

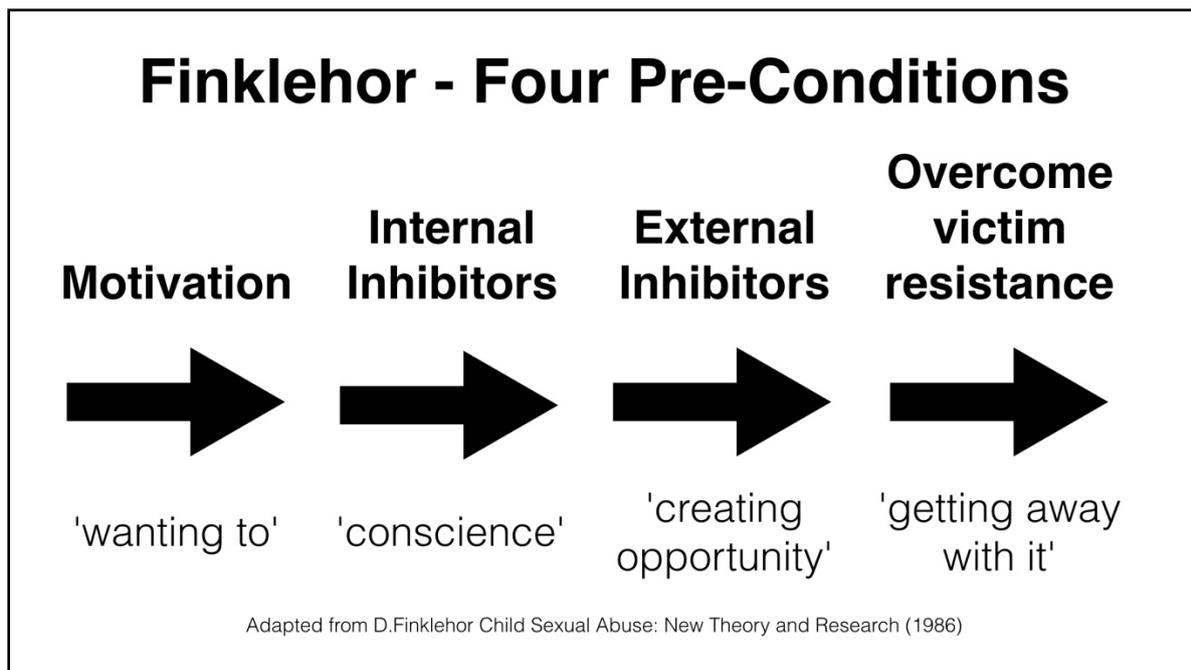
Grooming of children for sexual abuse

Safer recruitment procedures are aimed at preventing people who have harmed children, or may harm children, from working in schools, either as a member of staff or a volunteer. However, we must also be aware that once people are working in school they may go on to abuse children.

Following a case where a teacher had been able to abuse over 50 boys on residential visits, the serious case review recommended that *'the Department for Education should be asked to revise the training requirements [for staff]...to include training on the modus operandi of sex offenders'*. Although this does form part of the Safer Recruitment training, most school staff do not receive any training on recognising grooming.

The Finklehor Model

David Finklehor is a well-respected researcher in understanding child sexual abuse, in particular how adults groom children for abuse. Finklehor's research sets out four pre-conditions of abuse. It is the model of abuse that forms the foundation of Safer Recruitment procedures. Grooming is a gradual process and can take place over a long period of time.



Stage 1 - Motivation

The person recognises that they have a sexual interest in children and that they are motivated to act on those feelings. This thinking is reinforced by fantasies.

Stage 2 - Internal Inhibitors

The majority of perpetrators recognise that sexual offences against children are wrong, but they are able to rationalise this wrong-doing in some way so that they can override their conscience. The justification of their behaviour may include blaming the victim, denying their

abusive conduct, minimising responsibility for their actions, or minimising the harm to the victim.

Stage 3 - External Inhibitors

The opportunity for an offence to occur must be created by the perpetrator. These are not random acts. Potential offenders must place themselves in an environment where they can meet children. Some offenders have chosen to work in schools, so that they can abuse young people. Within the school context, people who go on to harm children will find opportunities during both school time, and out-of-hours.

Reducing the opportunity to offend in schools and protect children from harm is an important part of a safeguarding policies, including an effective staff code of conduct and creating environmental protections, such as windows in doors.

A significant external inhibitor in schools is the presence of other adults, systems and procedures, so it is important for the potential offender to groom staff (and/or parents) to ensure that they can circumvent any protections around the child, whilst appearing plausible. Many offenders in schools are well-regarded. This increases the likelihood that any children reporting issues will not be believed, and thus there is a greater freedom to create opportunities to groom or offend.

Stage 4 - Overcome Victim Resistance

This is the 'offending stage'. There has often been a slow process of developing a trusting relationship. Typically, vulnerable children will be targeted. The offender will often create a 'special' relationship involving greater (social) contact, rewards and/or threats, bribes, or 'trickery' to behave in increasingly inappropriate ways. The offender will usually aim to maintain the relationship and so continue to harm the child. Offenders may come across as kind to the children, but also show glimpses of anger that serve to intimidate or threaten.

'Grooming' is not a specific form of child sexual exploitation but should be seen as a way in which perpetrators target children and manipulate their environments. It is an approach to exploitation and may be the beginning of a complex process adopted by abusers. Grooming can be defined as developing the trust of a young person or his or her family in order to engage in illegal sexual activity or for others to engage in illegal sexual activity with that child or young person.

Crown Prosecution Service

Who is at most risk?

Those at most risk include:

- Children with disabilities
- Children previously, or currently, abused or maltreated
- Children or families under stress, or with financial pressures, including poverty
- Children who are isolated, perhaps away from home, or socially excluded
- Children whose backgrounds are chaotic or dysfunctional



Although the signs in the diagram above, may be seen in the grooming process, there are legitimate reasons for some of them and so they are only intended as a guide.

Whilst there is little reason for children to be 'following' staff on their private social media account, schools do use email between staff and students, and sometimes have school social media accounts. In these cases, schools need very clear policies on professional social media use, and should have more than one administrator for the account.

In many cases of the sexual abuse of children in schools by staff the work with, other staff have often been distracted by the person's often charismatic or imposing personality. Such offenders typically grooming the family too, by getting to know them, stepping over professional boundaries and by making frequent home visits. To counter this possibility, schools should be clear about the purpose of such visits, limit them to relevant staff members and have a professional protocol about behaviour, relationships and recognise the need to record such visits.

Reducing the risk of grooming and abuse by staff

The risk of grooming and sexual abuse of staff can be minimised by creating a strong safeguarding culture and by raising awareness of the potential for harm in the school itself. An open culture, where staff feel that they can ask questions about the conduct of other adults and speak to relevant school leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, headteachers or governors.

Safer Recruitment processes must be as effective as possible, and ensure that, as far as possible, the background and motivations of potential employees is checked out. A robust code of professional conduct can make it easier for people to raise concerns and for leaders to take action. Staff who realise that they have inadvertently breached the code, should report the incident to the head or deputy head, or ask for permission if the breach is planned.