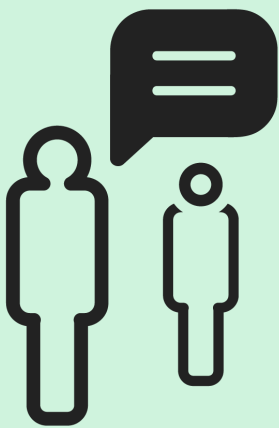


TDI *Explainer*

How do offenders access victims?

In order to sexually harm or sexually abuse, offenders need to be able to access their victims. In this Explainer, we introduce some of the ways that might happen.

Remember: most offenders are known to their victims, offences committed by total strangers are rare. However, many offences are committed by offenders who have deliberately cultivated relationships which allow them access and give them the ability to offend.



What sort of relationships might offenders have?

The most common type of relationship is **familial**, such as a parent or step-parent, a sibling, a more distant relation like an uncle or grandparent, or close friends of the family.

Offenders may create relationships over the **internet**, using platforms like Facebook or Twitter to establish contact and reasons to speak, through online communities, or through games.

They might be in **positions of trust**, like teachers, police officers, religious leaders or community figures.

And they might target **specific places** where potential victims congregate, such as leisure centres or shopping malls.

It's worth noting that these relationships might not just be with victims, but with people with responsibility for them. For example, an offender might establish a relationship with a single parent, maybe even marrying them, to gain easier access to a child.

Grooming

Manipulating a victim, or someone with responsibility for a victim, is called 'grooming'.

Certain types of grooming are illegal. For example, adults can't make contact with children online and encourage them to meet in person for sexual purposes.

A lot of grooming, though, looks and feels like a normal relationship. Offenders will look to establish bonds with their target through shared interests and activities or through behaviour which seems loving.

Sex offender skill set

To be able to do this, offenders need certain skills. They might appear to be:

Thoughtful

Out-going

Generous

Kind

Friendly

In short, they'll seem to be normal people it is fun to be around. They will be hard to spot.

Stages of grooming

How does grooming happen? One model is that of Barnado's from their 2007 publication 'Bwise2 sexual exploitation'. They talked of the 'grooming line'

Stage 1

The offender **observes** the victim or carer, **selects** an easy target, befriends them, **gains their trust** and shares information or activities with them.

Stage 2

The offender makes their target **feel special**, they may give them **gifts** or rewards, they will **spend time** together, they will **share**, and later **recall**, details of their lives and may enjoy keeping **secrets** together, they will **appear supportive**, they may offer **protection**, they might '**accidentally**' touch the victim sexually.

Stage 3

The offender will **establish** the pretense of a 'loving' relationship, involving being **boyfriend or girlfriend**, being **sexually intimate**, **lowering** the victim's inhibitions, **forbidding** activities such as seeing friends

Stage 4

The relationship becomes **abusive**, with the offender **using** the victim sexually, **isolating** them from family and friends, **manipulating** them, **threatening** them, making them **feel guilt or fear**, with the aim of discouraging reporting.

Further questions you might want to think about:

How do offenders come to offend? How can we identify risky behaviour? How do offenders protect themselves against being discovered?



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TDI is a national charity which works to increase public protection by finding practical and creative solutions to the problem of sexual offending.

For over 25 years we have been at the forefront of the field, providing training, research, consultancy and public protection schemes to individuals and organisations across society.

If you've found this explainer useful, you may be interested in learning more through one of our training programmes. Contact us at info@tdi.org.uk to find out more.