Overview: What is grooming, and why are some states passing laws to define and/or criminalize it?

"Grooming" is the process through which an offender manipulates a minor to gain their trust in order to sexually abuse them. Grooming can occur in person or online, and involves these steps by the offender.

1. Selecting a vulnerable child to abuse, such as those with low self-esteem or troubled home lives;

2. Gaining access to the child, finding reasons to be alone with them and isolating the child from others;

3. Deceptively developing trust with the child and those around the child;

4. Gradually desensitizing the child to sexual content, such as through pornography and physical touch;

5. After the abuse occurs, convincing the child they are to blame and that they should not tell anyone.[1]

It should be noted that although the word "grooming" has become politicized and used to refer to teaching children about sexual education, sexual orientation and gender identity, when the child abuse prevention field refers to "grooming", it is referring to the process by which sexual offenders manipulate children and families and gain their trust to sexually abuse the children.

[1] Elizabeth L. Jeglic, Georgia M. Winters, Benjamin N. Johnson, "Identification of red flag child sexual grooming behaviors", *Child Abuse & Neglect,* Volume 136, 2023, ISSN 0145-2134, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105998.(https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213422005324)

Variations in state laws defining grooming

Nineteen states have passed laws defining grooming as the process of manipulating a child to gain their trust and sexually abuse them.

Of those nineteen, seventeen states criminalize grooming a minor with intent to sexually abuse them as a felony, either by any adult, or with higher penalties for, or specifically targeting adults in positions of authority over children, such as school employees. One state simply requires schools to adopt a policy prohibiting grooming and sexual relationships between employees and students and says that grooming can result in revocation of a teacher's certificate or dismissal. Another state simply makes it harder to hire a school employee with a history of grooming students with intent to sexually abuse them. As our Criminalizing Educator Sexual Misconduct/Abuse map makes clear, sexual abuse by school employees is widespread, and 39 states have passed laws to ensure prosecution of those who use their positions of authority to abuse students, regardless of the age of consent.

The first state to pass a law defining grooming was Arkansas in 2013, which defines grooming as sharing with a child a sexual image or video in order to groom a child 13 years old or younger for sexual activity. This is criminalized as a felony. This bill did not include other grooming behaviors or patterns of behavior, and does not protect children ages 14-18. Another bill to strengthen the grooming law in Arkansas to include bribing a child to engage in sexual activity was passed in 2025.

Nebraska became the first state to more broadly define grooming as the process of manipulating a child in order to sexually abuse them, in 2020. The law defines grooming and requires schools to adopt a policy prohibiting grooming and sexual relationships between employees and students. Grooming may result in revocation of a teacher's certificate, dismissal and referral to law enforcement. It does not, however, make grooming a crime.

Indiana passed a similar law defining grooming in 2023, and making it harder for schools to hire employees with a history of such behavior.

The seventeen states which criminalize grooming as a felony include:
Arkansas (2013) and (2025), Illinois (2021), Texas and Nevada (2023), Arizona, Georgia, Florida, Iowa, Vermont and Wisconsin (2024), Ohio, Montana, Mississippi, and Louisiana (2025) Wyoming, Missouri and Kentucky (2026)

Wisconsin's 2024 law applies specifically to school employees. However, in March 2026 WI passed another bill to strengthen its grooming law to enable prosecution of other adults for grooming besides school employees, and include increased penalties for grooming by an adult in a position of authority and grooming of a child with a disability. Arizona, Vermont and Mississippi also include increased penalties for those who abuse their positions of authority, and Ohio includes increased penalties for educators. Some states include exceptions to prosecution for perpetrators less than 4 years older than the victim, while some do not.

Pending Bills to Criminalize Grooming:

One additional state, **Kentucky**, has a pending bill in 2026 to criminalize grooming as a felony. **Iowa** has a pending bill that would strengthen its current grooming law to explicitly include grooming a person who the offender believes to be a minor, even if the person is actually an undercover law enforcement officer.

Grooming Laws in the 16 States:

By order of enactment:

1. Arkansas:

Title 5, Section 5-27-307 - Sexually grooming a child, enacted in 2013

Arkansas has a law that defines grooming as sharing with a child a sexual image or video in order to groom a child 13 years old or younger for sexual activity. This law has been in place since 2013. It does not include other grooming behaviors or patterns of behavior, and does not protect children ages 14-18. Law text:

> *"**(b)** A person commits sexually grooming a child if he or she knowingly disseminates to a child thirteen (13) years of age or younger with or without consideration a visual or print medium depicting sexually explicit conduct with the purpose to entice, induce, or groom the child thirteen (13) years of age or younger to engage in the following with a person:*
>
> > ***(1)** Sexual intercourse;*
> >
> > ***(2)** Sexually explicit conduct; or*
> >
> > ***(3)** Deviate sexual activity.*
>
> ***(c)** Sexually grooming a child is a:*
>
> > ***(1)** Class D felony if the actor is twenty-one (21) years of age or older; or*
> >
> > ***(2)** Class A misdemeanor if the actor is younger than twenty-one (21) years of age.*
>
> ***(d)** It is an affirmative defense to prosecution under this section that the actor was not more than three (3) years older than the victim.*
>
> ***(e)** It is not a defense to prosecution under this section that the actor does not know the age of the child or believes the child is fourteen (14) years of age or older."*

Link to the law: https://law.justia.com/codes/arkansas/title-5/subtitle-3/chapter-27/subchapter-3/section-5-27-307/

Arkansas HB1777, passed in 2025 and enacted as Act 683

This bill strengthened the previous grooming law to include bribing a child to engage in sexual activity as a grooming behavior. It still only criminalizes grooming of children under 13 and only makes it a felony for offenders over 21.

