



## **Parent Response Guide:**

### ***What to Do If Your Child Is Being Groomed, Coerced, or Exploited Online***

When a child is being groomed, coerced, or threatened online, they are often terrified, ashamed, or convinced they will get in trouble. Parents play the most important role in interrupting the predator's control. This guide offers a calm, step-by-step approach to help you support your child, protect their safety, and take the right next steps.

#### **Recognizing When Something Is Wrong**

Teens will likely never say, "I'm being groomed." Instead, you'll see changes in behavior, mood, or device use. These shifts are signals that your child may be overwhelmed, scared, or hiding something they don't know how to handle. The goal is not to panic, but to pay attention.

##### *Common signs include:*

- Sudden secrecy around devices or switching screens quickly
- Late-night gaming or messaging that feels compulsive
- Anxiety, irritability, or withdrawal after being online
- Strong emotional attachment to an online friend they won't talk about
- Using multiple accounts or encrypted apps
- Unexplained marks, injuries, or self-harm talk
- Fear of losing their device or getting in trouble

These signs don't confirm exploitation, but they do mean your child needs support.

#### **How to Talk to Your Child Without Triggering Shame**

Your tone is the most important tool you have. Kids who are being groomed often feel responsible for what's happening, even though they are not. A calm, steady approach helps them feel safe enough to talk.

##### *Helpful ways to open the conversation:*

- "You seem stressed lately. I'm here to help you, not punish you."
- "Sometimes people online pretend to be someone they're not. Has anyone made you uncomfortable?"
- "You won't be in trouble for telling me the truth. I'm proud of you for talking to me."

##### *Avoid:*

- "Why didn't you tell me?"
- "How could you let this happen?"
- "You know better than this."

Shame shuts kids down. Offering safe, calm, non-judgemental listening helps them open up.



## Stopping Contact Safely

Once your child feels safe enough to share, the next step is to help them stop contact without escalating the situation. Teens often fear that blocking someone will make things worse, so they need your leadership.

### *Steps to take:*

- Block the person on all platforms
- Turn off friend requests and DMs
- Change usernames if needed
- Remove apps with disappearing messages
- Review privacy settings together

If your child is scared of retaliation, reassure them:

“You don’t have to respond. I will help handle anything that comes next.”

## Preserving Evidence Without Increasing Harm

Do **not** delete accounts, messages, or devices. Evidence helps protect your child and stops the predator from targeting others. Keeping the digital trail intact is essential for reporting.

### *What to save:*

- Screenshots of messages, usernames, threats, or requests
- Timestamps and platform names
- Links to profiles or servers
- Any photos or files the predator sent

### *What **NOT** to do:*

- confront the predator
- threaten them
- delete the account or wipe the device
- tell your child to “just ignore it”

Your goal is to preserve information while keeping your child emotionally safe.

## When to Seek Immediate Professional Support

If your child has been pressured to harm themselves, harm others, or perform acts on camera, treat the situation as urgent. These tactics are common in 764-type cases and can escalate VERY quickly.

### *Seek immediate help if your child:*

- Mentions self-harm or suicide
- Shows unexplained injuries
- Has been coerced into dangerous acts
- Is terrified of the predator’s threats
- Is overwhelmed, panicked, or shutting down



*A mental-health professional can help your child process what happened safely.*

## **Where and How to Report**

You do not need proof to report. Suspicion is enough.

### *NCMEC CyberTipline*

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children operates the CyberTipline at **report.cybertip.org**, the official reporting center for:

- Online enticement
- Sextortion
- Coercion or threats
- Adults or older teens targeting minors

### *Platform Reporting Tools*

Roblox, Discord, Snapchat, Telegram, Minecraft, and others have built-in reporting systems. Reporting helps platforms remove predators quickly.

### *Local Law Enforcement*

Contact police if there are threats, extortion, or immediate danger. Bring screenshots, usernames, timestamps, and a summary of what happened.

### *School or Mental-Health Providers*

If peers are involved or your child is struggling emotionally, schools and clinicians can help monitor safety and provide support.

## **Supporting Your Child Emotionally Afterward**

Even after contact stops, kids often feel ashamed, scared, or confused. They may worry they'll get in trouble or that the predator will come back. Your job is to create safety, predictability, and connection.

### *Ways to support recovery:*

- Reassure them repeatedly that they are not at fault
- Create predictable routines and increased supervision
- Frame new boundaries as protection, not punishment
- Encourage offline activities and family connection
- Watch for ongoing anxiety, sleep issues, or withdrawal

If symptoms persist, a mental-health professional can help your child process the experience.

### *What **NOT** to Do*

- Blame or shame your child
- Threaten to take away all devices permanently
- Confront the predator directly
- Delete accounts or wipe devices



- Assume your child told you everything the first time

Avoid actions that increase shame or escalate the situation. Kids disclose in layers. Stay steady and patient.

### **What Healing Looks Like**

Recovery is not instant. Kids often cycle through fear, relief, shame, and confusion. With steady support, predictable routines, and professional help when needed, they can regain a sense of safety and control. Your calm, nonjudgemental presence is the most protective factor in their healing.