

CHILD

TERMINOLOGY GUIDELINES

FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Grooming (online/offline) for sexual purposes

This term appears to have a generally agreed meaning and/or can be used without stigmatising and/or otherwise harming the child.

In the context of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, “grooming” is the short name for the solicitation of children for sexual purposes. “Grooming/online grooming” refers to the process of establishing/building a relationship with a child either in person or through the use of the Internet or other digital technologies to facilitate *either online or offline* sexual contact with that person.²²³ Grooming is defined by major dictionaries as the act of “*prepar[ing] or train[ing] (someone) for a particular purpose or activity*”, and in the specific context of child sexual exploitation and abuse as “*(of a paedophile) prepare (a child) for a meeting, especially via an Internet chat room, with the intention of committing a sexual offence*”²²⁴ or “*the criminal activity of becoming friends with a child, especially over the internet, in order to try to persuade the child to have a sexual relationship*”.²²⁵

As with the solicitation of children for sexual purposes, there appears to be no linguistic or other logical reason why the definition of “grooming” should be limited to acts where a physical, in-person meeting has been attempted and/or occurred. Research has shown that grooming, which is a term that suggests a course of conduct evolving over a period of time while the offender subtly gains the trust of her/his victim, is not the most frequent form of online sexual exploitation of children today. “*While slow-time grooming of a single victim still occurs, there is evidence that the dynamics of this threat have changed considerably over the last few years. Today, the period of time between initial engagement with a child and an offending outcome is often extremely short*” and “*[o]ffenders focus on quickly gaining leverage over a victim rather than first establishing a trusting relationship*.”²²⁶ For this reason, the term “online child sexual exploitation” has sometimes been preferred to cover not only specific practices such as grooming but also other, more direct and coercive, forms of solicitation of children for sexual purposes.²²⁷

²²³ See Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus.

²²⁶ CEOP, “Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse”, p.10.

²²⁷ Ibid