Text:

SECTION 1. Arkansas Code § 5-27-307 is amended to read as follows: 25 5-27-307. Sexually grooming a child. (a) As used in this section,:

(1) "Bribe" means to offer or bestow any property, gift, good, or service or to withhold any property, gift, good or service with the purpose of garnering acceptance, cooperation, or compliance; and

(2) "Disseminates" means to allow to view, expose, furnish, present, sell, or otherwise distribute.

Link to law:
https://arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FBills%2F2025R%2FPublic%2FHB1777.pdf

2. NEBRASKA: LB1080, enacted in 2020

The law defines grooming and requires schools to adopt a policy prohibiting grooming and sexual relationships between employees and students. Grooming may result in revocation of a teacher's certificate, dismissal and referral to law enforcement. It does not make grooming a crime.

Section 1 "(a) ***Grooming*** *means building trust with a student and individuals close to the student in an effort to gain access to and time alone with the student, with the ultimate goal of engaging in sexual contact or sexual penetration with the student, regardless of when in the student's life the sexual contact or sexual penetration would take place;" . . .*
"(2) On or before June 30, 2021, the school board or board of education of each school district and the governing authority of each private, denominational, or parochial ***school shall adopt a policy regarding appropriate relationships between a student and a school employee or a student teacher or intern.*** *Such policy shall include the following, at a minimum:*
(a) A provision prohibiting any school employee or any student teacher or intern from engaging in grooming;
(b) ***A provision prohibiting any relationship that involves sexual contact or sexual penetration from occurring between a student and a school employee*** *or a student teacher or intern while the student is a current student and for a minimum of one year after the date of the student's graduation or the date the student otherwise ceases enrollment;*
(c) ***Examples of grooming and related conduct the board or governing authority deems unacceptable;***

(d) A procedure for a school employee or a student teacher or intern to verify the policy was received and understood;
(e) ***A procedure for reporting suspected grooming or other unacceptable conduct of a school employee*** *or a student teacher or intern to the school or school district administration, the State Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and law enforcement;*
(f) A description of the preferred methods for a school employee or a student teacher or intern to use in communicating with students, including which personal communication systems the board or governing authority has deemed permissible for such purpose;
(g) Notice that any violation of the policy by a school employee or a student teacher or intern may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal;
(h) Notice that any violation of the policy by any certificated employee may result in referral to the State Department of Education and consequences including suspension or revocation of the employee's certificate; and
(i) Notice that any violation involving sexual or other abuse will result in referral to the Department of Health and Human Services, law enforcement, or both."

Link to LB1080: https://nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/106/PDF/Final/LB1080.pdf

3. ILLINOIS: HB1975, enacted in 2021

This law criminalizes grooming as a felony.

"(3) many breaches of staff-student boundaries do not rise to the level of criminal behavior but do pose a potential risk to student safety; (4) repeated violations of staff–student boundaries can indicate the ***grooming*** *of a student for sexual abuse;"*

"Abused child" means a child whose parent or immediate family member, or any person responsible for the child's welfare, or any individual residing in the same home as the child, or a paramour of the child's parent: . . .(i) ***commits the offense of grooming****, as defined in Section 11-25 of the Criminal Code of 2012, against the child."*

*"Sec. 11-25****. Grooming. (a) A person commits grooming when he or she knowingly uses a computer on-line service, Internet service, bulletin board service, or any other device capable of electronic data storage or transmission, performs an act in person or by conduct through a third party, or uses written communication to seduce, solicit, lure, or entice, or attempt to seduce, solicit, lure, or entice, a child, a child's guardian, or another person believed by the person to be a child or a child's guardian, to commit any sex offense*** *as defined in Section 2 of the Sex Offender Registration Act, to distribute photographs depicting the sex organs of the child, or to otherwise engage in any unlawful sexual conduct with a child or with another person believed by the person to be a child. As used in this Section, "child" means a person under 17 years of age. (b) Sentence.* ***Grooming is a Class 4 felony****. (Source: P.A. 100-428, eff. 1-1-18.)"*

Link to HB1975: https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/102/PDF/102-0676.pdf

4. TEXAS: SB1527, enacted September 2023

This law criminalizes grooming as a felony.

*Sec. 15.032. **CHILD GROOMING.** (a) A person commits an offense if, with the intent that an offense under Chapter 43 or an offense involving sexual activity, the occurrence of which would subject the actor to criminal liability under Chapter 20A, 21, or 22, be committed, the person **knowingly persuades, induces, entices, or coerces, or attempts to persuade, induce, entice, or coerce, a child younger than 18 years of age** to engage in specific conduct that, under the circumstances surrounding the actor's conduct as the actor believes them to be, would:*

(1) constitute an offense under Chapter 43 or an offense involving sexual activity the occurrence of which would subject the actor to criminal liability under Chapter 20A, 21, or 22; or (2) make the child a party to the commission of an offense described by Subdivision (1).
*(b)An offense under this section is a **felony of the third degree**, except that the offense is a felony of the second degree if the actor has previously been convicted of an offense under:…*
(c) It is an affirmative defense to prosecution under this section that the actor is under the age of 18 and:
(1)the actor engaged in conduct described by Subsection (a) with respect to another child under the age of 18:
(A)who is not more than three years older or younger than the actor and with whom the actor had a dating relationship at the time of the offense; or
(B)who was the spouse of the actor at the time of the offense; and
(2)the conduct occurred only between the actor and the other child described by Subdivision (1).
(d)If conduct constituting an offense under this section also constitutes an offense under another section of this code, the actor may be prosecuted under either section but not both

Additionally, Audrii's Law, enacted in 2025, requires those convicted of grooming to register as sex offenders.

