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**Learning from Case Review – Child A**

**Grooming within organisations – How to keep children safe**

This case review was triggered by the arrest and subsequent conviction of a teacher for sexually abusing a young person at the school where they were employed. The review identified that the abuse of the child was possible because the teacher was able to ‘groom’ not only the child but also their colleagues and senior staff within the school and that this meant that the safeguarding systems within the school failed.

**Understanding what grooming is and learning how to identify it are fundamental to preventing abuse within an organisation and the learning from this review is not limited to schools but applies to all organisations working directly with children.**

Grooming is a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specifical goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child’s compliance and maintaining the child’s secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process services to strengthen the offender’s abusive pattern, as it may be used as a mean of justifying or denying their actions.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*‘Perpetrators of grooming manipulate their victims over a period of time, sometimes years, gradually gaining the victim’s trust, desensitising, and sexualising them for the purposes of abuse. Victims are taught to respect, trust and sometimes love their perpetrator and the betrayal of that trust can result in severe long-term trauma. The damage caused by grooming can be irreparable. It frequently takes place undetected by others and it is rarely disclosed by the victim.’[[2]](#footnote-2)*

The process of grooming is known to involve certain stages – all of which are apparent in the history of Teacher1’s involvement with Child A. The process often follows a pattern, and the interview with Child A confirmed that Teacher1 groomed Child A in the classic way and that they were probably one of several potential victims.

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| **Grooming pattern:**   * *Target vulnerable victim –* Child A was vulnerable because of their poor peer relationships. * *Gain victim’s trust –* This was achieved through Child A’s interest in the subject that Teacher1 taught but the teacher also used the presence of their own child in the school as a protective factor. * *Gain the trust of others –* Child A’s mother thought Teacher1 was concerned about Child A and was being penalised by the school systems for that interest. * *Filling a need/becoming more important to the child –* partly because Child A had poor peer relations, but Teacher1 also exploited Child A’s problematic relationship with their father. * *Isolating the child –* The perpetrator may encourage dependency and undermine relationships with friends or family members. In Child A’s case Teacher1 undermined their relationships with other teaching staff and determined the children who they should be friends with. * *Sexualising the relationship –* The process to initiate low-key physical contact that is escalated over time. * *Maintaining control and secrecy –* Offenders may use their professional position to make a child believe that they have no choice but to submit to the offender. Teacher1 clearly controlled Child A by advising that they would not be believed due to a history of circulating perceived untruths within their peer group.[[3]](#footnote-3) |

The Child A case review highlighted ways in which Teacher1, not only groomed Child A, but also groomed their school colleagues, including the Senior Leadership Team. These included: -

* Creating an image if themselves as a naïve and caring individual who was experiencing unwanted attentions of a young person who had developed a ‘crush’ on them.
* Using their own family as a mechanism to blur boundaries and provide a picture of Teacher1 as a victim. Teacher1 used their parental relationship with their own child as an explanation for why their contact with Child A was legitimate, and garnered sympathy from their colleagues and managers because of their responsibilities to their ex-partner and their children.
* Developing amongst their colleagues a view of Child A as a manipulative and damaged child who lacked boundaries.

**Recommendations from the review were:**

* That the KSCMP work with The Education People and Community Learning and Skills to produce specific training and guidance linked to Keeping Safe in Education (KCSIE) and Working Together 2018 (2020 update) to refresh Education HR providers on the context of safeguarding and allegation management versus employment law and disciplinary processes.
* KSCMP to ask all agencies to review their internal procedures to check that they are clear about distinguishing between routine disciplinary investigations and safeguarding investigations and that their processes are clear about how to best involve parents and carers and to engage with young people in such a way that enables them to disclose.
* That KSCMP ensures that there are training programmes to improve the knowledge and understanding by professionals of grooming and the ways in which perpetrators groom adults, as well as children, to be able to abuse children. KSCMP to consider a learning workshop based on a case study of Child A’s experiences.

**Additional resources include:**

Grooming within organisations - how to keep children safe; Katie Rigg and Professor

Andy Phippen; 21 January 2016 <https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/grooming-within-organisations-how-to-keep-children-safe/r/a11G000000DeJK1IAN>

Research and analysis: Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges; Ofsted; 10th

June 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

1. Craven, S. Brown, S and Gilchrist, E (2006) ‘Sexual grooming of children: review of the literature and theoretical

   consideration’ Journal of Sexual Aggression. 12 (3) 287-299 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Grooming within organisations - how to keep children safe Katie Rigg and Professor Andy Phippen | 21 January 2016

   <https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/grooming-within-organisations-how-to-keep-children-safe/r/a11G000000DeJK1IAN> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)