


Online Grooming and Exploitation

Dave Sunday
Pennsylvania Attorney General

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Online Grooming and Exploitation

Devices are a part of our lives

According to CHOC- Childrens health hub

- Age 13-18
 - 7-8+ hours a day on devices (4.8 on social media alone)
- Age 8-12
 - Spend 5.5 hours per day

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the US Center for Disease Control say :
Preteens and teenagers: Varied effects on mental health, academic achievement and social skills.

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Conversations and education are prevention.

- We are navigating an ever changing digital landscape.
- This allows constant engagement with youth.
- Goal is to provide supervision rooted in understanding rather than fear.
- Creation of safe spaces for conversations that are honest and ongoing.

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The internet is like a city..

Exciting, you can connect, learn..

Like any city it can also have dangers.



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Who is on the internet?

Everyone for every reason.

6 Billion people worldwide use the internet. 74% of the population.

International Telecommunication Union, *Facts and Figures 2025*

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Myths

- “Stranger Danger” like a virus.
- Grooming takes time with no sextortion.
- Grooming is designed to silence and its effective.
- Disrupts or falsifies kids.
- Disrupts or falsifies kids.
- Streaming media community apps safe.
- The online space for development not only needs.
- Technology is the multiplier.
- Kids are resilient, they should have known better”

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Grooming is only the beginning

- Grooming is the gateway offense for other abusive behavior

§ 6318. Unlawful contact with minor.

(a) **Offense defined.**--A person commits an offense if the person is intentionally in contact with a minor, or a law enforcement officer acting in the performance of duties who has assumed the identity of a minor or of another individual having direct contact with children, as defined under 23 Pa.C.S. § 6303(a) (relating to definitions), for the purpose of engaging in an activity prohibited under any of the following provisions under this title, and either the person initiating the contact or the person being contacted is within this Commonwealth:

(1) (Deleted by amendment).

(1.1) Any of the offenses enumerated in Chapter 30 (relating to human trafficking), if the activity involved sexual servitude and the victim was a minor.

(1.2) Any of the offenses enumerated in Chapter 31 (relating to sexual offenses).

(1.3) Incest as defined in section 4302(b) (relating to incest).

(1.4) Endangering welfare of children as defined in section 4304(a)(1) (relating to endangering welfare of children), if the activity involved sexual contact with the minor.

(2) Open lewdness as defined in section 5901 (relating to open lewdness).

(3) Prostitution as defined in section 5902 (relating to prostitution and related offenses).

(4) Obscene and other sexual materials and performances as defined in section 5903 (relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances).

(4.1) Corruption of minors as defined in section 6301(a)(1)(i) (relating to corruption of minors), if the activity involved sexual contact with the minor.

(4.2) Corruption of minors as defined in section 6301(a)(1)(ii).

(5) Sexual abuse of children as defined in section 6312 (relating to sexual abuse of children).

(6) Sexual exploitation of children as defined in section 6320 (relating to sexual exploitation of children).

(7) An attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the offenses in this subsection.

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Conditioning can be gradual



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Grooming can go anywhere

- According to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children after analyzing 476 cases from 2020-2023
 - One third of missing children enticed online were recovered in a different state/
 - 41% of offenders were more than ten years older than the child, largest age gap was 48 years
 - 59% of case involved children 15 years old or younger
 - Most common sites- Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Discord and TikTok

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Grooming

- Building trust with a child in order to exploit them.
- This can be:
 - Manipulation of behavior
 - Abuse
 - Creating an environment that will allow and tolerate abuse
 - Establishing comfort, trust, and space to transition from non abuse to abuse.
- The Process: Targeting, Building trust, Isolation and Exploitation

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Grooming

- Groomers are not always strangers.
- A predator can take on many roles.
- Grooming can happen quickly or develop over longer periods of time.
- It may involve:
 - isolation
 - constant need for access to the child
- It can appear simple or harmless at first.
- Shared interest are often used as an easy starting point to disarm.
- This is all about normalizing over time to accept the abuse.

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Where can grooming happen?

Internet is an easy place for grooming to start, devices provide access and a direct connection to children.


“Kid Friendly” doesn’t mean kid safe

- Social Media – also outputting information to groomers.
 - TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Discord
- Gaming platforms – a built-in common ground.
 - Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft

In Person.

- Small connections to kids, friends of friends. A trusted connection is utilized to hotwire a connection to a child. “I know your uncle”
- Family friends – these people are already seen by children as accepted. They do not fit into the ‘stranger danger’ branding of the past.