Link to Audrii's Law: https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/html/HB02000I.htm

Link to SB1527: https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/pdf/SB01527F.pdf#navpanes=0

5. INDIANA: SB342, enacted in 2023

The Indiana law doesn't impose a criminal penalty on "misconduct relating to the health, safety, or well-being of a student" (or **grooming**,) just makes it harder for schools to hire the employee.

"(h) A school corporation, charter school, or state accredited nonpublic school may not hire or contract with an individual:
(1) who is required to wear an ankle monitor as the result of a criminal conviction;
(2) who entered into an agreement to settle an ***allegation of misconduct relating to the health, safety, or well-being of a student*** *at a school corporation, charter school, or state accredited nonpublic school, if the agreement included a nondisclosure agreement covering the alleged misconduct; or*
(3) who, in an academic environment, ***engaged in a course of conduct involving repeated or continuing contact with a child that is intended to prepare or condition the child for sexual activity*** *(as defined in IC 35-42-4-13);*
unless a majority of the members elected or appointed to the governing body of the school corporation, or the equivalent body for a charter school, approves the hire or contract as a separate, special agenda item, or unless the school administrator of a state accredited nonpublic school informs the administrator's appointing authority of the hiring.
*(i) For purposes of subsection (h), "****misconduct relating to the health, safety, or well-being of a student****" includes:*
(1) engaging in a pattern of flirtatious or otherwise inappropriate comments;
(2) making any effort to gain unreasonable access to, and time alone with, any student with no discernable educational purpose;
(3) engaging in any behavior that can reasonably be construed as involving an inappropriate and overly personal and intimate relationship with, conduct toward, or focus on a student;
(4) telling explicit sexual jokes and stories;
(5) making sexually related comments;
(6) engaging in sexual kidding or teasing;
(7) engaging in sexual innuendos or making comments with double entendre;
(8) inappropriate physical touching;
(9) using spoken, written, or any electronic communication to importune, invite, participate with, or entice a person to expose or touch the person's own or another person's intimate body parts or to observe the student's intimate body parts via any form of computer network or system, any social media platform, telephone network, or data network or by text message or instant messaging;
(10) sexual advances or requests for sexual favors;
(11) physical or romantic relationship including but not limited to sexual intercourse or oral sexual intercourse;
(12) discussion of one's personal romantic or sexual feelings or activities;
(13) discussion, outside of a professional teaching or counseling context endorsed or required by an employing school district, of a student's romantic or sexual feelings or activities;
(14) displaying, sharing, or transmitting pornographic or sexually explicit materials;
(15) any physical contact that the student previously has indicated is unwelcome, unless such contact is professionally required, such as to teach a sport or other skill, or to protect the safety of the student or others;
(16) other than for purposes of addressing student dress code violations or concerns, referencing the physical appearance or clothes of a student in a way that could be interpreted as sexual; and
(17) self-disclosure or physical exposure of a sexual, romantic, or erotic nature

Link to SB 342: https://iga.in.gov/pdf-documents/123/2023/senate/bills/SB0342/SB0342.05.ENRH.pdf

6. Nevada - enacted in 2023

In Nevada, NRS 201.553, enacted in 2023, defines the crime of unlawful communication between a person in a position of authority (such as a teacher, school employee, or volunteer) and a pupil. This charge specifically targets communication—often through electronic devices—intended to facilitate sexual conduct or other felonies. Though this law doesn't use the word grooming, the behavior described meets our definition, and criminalizes it as a felony.

Bill text:

NRS 201.553 Unlawful communication between person in position of authority and pupil: Penalty; exceptions.

1. Except as otherwise provided in subsection 2 and unless a greater penalty is provided by specific statute, a person in a position of authority who knowingly contacts or communicates with or attempts to contact or communicate with a pupil with the intent to:

(a) Engage in the commission of a crime punishable as a felony or gross misdemeanor; or

(b) Cause or encourage the pupil to:

(1) Engage in sexual conduct, either in person or through the use of an electronic communication device;

(2) Use an electronic communication device to transmit or distribute a sexual image of himself or herself to the person;

(3) Engage in an unlawful act that, if committed by an adult, would be a felony or gross misdemeanor; or

(4) Facilitate the commission by the person in a position of authority of a crime punishable as a felony or gross misdemeanor, is guilty of a category C felony and shall be punished as provided in NRS 193.130.

(Added to NRS by 2023, 2466)

Link to law: https://law.justia.com/codes/nevada/chapter-201/statute-201-553/

Nevada also has a law criminalizing sexual conduct between adults in positions of authority and minors in their care (see our Criminalizing Educator Sexual Misconduct and Abuse map).

7. <u>WISCONSIN:</u> Act 200/SB333, enacted in March 2024:

This law does criminalize grooming by a school employee or volunteer as a felony.

*"**948.098 Sexual misconduct by a school staff person or volunteer.***

***(1)** In this section:*

*(a) **"Physical contact of a sexual nature"** means any of the following types of intentional touching, whether direct or through clothing:*

1. Intentional touching by the actor or, upon the actor's instruction, by another person, by the use of any body part or object, if the purpose of the intentional touching is any of the following:

a. To sexually degrade or sexually humiliate the pupil.

b. To sexually degrade or sexually humiliate the actor.

c. To sexually arouse or sexually gratify the pupil.

d. To sexually arouse or sexually gratify the actor.

