SAFE & SEEN
A Teen's Guide to Healthy Relationships, Grooming & Consent

INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, someone probably shared this book because they care about you. Maybe it was a parent, teacher, coach, counselor—or maybe you found it on your own because you had questions or were simply curious.

When I first started volunteering with the Beau Biden Foundation, I thought I already knew what it meant to stay safe in all aspects of my life—online, in relationships, and with other adults. I assumed unhealthy situations would be obvious and easy to recognize.

I was wrong.

What surprised me most is that, when it comes to relationships, unhealthy ones often begin with things that seem completely normal—kindness, trust, encouragement, and attention. The important part is noticing when those interactions begin to change over time, whether in person or online. I also learned that grooming is a common part of many cases of child sexual abuse. That surprised me because I had always assumed abuse began with obvious warning signs, not necessarily with someone subtly earning a young person's trust.

What seems like a simple relationship can slowly develop into something much more serious. Learning to recognize when a relationship begins to change—when healthy support and encouragement gradually become secrecy, pressure, or manipulation—is important. That doesn't mean you have to be suspicious of everyone you meet. It simply means that it's important to understand the difference between respect and manipulation.

Throughout this book, you'll meet three teens—Ava, Noah, and Sophie—whose stories explore grooming, online safety, and consent. As you read, think about what you would do in their situations and consider what healthy relationships look like in your own life.

Does It Really Matter?

Learning about grooming and consent doesn't mean you should stop trusting people. It means you'll be better prepared to recognize the right kinds of relationships, notice unhealthy patterns early, and learn when to ask more questions or reach out to someone else for help.

The Main Point

Knowledge doesn't create fear. It builds confidence.

SECTION 1

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE RED FLAGS?

Sometimes the most important question isn't whether a person is good or bad. Instead, it's to consider, "Could this become part of an unhealthy pattern?"

Read each situation and go with your first instinct. Some answers are obvious. Others aren't—and that's exactly the point.

1. Your teacher tells you they are proud of how hard you've been working.

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern
- ⭕ Not Necessarily

2. A teacher frequently comments on your appearance and says you're "more mature" than everyone else.

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern
- ⭕ Not Necessarily

3. Your coach congratulates the whole team after a great game.

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern
- ⭕ Not Necessarily

4. Someone online asks you to move your conversation to another app because it's "more private."

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern
- ⭕ Not Necessarily

5. A family friend checks in after hearing you've had a difficult week.

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern
- ⭕ Not Necessarily

6. Someone buys you gifts and asks you not to tell your parents.

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern
- ⭕ Not Necessarily

7. Someone gets upset whenever you spend time with your other friends.

- ⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern

⭕ Not Necessarily

8. Someone asks you to keep your friendship a secret.

⭕ Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern

⭕ Not Necessarily

How Did You Do?

What did you notice? Some questions were easy. Others were a little less obvious. That's normal. Real life isn't always black and white. Healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships can sometimes look the same at first glance. The difference isn't usually a single gesture or one uncomfortable moment—it's the pattern of behavior that develops over time.

1. Your teacher tells you they are proud of how hard you've been working.

✅ **Not Necessarily**

Encouragement and praise are normal parts of healthy relationships. Adults who care about you recognize effort, celebrate achievements, and help students build confidence.

2. A teacher frequently comments on your appearance and says you're "more mature" than everyone else.

⚠️ **Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern**

Repeated personal compliments that focus on your appearance or make you feel "different" from other students can be a way someone begins creating a special connection. By themselves, they don't seem harmful, but they still deserve attention—especially if they make you uncomfortable or become a consistent interaction.

3. Your coach congratulates the whole team after a great game.

✅ **Not Necessarily**

Celebrating the success of the entire team is a healthy and appropriate way to encourage athletes.

4. Someone online asks you to move your conversation to another app because it's "more private."

⚠️ **Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern**

Moving conversations out of the public eye could be an attempt to create secrecy. Before agreeing to make a conversation private, ask yourself why that privacy is suddenly important.

5. A family friend checks in after hearing you've had a difficult week.

✅ **Not Necessarily**

Supportive adults often check on young people when they're struggling. It's healthy for adults to offer kindness without asking for secrecy, special treatment, or something in return.

6. Someone buys you gifts and asks you not to tell your parents.

⚠️ **Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern**

Kind gifts aren't the problem. Asking you to keep them secret is. Secrecy can be an early warning sign that someone is trying to separate you from the adults who help keep you safe.

7. Someone gets upset whenever you spend time with your other friends.

⚠️ **Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern**

Healthy relationships encourage you to have other friendships and interests. Someone who tries to make you feel guilty for spending time with others may be trying to manipulate or isolate you.

8. Someone asks you to keep your friendship a secret.

⚠️ **Could Be Part of an Unhealthy Pattern**

Healthy relationships don't need to be hidden. When someone asks you to keep your interactions a secret, it's important to stop, think, and talk with a trusted adult.

