

# GROOMING:

## Abuse hiding in plain sight

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM &  
SHANUM SARKAR

Trigger warning: mentions and/or graphic details of sexual abuse

Young people tend to trust the adults in their inner circle because they have a natural naiveté towards life, which is the way it should be. Adults should be there in a child's life to guide and protect them. This makes it doubly tragic to fathom that a large proportion of grooming cases have adults as the abusers and children, usually between the ages of 12 and 15, as the victims.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU ARE BEING GROOMED



#### Talk to an adult you trust

Be it your parents, a teacher, a sibling or any adult from your support system, talk to them openly about the events that have transpired.



#### Consult a doctor

If you are a victim of sexual assault, visit a doctor to ensure that you haven't been physically wounded.



#### Keep yourself safe online

Don't give out sensitive information to strangers on the internet that could enable them to track you.

#### Talk to a friend

If you don't feel comfortable talking to an adult, speak to a friend first. Because your boundaries have been violated, it is only normal to be sceptical about reaching out for help.



source: [victimsupport.org.uk](http://victimsupport.org.uk)

ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

that he was exactly as he portrayed himself to be. He put himself in a position of knowledge and trust from which he monitored my relationships, making me view him as a greater friend than my other friends," she adds.

Grooming can also happen in adolescent intimate relationships, where one of them is closer to adulthood than their partner. If there is hesitancy in regards to physical intimacy from one end, the abuser often uses these tactics over a period of time to build a false sense of emotional connection for sexual favours.

The perpetrator can mould the situation in such a way that the power dynamics tip in their favour, making it easier to exercise their will. Thus, even when victims become aware of their situation, they may be pressured into

staying in the relationship and not revealing it to others in fear of repercussions or that others might not believe them.

The fear of being ridiculed for being in a relationship of this sort can also influence their decision to not come out with it, as was the case with Azad.

Grooming is not necessarily restricted to real-life interactions.

Over the years, cases of online grooming have risen astronomically, becoming one of the most common variants of online child sexual abuse. Being online, the perpetrator has the added advantage of being hidden behind a veil of anonymity, where they can easily catfish the victim by lying about their age or sex.

The victim might also believe it is okay to form connections with people online because can easily sever contact if necessary. However, that does not always end up being the case. It is possible for the perpetrator to place themselves so intimately in the victim's life or gain such crucial information on the victim that it becomes exceptionally difficult to end the relationship.

While it may be unsavoury

to think about, certain victims might actually be willing to engage in a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a much older abuser because of normalisation and glorification of age gaps in films, literature, and other media.

Older men chasing younger women without consent is often shown as something desirable because older

men are portrayed as being more mature and attractive. Likewise, younger men securing the affections of older women is also glorified. These portrayals are often problematic and can skew how a young, impressionable mind views and interacts with romantic entanglements in the long run.

The long-term effects of grooming can be devastating for a victim. Dr Tumpa Indrani Ghosh, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Consultant at Lifespring and Assistant Professor at Mymensingh Medical College, says, "Victims are left vulnerable after the incident. They fall prey to anxiety and depression, and they become more prone to substance abuse. Unable to form proper, meaningful relationships in the fallout, they may become socially withdrawn. Moreover, their appetite and sleep patterns can change drastically for the worse."

"I felt betrayed by the whole thing. It has given me certain trust issues and made me more wary of older men trying to establish a relationship like that with me," adds Amreeta.

Grooming is incredibly deceptive, but there are a few signs people can look out for. For instance, if a child has expensive gifts and they refuse to disclose

who gave them can be an indicator of grooming. Another sign could be a child showing an inexplicable interest towards a particular person, and/or showing diminished desire to partake in activities they previously enjoyed. In the past, if the child had a friendly relationship with their family or friends and regularly shared details of their life with their close ones but are suddenly very uncommunicative, it might be time to have a conversation with them.

When someone opens up to you about grooming, it's important to listen carefully, let them know they've done the right thing by telling you, and emphasise how it's not their fault or reflective of them in any way. Do not immediately confront the alleged abuser. Instead, explain the mode of action and report what the child has told you to relevant authorities as soon as possible.

When asked how victims' understanding of grooming developed, many said that they had not been familiar with the terminology or process early on, and only got to know about grooming through social media or conversations much later. Awareness helps people be on the lookout before they find themselves confined to a viciously damaging relationship. The connotations surrounding grooming are certainly not easy to discuss, but it is a conversation that we need to have.

\*Names have been changed upon request

#### References:

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The writers are contributors at SHOUT. Reach out to us at [zaima2004adrita@gmail.com](mailto:zaima2004adrita@gmail.com) and [shanumsarkar18@gmail.com](mailto:shanumsarkar18@gmail.com)

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