2. Intentional touching by the pupil, by the use of any body part or object, of the actor or, if done upon the actor's instructions, another person, if the purpose of the intentionally touching is any of the following:

a. To sexually degrade or sexually humiliate the pupil.

b. To sexually degrade or sexually humiliate the actor.

c. To sexually arouse or sexually gratify the pupil.

d. To sexually arouse or sexually gratify the actor.

(b) "School" means a public or private elementary or secondary school, or a tribal school, as defined in s. 115.001 (15m).

(c) "School staff member" means any person who provides services to a school or a school board, including an employee of a school or a school board and a person who provides services to a school or a school board under a contract. "School staff member" includes a bus driver.

*(d) **"Sexual misconduct"** means verbal conduct of a sexual nature or physical contact of a sexual nature. "Sexual misconduct" includes conduct directed by a person at another person of the same or opposite gender.*

*(e) "**Verbal conduct of a sexual nature"** means communications made intentionally for any of the following purposes:*

1. Sexually degrading or sexually humiliating the pupil

2. Sexually degrading or sexually humiliating the actor.

3. Sexually arousing or sexually gratifying the pupil.

3. Sexually arousing or sexually gratifying the actor.

(f) "Volunteer" means a person, other than a school staff member, who provides services to a school without compensation.

(2) Any school staff member or volunteer who commits an act of sexual misconduct against a pupil enrolled in the school is guilty of a Class I felony.

***(3)** A law enforcement officer who receives a report of an alleged violation of sub. (2) shall notify the department of public instruction of the alleged violation including the name of the*

person alleged and the name of the school district or school at which the person works or volunteers."

Link to Act 200: https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2023/related/acts/200

New Wisconsin Grooming Bill: 2025 SB 671, now WI AB677

Status: Passed, Signed by the Governor March 6, 2026

Description:

This bill criminalizes grooming as a felony; goes beyond previously passed WI grooming law that criminalized sexual misconduct by school employees, enabling charging of any adult for grooming. The previous law also didn't use the word grooming, instead describing physical and verbal sexual misconduct.

This bill defines grooming as the "**course of conduct, pattern of behavior, or series of acts with the intention to condition, seduce, solicit, lure, or entice a child for the purpose of engaging in sexual intercourse or sexual contact or for the purpose of producing distributing, or possessing depictions of the child engaged in sexually explicit conduct,"** and provides examples of the conduct that constitutes grooming, including verbal comments, suggestions, or conversations of a sexual nature directed toward a child; inappropriate or sexualized physical contact; written, electronic, or digital communications to seduce, solicit, lure, or entice a child; and isolating a child. The class of felony increases if the adult is in a position of authority over the child. There is an age exception: "the crime does not apply to a person who is 18 or under if it involves a child who is not more than four years younger than the person unless the violation involves force, coercion, or abuse of a position of trust or authority over the child." There are also increased penalties if the minor child has a disability.

Bill text:

948.072 Grooming of a child for sexual activity. (1) In this section,

"position of trust or authority over the child" means a relationship between a person and a child in which the person has regular and direct contact with the child and power or control over the child's welfare, education, or other factors important to the child.
(2) No person may engage in a ***course of conduct, pattern of behavior, or series of acts with the intention to condition, seduce, solicit, lure, or entice a child for the purpose of engaging in sexual intercourse or sexual contact, or for the purpose of producing, distributing, or possessing depictions of the child engaged in sexually explicit conduct. Fo****r purposes of this section, a course of conduct, pattern of behavior, or series of acts may include, among other activities, any of the following:*
(a) Verbal comments, suggestions, or conversations of a sexual nature directed toward a child.
(b) Inappropriate or sexualized physical contact or attempts to initiate such contact.

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(c) Written, electronic, or digital communications, including using text messages, emails, social media, or online platforms, to seduce, solicit, lure, or entice a child.
(d) Provision or promise of gifts, favors, privileges, attention, or other items of value with the intent to lower a child's inhibitions, gain trust, or create emotional dependence.
(e) An act intending to isolate a child, or to encourage a child to separate, from family, peers, or guardians.
(f) Use of a computer, online service, Internet service, local bulletin board service, or any device capable of electronic data storage or transmission to contact a child, a child's guardian, or any person believed by the actor to be a child or a child's guardian.
(3) Except as provided in sub. (4), a person who violates sub. (2) is guilty of the following:
(a) A Class G felony.
(b) If the person is in a position of trust or authority over the child, a Class F felony.
(c) If the child has a developmental, cognitive, or physical disability that is known, or should be known, by the person, a Class E felony.
(d) If the violation involves 2 or more children, a Class D felony.
(4) Subsection (3) does not apply to a person who has not attained the age of 19 if the violation involves a child who is not more than 4 years younger than the person unless the violation involves force, coercion, or abuse of a position of trust or authority over the child.
Link to bill: https://legiscan.com/WI/bill/AB677/2025

8. Georgia: HB 993, enacted in April 2024

This law criminalizes grooming as a felony and states that it is not a defense that no sexual offense or trafficking was accomplished or attempted. It does exclude from prosecution people under 18 or less than 4 years older than the victim. Law text:

"(b) A person over the age of 18 and no less than 48 months older than the alleged victim commits the offense of ***grooming of a minor*** *when such person knowingly and intentionally engages in a* ***pattern of conduct or communication*** *in person; through a third party; through the use of an electronic device, a computer, social media, or text messages; or by any other means to gain access to, to gain the compliance of,* ***to prepare, to persuade, to induce, or to coerce a minor to engage in a sexual offense or trafficking of persons for sexual servitude****.*

(c) Any person who violates this Code section shall be guilty of a felony and punished by imprisonment for not less than one nor more than five years.

