



Understanding perpetrator tactics helps disability support workers avoid unconsciously mimicking abusive behaviours and triggering trauma responses in clients living with disability.

Grooming

Grooming is a deliberate process used by offenders to manipulate children into silence and compliance. Recognising these tactics can help prevent abuse and support vulnerable children effectively.

1. Targeting Vulnerable Children

Perpetrators seek out children with risk factors such as:

- Low self-esteem, loneliness, or social isolation.
- Victims of bullying or perceived as “troubled.”
- Fractured family relationships or lack of a father figure.
- Inadequate supervision or caregiving challenges due to disability or illness.
- Marginalized identities (social, racial, cultural, gender, or sexuality diversity).
- Unstable living situations (homelessness, foster or residential care).
- History of maltreatment (neglect, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, family violence).

2. Building Trust

Groomers build trust with both the child and their caregivers by:

- Offering assistance to caregivers.
- Providing gifts, attention, favoritism, and emotional support.
- Engaging in shared interests (gaming, social media, sports).
- Pretending to be a peer online.
- Using bribes like money, alcohol, or drugs.



Protective Strategies for Disability Support Workers

- ✓ Be mindful of mimicking grooming behaviours and report concerns early.
- ✓ Be mindful of physical interactions and maintain professional boundaries.
- ✓ Foster strong, open, and trusting relationships with clients.
- ✓ Educate clients about safe relationships and empower them to speak up.
- ✓ Encourage a culture of accountability within support environments.



If You Suspect Grooming or Abuse

- ✓ Follow mandatory reporting guidelines.
- ✓ Provide support without judgment or blame.
- ✓ Encourage the client to speak with a trusted person.
- ✓ Document concerns accurately and act promptly.

For further resources or training, contact Stepping Out Program at info@steppingout.org.au

3. Isolating the Child

Perpetrators seek opportunities to be alone with children by:

- Gaining employment or volunteer roles in child-focused settings (schools, sports clubs, youth groups).
- Encouraging activities with minimal supervision (overnight camps, one-on-one lessons).
- Grooming other adults to appear trustworthy.
- Using social media and chat platforms to distance the child from family and friends.

4. Desensitisation & Sexualisation

Offenders slowly breach boundaries to normalise sexual behaviour by:

- Introducing sexual topics under the guise of education.
- Using non-sexual physical contact (hugging, tickling, roughhousing) to test reactions.
- Showing pornography, requesting nude photos, or encouraging undressing.
- Gradually escalating inappropriate behaviour.

5. Control Through Secrecy & Manipulation

Once abuse begins, perpetrators maintain control by:

- Convincing the child they are complicit in the abuse.
- Using threats, bribes, and emotional manipulation.
- Telling the child no one will believe them or that disclosure will cause harm (e.g., family breakdown).
- Exploiting shame and secrecy to keep the child silent.