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Red Flags

1. Keeping Secrets- about conversations or relationships.
2. Expectations- another form of starting to normalize control. (They have to respond in a certain time)
3. Unrealistic relationships- A new friend who is ALWAYS there for Everything, anything the child needs.
4. Private or hidden messages.
5. Gifts- this can appear in many different forms. Ex. Currency in Apps

Secretive about devices

Online habits change

New friends

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Effects of grooming

- Anxiety.
- Embarrassment.
- Irritability.
- Stress.
- Depression.
- Substance abuse.
- Self-harming.
- PTSD.



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Gaming

- Include a built in interest
- Live chat
- Direct messages
- Guise of innocence, just a game
- Incentive interaction, friend systems that make it easier to do well in the game
- Voice chat- no transcript
- Gift giving
- Gaming is a wide net for first communication
- Time spent here easily written off as harmless

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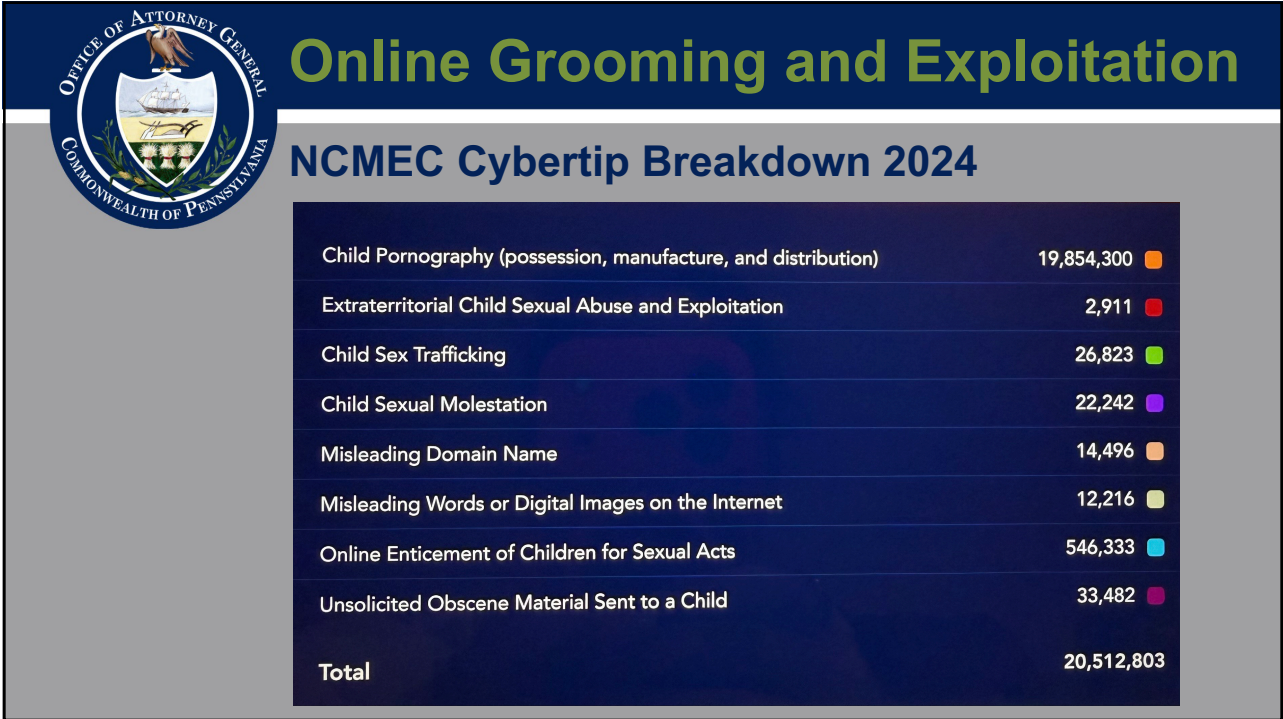
Preventing Grooming

- Privacy settings
- Reviewing apps, sites and games
- Blocking software
- Encourage children to talk to someone
- Be approachable and talk to children and teens about groomers online
- You play a critical role in identifying signs


What information is being shared?

What conversations are you having and how often?

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Now What?

- Stay Calm.
- Document.
- Don't shut down conversations.




Image from *Finding Dory*

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Everyone deserves to have the benefits of the internet and also be safe.

Keep the conversation going- communication builds awareness and trust.

Stay adaptable- technology and online environments are constantly changing.

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Thank You

Angela Sperrazza
asperrazza@attorneygeneral.gov
 Michelle Laucella
mlauchella@attorneygeneral.gov

Dave Sunday
 Pennsylvania Attorney General

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