(d) It shall not be a defense to prosecution under this Code section that no sexual offense or trafficking of persons for sexual servitude was accomplished or attempted."

Link to law: https://legiscan.com/GA/text/HB993/id/2971511

9. Florida HB 1545, enacted in April 2024

Florida HB 1545 (2024), regarding child exploitation offenses, was signed into law by Governor DeSantis on April 11, 2024. The bill, which increases penalties for child exploitation and establishes offenses for harmful communications with minors, went into effect on July 1, 2024.

This bill added to the criminal code the offense of harmful communication to a minor. It **prohibits an adult from engaging in a pattern of communication to a minor that includes explicit and detailed verbal descriptions of sexual activity.** It also prohibits:

"Transmission of material harmful to minors to a minor by electronic device or equipment."

It also included additional penalties for possessing, viewing and distributing child sexual abuse material, and enticing a minor to engage in it.

Link to bill: https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/1545/BillText/Filed/PDF

Florida HB 777 (2025) - Luring or Enticing Children:

This legislation strengthened penalties for luring or enticing children under 14 years old. The first offense was upgraded from a first-degree misdemeanor to a third-degree felony. Subsequent offenses were raised to a second-degree felony. Ignorance of the child's age or a "bona fide belief" about the age is no longer a valid defense.

The bill defines **lewd or lascivious grooming** as a criminal offense, aimed at protecting children from predators who build trust for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Link to bill: https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2025/777/BillText/er/PDF

10. Arizona: HB2310, enacted in May 2024

This law criminalizes grooming as a felony, with additional penalties for adults in a position of trust. It does not provide exceptions for offenders similar in age to the minor, and includes attempting to entice a minor to distribute photographs that depict a person's sex organs. This could criminalize minors who engage in sexting.

"13-1430. Grooming; classification

A. A PERSON COMMITS GROOMING BY KNOWINGLY USING AN ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE AS DEFINED IN SECTION 13-3561, PERFORMING AN ACT IN PERSON OR THROUGH A THIRD PARTY OR USING ANY WRITTEN COMMUNICATION TO SEDUCE, LURE OR ENTICE OR ATTEMPT TO

SEDUCE, LURE OR ENTICE A MINOR, A MINOR'S GUARDIAN OR ANOTHER PERSON WHOM THE PERSON BELIEVES TO BE A MINOR OR A MINOR'S GUARDIAN TO:

1. COMMIT ANY OFFENSE THAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS CHAPTER OR CHAPTER 35.1 OF THIS TITLE.

2. DISTRIBUTE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT DEPICT A PERSON'S SEX ORGANS.

3. ENGAGE IN ANY UNLAWFUL CONDUCT WITH A MINOR OR ANOTHER PERSON WHOM THE PERSON BELIEVES TO BE A MINOR.

B. GROOMING IS A CLASS 5 FELONY, EXCEPT THAT GROOMING IS A CLASS 4 FELONY IF THE DEFENDANT IS IN A POSITION OF TRUST."

Link to law: https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/56leg/2r/bills/hb2310p.htm

11. Iowa: HF 2602, enacted in May 2024

This law criminalizes grooming of a child under 18 as a felony. It does not include exceptions for the age of the offender, but only includes grooming for "unlawful sexual conduct" and not all sexual activity.

"Section 1. NEW SECTION. 709.8A Grooming. 1. A person commits grooming when the person knowingly performs an act in person or by conduct through a third party, uses a computer, internet service, or any other electronic storage or transmission device, or uses written communication to seduce, solicit, lure, or entice, or attempt to seduce, solicit, lure, or entice, a child or a person believed to be a child to commit any unlawful sex act or to otherwise engage in unlawful sexual conduct. As used in this section, -child - means a person under eighteen years of age. 2. Grooming is a class " D" felony."

Link to law:
https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LGE/90/Attachments/HF2602_GovLetter.pdf

Iowa HF 561 is currently pending in the 2025-2026 legislative session. This bill specifies that a person commits grooming if they knowingly seduce, solicit, lure, or entice (or attempt to do so) a child or someone believed to be a child, **including a law enforcement officer posing as a minor.** This provision is what differs it from the previously enacted bill.

Link to HF 561: https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ba=HF561&ga=91

12. VERMONT: H173 - Act 172, enacted June 2024:

This law does criminalize grooming, with increased penalties for those who abuse a child through their position of authority.

H173, "An act relating to prohibiting manipulating a child for the purpose of sexual contact"
"Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to expand the statute prohibiting luring a child to also ***prohibit manipulating behaviors intended to facilitate sexual contact with a child.***

…

(a) ***Behavior commonly referred to as "grooming"*** *is a tactic in which someone methodically builds a trusting relationship with a child or young adult, the child's or young adult's family, and the child's or young adult's community with intent to manipulate, coerce, or force the child or young adult to engage in sexual activities*

(b) Manipulating a child to engage in sexual activity may include behaviors in which the perpetrator:

(1) engages in boundary violations involving touching of the child;

(2) exposes the perpetrator's naked body to the child or observes the child undressing or while naked;

(3) shows the child obscene or indecent materials as defined in 13 V.S.A. chapter 63;

(4) physically or emotionally separates or isolates the child from peers, family, or other support systems;

(5) provides the child with alcohol or drugs; or

(6) develops a trusting relationship with the child through behaviors that are excessive or inappropriate for the context or relationship, including the provision of attention; affection; compliments; or rewards, privileges, or gifts…

§ 2828. LURING A CHILD

(a) No person shall ***knowingly solicit, lure, manipulate, or entice****, or to attempt to solicit, lure, manipulate, or entice, a child under 16 years of age or another person believed by the person to be a child under 16 years of age, to engage in a sexual act as defined in section 3251 of this title or engage in lewd and lascivious conduct as defined in section 2602 of this title.*

(b) This section applies to solicitation, luring, manipulating, or enticement by any means, including in person, through written or telephonic correspondence, or through electronic communication.

