

What is cyber-grooming?

Cyber-grooming is the specific targeting of children and adolescents under the age of 14 on the Internet with the aim of initiating sexual relations. The term "grooming" has various connotations, including befriending and preparing to commit sexual abuse. Cyber-grooming is a specific form of grooming that focuses on the use of online platforms, social media, chat rooms and other digital means of communication. Cyber-groomers can be sentenced to between 3 months and 5 years imprisonment under Section 176 (4)(3) of the German Criminal Code (StGB).

In grooming, the perpetrators may have direct personal contact with children and adolescents. The perpetrators often come from the victim's extended social environment. Cyber-grooming, on the other hand, mainly takes place online. This increases the risk of complete strangers making contact. Furthermore, the perpetrators include not only adult paedophiles, but also minors. They often build up a relationship with the affected child over a long period of time.



Please feel free to get in touch with us:



Der Kinderschutzbund
Bundesverband



Together against cyber-grooming!



QR code for the Parents' Letter:

www.internet-abc.de



Click here to visit the website of the
Federal Association of the Child
Protection Association in Germany

www.kinderschutzbund.de



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Dear parents and/or guardians,

Imagine the following: Your child is chatting on their first smartphone with an online contact they have never met before. This person pretends to be the same age, asks for personal or intimate details, photos or videos – and may even suggest meeting up. Such online contacts can be extremely dangerous. It gets particularly bad when children do not tell their parents out of shame or fear of being banned from the Internet.



How do perpetrators operate on the Internet?

According to North Rhine-Westphalia's State Office of Criminal Investigation it is mainly men who sexually abuse minors on the Internet. They generally pursue very similar strategies:

1. They often hide behind anonymous user names or use fake identities to pretend to be children or teenagers.
2. Rarely do they immediately refer to anything implicitly or explicitly sexual in nature. Instead, the perpetrators first of all build up trust.
3. Once this is achieved, many perpetrators suggest moving to a private chat, messenger or video chat. This prevents anyone from reading previous content and reporting their behaviour to the platform.
4. The child is often asked to give their phone number so that further contact can be made directly via the smartphone. This enables the perpetrator to have "access" to the child at all times. At this age, children are insecure when it comes to setting boundaries or breaking off communication. What's more, anything forbidden seems exciting to many at first.
5. Over time, the perpetrator encourages the child to perform sexual acts. At this point at the latest, the person is clearly committing a crime. For example, the child may be asked to send naked photos of themselves or to film themselves partly unclothed ("livestream abuse"). Some perpetrators may require the child to watch or participate in sexual activity via a webcam.

6. In order to manipulate children into engaging in sexual activity, perpetrators initially shower them with compliments. Some promise money or gifts in exchange for images.
7. If children refuse to share explicit images of themselves or other children, perpetrators use considerable psychological coercion to compel them to do so. They may threaten to end the "friendship" or try to blackmail the child in question by threatening to reveal secrets or distribute files that have already been entrusted to them.

Sexual abuse on the Internet happens everywhere where children like to be:

on social networks or online games such as TikTok, WhatsApp, Knuddels, Instagram, Minecraft, Twitch, Facebook, Fortnite or YouTube.



Control questions to protect against cyber-grooming

- Which personal details should be kept private?
- What are the warning signs in chats?
- When should adults be involved?
- What can children do together with trusted adults if they suspect cyber-grooming?

Build trust – monitor rather than ban

Be alert if your child suddenly seems depressed, anxious or stressed. Make it clear to your child that you are on their side. They should know that they can come to you with difficult issues and that even if they make mistakes, there is no immediate threat of a ban. Take an interest in what your child is doing online. Talk openly with your child if something makes you feel uneasy. This will help you build trust – and make it easier for your child to turn to you in an emergency.

5 recommendations:

What to do if someone is harassing your child online

1. Save legally compliant screenshots of the chat or audio recordings of voice messages. These are important pieces of evidence if you want to file a criminal complaint with the police. The material should never leave the child's end device and should also be reported to the police from there.
2. Only then should you leave the chat with your child.

→ **How to take a legally compliant screenshot:**
hateaid.org/en/create-legally-compliant-screenshots-how-does-it-work/

3. File a criminal complaint with the police.

→ **By telephone and at your local police station:**
www.polizei.de

→ **Online at your federal state's "Internetwache" (online police station):**
portal.onlinewache.polizei.de/de

4. Block the perpetrator's account and report their identity and profile information to the platform after consulting the police.
5. Seek psychological counselling and legal advice for your child and yourself.

→ **Hilfe-Portal sexueller Missbrauch (Sexual Abuse Help Line):**

Anyone can call **0800 22 55 530** to receive free, confidential and anonymous advice from psychologically and educationally trained specialists with many years of experience in dealing with sexual abuse and violence. By telephone on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (9am-2pm), Tuesdays and Thursdays (3-8pm)
www.hilfe-portal-missbrauch.de/en/home

→ **Nummer gegen Kummer:**

This helpline is available for children and young people by phoning **116111** and for parents by phoning **0800 111 0550**.
www.nummergegenkummer.de

→ **Safe im Recht:**

Free and confidential legal counselling for young people provided by legal and psychological experts, available on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (11am-1pm and 6-8pm via chat).
www.safe-im-recht.de