction with them, or with another child, it is important that adults listen and take the concerns seriously. Reporting of abuse notification form (CC5) will assist.

## **Want more information?**

### **Synod resources:**

- Consult your congregation's Culture of Safety Contact person.
- Discuss concerns with the Safe Church Educator (03) 9251 5288 or email [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)
- Attend Safe Church Training
- Become familiar with the Synod's Keeping Children Safe policies on <http://ucavictas.org.au/keepingchildrensafe> If you cannot access the internet, ring the Safe Church Educator for a paper copy.

## **Need to report abuse?**

Tasmania – Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection Intake – 1300 737 639

Victoria – Department of Human Services – 1 300 650 172 or 131 278 (afterhours)

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