(c) This section shall not apply if the person is less than 19 years of age, the child is at least 15 years of age, and the conduct is consensual."

"(c)(1) A person who violates subsection (a) of this section shall be imprisoned for not more than one year or fined not more than $2,000.00, or both.

(c)(2) A person who violates subsection (a) of this section and who abuses his or her the person's position of power, authority, or supervision over the minor in order to engage in a sexual act as defined in section 3251 of this title or sexual conduct as defined in section 2821 of this title shall be imprisoned for not more than five years or fined not more than $10,000.00, or both.

(d)(1) A person who violates subsection (b) of this section shall be imprisoned for not more than six months or fined not more than $1,000.00, or both.

(2) A person who violates subsection (b) of this section and who abuses the person's position of power, authority, or supervision over the minor in order to engage in a sexual act as defined in section 3251 of this title or sexual conduct as defined in section 2821 of this title shall be imprisoned for not more than two years or fined not more than $5,000.00, or both.

Link to H173 (Act 172): https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2024/H.173

13. OHIO: HB322, enacted January 2025

Criminalizes **grooming** as a precursor to abuse, with a higher penalty for educators.

"(B) No person who is eighteen years of age or older shall engage in a pattern of conduct with a minor who is less than sixteen years of age and who is four or more years younger than the person, when the pattern of conduct would cause a reasonable adult person to believe that the person is communicating with the minor with purpose to do either of the following:

(1) Entice, coerce, or solicit the minor to engage in sexual activity, and when the person's purpose in engaging in the pattern of conduct is to entice, coerce, or solicit the minor to engage in sexual activity with the person or a third person;
(2) Prepare the minor to engage in sexual activity, and when the person's purpose in engaging in the pattern of conduct is to prepare the minor to engage in sexual activity with the person or a third person that would be a violation of section 2907.02, 2907.03, 2907.04, 2907.05, 2907.06, or 2907.07 of the Revised Code.
(C) No person who is eighteen years of age or older shall engage in a pattern of conduct with a minor if the person and the minor are in any of the relationships described in divisions (A)(5) to (13) of section 2907.03 of the Revised Code, when the pattern of conduct would cause a reasonable adult person to believe that the person is communicating with the minor with purpose to do either of the following:
(1) Entice, coerce, or solicit the minor to engage in sexual activity, and when the person's purpose in engaging in the pattern of conduct is to entice, coerce, or solicit the minor to engage in sexual activity with the person or a third person;
(2) Prepare the minor to engage in sexual activity, and when the person's purpose in engaging in the pattern of conduct is to prepare the minor to engage in sexual activity with the person or a third person that would be a violation of section 2907.02, 2907.03, 2907.04, 2907.05, 2907.06, or 2907.07 of the Revised Code.
(D) ***Whoever violates this section is guilty of grooming."***

Link to bill: https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/135/hb322

14. MONTANA: HB 82, passed January 2025, signed by the Governor 4/8/25.

House Bill 82 amends the CSAM statute to include AI-generated or altered child sexual abuse material, and criminalizes **grooming** as a sexual offense under the state's crimes against children

statute.

*"Section 1. **Grooming** of child for sexual offense.*

(1) A person commits the offense of grooming of a child for a sexual offense if the person purposely or knowingly engages in a pattern of behavior by any means of communication, including in-person or electronic communication, aimed at a child or the child's guardian with the intent to:
(a) manipulate the child into engaging in sexual conduct, actual or simulated;
(b) coerce or entice a child under 16 years of age to meet in person to engage in sexual conduct, actual or simulated;
(c) distribute or facilitate access to sexually explicit material; or
(d) exploit a position of authority to develop an intimate or secretive relationship with a minor.

*(2) (a) Except as provided in subsection (2)(b) or subsection (3), a person convicted of the offense of **grooming** of a child for a sexual offense shall be imprisoned in the state prison for a term not to exceed 10 years and may be fined not more than $10,000.*
(b) If the victim is under 16 years of age, a person convicted of the offense of grooming of a child for a sexual offense shall be punished by life imprisonment or by imprisonment in the state prison for a term of not less than 4 years or more than 100 years and may be fined not more than $10,000.

(3) (a) If the victim was 12 years of age or younger and the offender was 18 years of age or older at the time of the offense, the offender:
(i) shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for a term of 100 years. The court may not suspend execution or defer imposition of the first 25 years of a sentence of imprisonment imposed under this subsection (3)(a)(i) except as provided in 46-18-222(1) through (5), and during the first 25 years of imprisonment, the offender is not eligible for parole. The exception provided in 46-18-222(6) does not apply.
(ii) may be fined an amount not to exceed $50,000; and
(iii) shall be ordered to enroll in and successfully complete the educational phase and the cognitive and behavioral phase of a sexual offender treatment program provided or approved by the department of corrections.
(b) If the offender is released after the mandatory minimum period of imprisonment, the offender is subject to supervision by the department of corrections for the remainder of the offender's life and shall participate in the program for continuous, satellite-based monitoring provided for in 46-23-1010.

