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Understanding Online Grooming

The following information was obtained from different cyber security sources for notification to all parties concerned pursuant to the mandate of the Philippine National Police Anti-Cybercrime Group (PNP ACG) and classified as "Restricted" pursuant to the PNP Regulation 200-012 on Document Security and Impact Rating as high based on PNP Information Communication Technology (ICT) Security Manual s.2010-01 p. 22 and p.129.

SUMMARY

The internet can be a great place for children and young people to connect with their friends. However, it can be difficult for children to differentiate between friends they know in the offline world, and 'friends' made online. Not everyone online is who they say they are, and this can be a difficult concept for children to understand.

Online grooming is where someone befriends a child online and builds up their trust with the intention of exploiting them and causing them harm. Harm caused by grooming can be sexual abuse, both in person and online, and exploitation to obtain sexually explicit images and videos of the child. Grooming techniques could also be used to obtain personal and financial information from the child or their family. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time. It can start out publicly on social media and in games but will most likely move across to private chats.

Anyone could groom a child online, regardless of age, gender or race. Groomers are very skilled at what they do and can often befriend a child by appearing to have the same hobbies and interests as them. Using fake accounts and photos, they may also appear to be the same age as the child. However, not all groomers will choose to mask their age or gender. Some groomers may impersonate an aspirational figure such as a modelling scout, sports coach, celebrity or influencer, while others may use their age and experience to develop a 'mentor' type relationship with their victim.

A groomer will use the same sites, games and apps as children in order to gain their trust and build a friendship. Children can be flattered at first by the attention given to them by this new 'online friend', particularly if they are offering support, showing understanding or giving validation. However, they may also seek to manipulate, blackmail and control the child, potentially isolating them from their friends and family.

It's important to remember that children may not understand they have been groomed or see their 'online friend' as untrustworthy or abusive.

RECOMMENDATION

The public, especially the children, are advised to follow these tips to avoid being victim of online grooming:, to wit:

- Do not accept requests from people you do not know;
- Be careful who you talk with and what details you share when chatting;
- Do not reveal too much about yourself, particularly in the form of photos or videos, to prevent being blackmailed later on;
- Do not agree to meet someone you only know online without an adult you trust to accompany you; and
- If you feel uncomfortable, confused or scared about something you see online, do not be afraid to ask for help from your parents, teachers, adults you trust or report to the PNP station nearest you for appropriate action.

For additional information, please refer to the following websites:

- https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/online-grooming
- https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/adviceonlinegrooming.aspx
- https://tutorful.co.uk/guides/how-to-keep-kids-safe-online/how-to-prevent-online-grooming

POINT OF CONTACT

Please contact PMAJ JOSEPH ARVIL L VILLARAN, Police Communication Relation officer thru e-mail address acg@pnp.gov.ph or contact us on telephone number (632) 7230401 local 3562 for any inquiries related to this CYBER SECURITY BULLETIN.