The Warning Signs Every Parent Should Know

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Predators follow patterns. Once you know the patterns, you can spot trouble early. Grooming is a deliberate process of building trust, step by step, until a child feels a bond with someone who means them harm. Knowing how it works is the single most powerful thing a parent can learn.

How grooming usually starts

- It begins somewhere ordinary: a game chat, a social app, a comment section.
- The person seems friendly, notices the child, gives compliments, and shows interest in their hobbies.
- They may pretend to be younger than they are, or claim to understand the child better than anyone else.
- Over days or weeks, they ask about the child's life, friendships, and frustrations, gathering information and building emotional leverage.

The move to private channels

- The clearest turning point: a request to move somewhere private, a new app, a direct message thread, a platform the parent does not know.
- Requests escalate: photos, secrets, dares, sexual topics introduced gradually.
- Often paired with flattery and pressure: you are mature, you are special, do not tell anyone.

Warning signs checklist

☐ A child who suddenly guards their phone or switches screens when you walk in

☐ New apps or accounts you have not seen before

☐ Gifts, game credits, or money appearing from an unknown source

☐ An older "friend" you have never met and know nothing about

☐ Withdrawal from family, or sudden secrecy about online life

☐ A child who seems anxious after being online, or receives messages late at night

If you see the signs

- **Stay calm.** Your child needs to see you as safe to tell.
- **Preserve what you found.** Screenshots, messages, usernames, before anything gets deleted.
- **Report it.** NCMEC CyberTipline: report.cybertip.org. In immediate danger: call 911.
- **Get support.** Reach Guided Healers at guidedhealers.org/get-help.