(4) As used in this section, the following definitions apply:
(a) "Electronic communication" means a sign, a signal, writing, an image, a sound, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted or created in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photoelectronic, or photo-optical system.
*(b) **"Grooming"** means behavior that seeks to prepare, induce, or persuade a minor to engage in sexual activity or other forms of exploitation, even if no meeting or sexual act is completed. It is the deliberate act of establishing an emotional connection with a minor through manipulation, trust-building, or influence to facilitate future sexual abuse or exploitation. This includes online or in-person activities, use of third parties, or indirect methods to facilitate the manipulation of a child…"*

Link to bill text:
https://bills.legmt.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery#/laws/bill/2/LC0232?open_tab=bill

15. **MISSISSIPPI:** enacted April 2025

HB1308 criminalizes grooming as a felony, with increased penalties for adults in positions of authority or trust who groom minors in their care. This bill also criminalizes computer-generated or altered CSAM involving the image of an actual child.

"(2) A person over the age of twenty-one (21) ***commits the offense of grooming of a child when such person knowingly engages in a pattern of conduct or communication in person; through a third party; through the use of an electronic device, computer, social media, or text messages; or by any other means to gain access to, to gain the compliance of, to prepare, to persuade, to induce, or to coerce a child to engage in sexually explicit conduct or human trafficking or to procure the sexual servitude of a child.***

(3) (a) Any person who violates this section shall be guilty of a felony, and upon conviction thereof, be imprisoned in the custody of the Department of Corrections for not less than two (2) years nor more than ten (10) years, or fined not more than Ten Thousand Dollars ($10,000.00), or both.

(b) (i) Any person who is eighteen (18) years of age or older and violates this section while that person was in a position of trust or authority over the child at the time of the offense shall be guilty of a felony, and upon conviction thereof, be imprisoned in the custody of the Department of Corrections for not less than five (5) years nor more than ten (10) years, or fined not more than Twenty Thousand Dollars ($20,000.00), or both.

(ii) A person in a position of trust or authority over a child includes, without limitation, a child's teacher, counselor, physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, minister, priest, physical therapist, chiropractor, legal guardian, parent, stepparent, aunt, uncle, scout leader, or coach."

HB1308: https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/2025/pdf/history/HB/HB1308.xml

News: https://magnoliatribune.com/2025/04/08/lawmakers-make-grooming-of-a-child-a-felony-in-mississippi/

16. **LOUISIANA** – enacted June 2025

Louisiana SB58, Act 97 creates the felony crime of "grooming". This bill passed the Senate unanimously in May and was signed by the Governor June 10th.

*(3) T**he grooming of a child under the age of seventeen,** where the **offender is at least four years older** than the child. Completion or attempt to complete such act is not necessary to constitute grooming. Lack of knowledge of the child's age shall not be a defense.*

(1) "Grooming" shall mean the pursuit of an intimate relationship with a child under the age of seventeen by means of seduction, emotional manipulation, threats, promises, coercion, enticement, isolation, or extortion with the specific intent to commit a sex offense as defined in R.S. 15:541 against the minor, whether aggravated or not.

Link to law: https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/BillInfo.aspx?i=248214

17. WYOMING:

Wyoming HB 9

Status: Signed by Governor March 5th 2026

WY House Bill 9 is was recently passed in the 2026 legislative session. It criminalizes grooming a minor in order to sexually abuse them as a felony. It includes increased penalties for grooming a minor who is below 16 and 12 years of age, and increased penalties if the person who committed grooming is in a position of authority over the minor.

Bill text:

*(ii) Except as provided by W.S. 6-2-302 through 9 6-2-304 and 6-2-313 through 6-2-318, **"grooming" means behavior, including sending an electronic communication, that seeks to prepare, induce or persuade a minor to engage in sexual conduct or exploitation, even if no meeting or sexual conduct is completed**.*
"Grooming" includes:
(A) Deliberate acts that establish an emotional connection with a minor through manipulation, trust-building or influence to facilitate acts of sexual conduct, sexual abuse or exploitation;
(B) Online or in-person activities, the use of third parties or indirect methods to facilitate the manipulation of a minor.
…
(b) A person commits the offense of grooming of a minor for a sexual offense if the person:
1 (i) Is eighteen (18) years of age or older and
2 not less than four (4) years older than the minor; and
3 (ii) Purposely or knowingly engages in a pattern of grooming aimed at a minor or the minor's parent or guardian with the intent to:
(A) Manipulate the minor into engaging in sexual conduct;
(B) Coerce or entice a minor to meet in person to engage in sexual conduct;
(C) Distribute or facilitate access to sexually explicit material; or
(D) Exploit a position of authority to develop an intimate or secretive relationship with a minor.

