POLIZEI
Nordrhein-Westfalen
Landeskriminalamt

Cybergrooming
Prevention advice for parents, children and young people

Information

What is cybergrooming

Cybergrooming refers to the targeted initiation of sexual contact with children and young people via the internet. Perpetrators often pretend to be of the same age as their victims and thus gain their trust.

Their aim is usually to meet the underage victims in the 'real' world and abuse them. It is not uncommon for perpetrators to persuade minors to send them revealing self-portraits in advance. These are then used as leverage against the minors to coerce them to perform a variety of acts.

There are now numerous opportunities for perpetrators to make contact with children and young people via digital devices. Possible contacts with strangers can be established, for example, via online game chats, social networks or smart toys.

Legal classification

In Germany, cybergrooming of under 14-year-olds is potentially banned, depending on the circumstances. The applicable law was again amended in 2021. Under Sections 176 a and 176 b of the German Criminal Code (*StGB*), the following acts are deemed to be criminal offences:

> Influencing the child by means of 'pornographic graphic content or pornogragrphic speech' (*StGB*, s. 176a(1)(3))

> Influencing a child by way of content with the aim of sexual abuse (*StGB*, s. 176b)

> Causing the child to perform sexual acts (*StGB*, s.176a(1)(2))

What should you do if you are 'hit on' in this way?

> Talk to someone you trust, for example your parents, a good friend or a teacher.

> Never meet alone with a chat partner you don't know personally, not even out of curiosity.

> Do not send pictures or videos to people you have met in the 'virtual' world only.

What can parents do to help prevent things?

> Talk to your children about the issue and make sure that your children do not give out any personal details such as their address and telephone number in chats, social networks or via smart toys.

> Help your children with adjusting their privacy settings on social networks to minimise private information and only make it visible to a small group of people.

> Encourage children and young people to use photo and video images with care, and to not post everything online.

> Parents and teachers need to engage with the Internet and discuss the potential dangers and benefits with their children or pupils/students.

> Discuss with your children the difference between 'real-life' and 'virtual' friendships.

> Make it clear to your child that smart toys can be used by strangers, too, to communicate.

Find out more

National crime prevention programme, (ProPK): Sexual harassment in online games, as of 24.08.2023

ProPK: Abuse in the virtual world; current to 09/02/2024

Jugendschutz.net: Digital children's room; current to May 2024

ProPK website for children and young people 'Police are there for you': Cybergrooming; current to May 2022