c) Except as provided in subsections (d), (e) and (g) of this section, ***grooming of a minor for a sexual offense is a felony*** *punishable by imprisonment for more than five (5) years, a fine not to exceed ten thousand dollars ($10,000.00), or both.*
(d) A person who commits grooming of a minor for a sexual offense against a minor who is younger than sixteen (16) years of age but older than twelve (12) years of age shall be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment for 8 not more than ten (10) years, a fine not to exceed ten 9 thousand dollars ($10,000.00), or both.
(e) A person who is not less than eighteen (18) years of age who commits the offense of grooming of a minor for a sexual offense against a minor who is less than twelve (12) years of age shall be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment for not more than fifteen (15) years, a fine not to exceed fifteen thousand dollars ($15,000.00), or both.
(f) A person guilty of grooming of a minor for a sexual offense under this section shall: (i) Complete a sexual offender treatment program provided or approved by the department of corrections;
(ii) Be subject to probation for a period not to exceed ten (10) years.
(g) A ***person who occupies a position of authority in relation to the victim and who commits the offense of grooming of a minor for a sexual offense shall:***
(i) Except as provided in paragraphs (ii) and (iii) of this subsection, be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment for not more than ten (10) years, a fine not to exceed twenty thousand dollars ($20,000.00), or both; (ii) If the minor is between twelve (12) and 16 sixteen (16) years of age, be guilty of a felony punishable 17 by imprisonment for not more than twenty (20) years, a fine 18 not to exceed twenty thousand dollars ($20,000.00), or 19 both; (iii) If the minor is younger than twelve (12) 22 years of age, be guilty of a felony punishable by 23 imprisonment for not more than thirty (30) years, a fine not to exceed thirty thousand dollars ($30,000.00), or 2 both.

Bill link: https://legiscan.com/WY/bill/HB0009/2026

18. Missouri:

HB 2273 passed March 2026, awaiting Governor's signature

This bill specifically adds "grooming" to Missouri's existing felony of enticement of a minor, clarifying that actions designed to manipulate or prepare a child under age 18 for sexual conduct are criminal, even if sexual contact never occurs. The bill mandates a minimum 10-year prison sentence if the grooming results in a minor engaging in sex. This bill also increases penalties for "sextortion"—the distribution of private sexual images of a minor without consent—to a class C felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. It also updates the terminology in the statute from "child pornography" to "child sexual abuse material". The legislation was heavily influenced by testimonials from victims' families regarding taekwondo instructor misconduct (Evie and Sophie's Law) and teen suicide related to online extortion (Evan's Voice Act).

Bill text (grooming section):

566.152. 1. This section shall be known and may be cited as "Evie and Sophie's 2 Law".

2. A person commits the ***offense of grooming of a minor if such person is twenty one years of age or older and knowingly engages in a pattern of conduct that includes at least one overtly sexual act or communication directed toward a minor from which, by its nature or context, a reasonable person would infer the intent to prepare, condition, or manipulate such minor for sexual conduct, sexual performance, or a commercial sex act.***

3. For the purposes of prosecution of the offense of grooming of a minor, the following shall apply: (1) Direct evidence of explicit statements of intent of the defendant shall not be required. Intent of the defendant may be established by the nature, frequency, and context of communications or actions, except that intent of the defendant is required to be evaluated based upon only what a reasonable person would infer the intent of the defendant to be; and

(2) A pattern of conduct shall be determined by objective facts, not by the reputation or character of the defendant.

4. The offense of grooming of a minor shall not apply to a person who is a parent, guardian, or family member of the minor who is providing standard care or support to the minor if there is no evidence of sexual intent or exploitation by the person.

Link to bill: https://house.mo.gov/Bill.aspx?bill=HB2273&year=2026&code=R

19. Kentucky: 26RS HB 4

Status: passed by House and Senate, awaiting the Governor's signature as of March 31 2026

Description: Kentucky 26RS HB 4, proposed in 2026, would criminalize grooming, however, it is not always a felony. The punishment can be upgraded to a class C or D felony if the child is under 12. The pending law only criminalizes grooming of children 14-17 years old if the groomer is an authority figure. The law may leave 14–17-year-olds vulnerable to grooming by non-authority figures. The law criminalizes grooming behaviors that may occur online or in person. It explicitly states that grooming can occur without sexual contact or meeting in person.

Bill text:

1 AN ACT relating to grooming a minor.
2 Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:
3 SECTION 1. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 510 IS CREATED TO
4 READ AS FOLLOWS:
*5 (**1) A person is guilty of grooming a minor when:***
6 (a) Being eighteen (18) years of age or older, he or she engages in grooming
7 behavior directed at a minor who is under fourteen (14) years old with the
8 intent to entice, coerce, solicit, or prepare the minor to engage in sexual
***9 conduct with the person or another person**; or*
*10 (**b) Being a person in a position of authority or position of special trust, as***
11 those terms are defined in KRS 532.045, he or she engages in grooming
***12 behavior directed at a minor who is under eighteen (18) years old** with the*

13 ***intent to:***
14 1. Entice, coerce, solicit, or prepare the minor to engage in sexual
15 conduct with the person or another person; or
16 2. Develop an intimate or secretive relationship with the minor.
17 (2) (a) For a violation of subsection (1)(a) of this section, grooming a minor is a
18 Class A misdemeanor unless the minor is under twelve (12) years old, in
19 which case it is a Class D felony.
20 (b) For a violation of subsection (1)(b) of this section, grooming a minor is a
21 Class D felony unless the minor is under twelve (12) years old, in which
22 case it is a Class C felony.
23 (3) This section shall not be construed to prevent a person from communicating with
24 a minor for any lawful or legitimate purpose, including but not limited to:
25 (a) Teaching curriculum on human sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases
26 as provided in KRS 158.1415;
27 (b) The use of a traceable communication system by a school district employee

REFER TO BILL LINK FOR ADDITIONAL 2+ PAGES OF AMENDMENTS AND ADDITIONS TO BILL

Link to bill: https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/26rs/hb4.html