Ask Yourself

If you are ever uncertain about a relationship, ask yourself:

- Does this person respect my boundaries?
- Do they encourage honesty?
- Would I feel comfortable telling someone else about this relationship?

It's okay to ask questions if you're unsure about something. You don't need proof before talking to someone you trust.

The Reality

Healthy adult relationships aren't singular. They don't expect to be the only person you confide in, they don't ask you to keep anything about your relationship a secret. You are always free to make your own decisions and choose your own relationships.

The Main Point

None of these situations put you in any "immediate" danger, but what matters is your ability to see the red flags and pick up on the pattern. Grooming often begins with behaviors that seem harmless or even kind. Over time, those behaviors may slowly become more personal, more secretive, or more controlling.

Learning to recognize these patterns isn't about becoming suspicious of everyone. It's about building the confidence to recognize when something doesn't feel right and knowing it's always okay to ask a trusted adult for help.

SECTION 2

MEET AVA

Ava has been looking forward to joining yearbook since the first day of school. Photography has always been an interest of hers. Ava is excited to be part of this group and hopes to learn and grow from the experience.

In the very first meeting, one of the teachers notices Ava right away. He compliments her photos, always shares editing tips, and continues to tell her she has a real talent. One day he encourages Ava to enter a few local photography contests, outside of the weekly yearbook meetings.

At first, Ava feels flattered. She's grateful for all of the extra help this teacher is offering and is excited that he really believes in her. But then things start to shift, little things here and there begin to change.

The teacher starts texting Ava outside of club meetings to talk about the contests. He begins attending some of the contests to cheer her on and even brings Ava's favorite drink from Starbucks. He tells Ava that she's "more mature than the other students." Then one afternoon he says: "You might not want to tell your parents how often we talk. They'll probably misunderstand anyway and we make such a great team."

Ava pauses. Nothing terrible has happened. But something doesn't feel the same anymore. For the first time, she wonders why someone she trusts would ask her to keep their interactions secret.

What changed?

☐ The compliments

☐ The photography advice

☑ The relationship gradually became more personal and more secretive.

The help and encouragement weren't a problem. The concern is how the relationship slowly changed over time.

Healthy relationships offer encouragement while maintaining appropriate boundaries. They don't ask young people to keep secrets from others.

Grooming is a process in which someone gradually builds trust so they can cross boundaries, create secrecy, or gain greater access or control over a relationship. It usually happens little by little—not all at once.

Green Flags

Knowing the warning signs is important—but it's just as important to recognize what healthy relationships look like too.

Healthy relationships:

✓ Respect your boundaries.

✓ Accept “no” without making you feel guilty.

✓ Celebrate your accomplishments.

✓ Encourage relationships with family and friends.

✓ Listen without judging.

✓ Make you feel safe being yourself.

✓ Respect your privacy.

✓ Encourage open communication with trusted adults.

The Reality

Sometimes the hardest situations to recognize are the ones that don’t seem wrong at first. If a relationship begins to feel different, more secretive, or less comfortable than it did, take notice and trust your instincts. You can always share your thoughts or worries with someone else. You don’t need proof before asking for help.

Think About It

If you were Ava, when would you have started asking questions?

There’s no single right answer. The important thing is noticing when a relationship starts to change.

Remember This

Healthy relationships don’t depend on secrecy.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE ONLINE TOO

Healthy and unhealthy relationships don’t just happen in person. They can also start online, through games, social media, messaging apps, or shared interests.

The same question still applies: How does someone treat you over time?

Healthy online friendships are built on the same things as healthy in-person relationships:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Healthy boundaries

That’s exactly what Noah begins to discover when we meet him next.

SECTION 3

MEET NOAH

Noah loves technology and spends a lot of time gaming. During the summer, he plays his favorite game online with friends from school. One night, another player that he doesn't know joins his team. They're funny, they're good at the game, and they're easy to talk to.

After a few weeks, Noah's new friend suggests they move their conversations to another app because it's easier to chat while playing. At first, they mostly talk about games, music, and school. Then, little by little, the questions begin to change.

"Where do you live again? Are you ever home by yourself? It's a lot easier to talk then."

"Do your parents have access to your phone or online accounts?"

Finally, one night, another message appears: "Don't tell anyone about our conversations. Other people, especially parents, usually don't understand online friendships."

Noah pauses but doesn't answer. Nothing happened overnight. But something feels different. For the first time, he wonders why someone he thought was a friend would ask him to keep their conversations a secret.

What changed?

☐ They started playing games together.

☑ They moved to another app.

☑ The conversations gradually became more personal and more secretive.

Making friends online isn't automatically unsafe. Millions of people connect online every day through games, social media, and shared interests. The concern isn't one game, one app, or one conversation. It's the pattern.

Just like Ava's story, the concern is how the relationship changed over time.

Healthy Online Friendships

Healthy online friendships:

✓ Respect your privacy.

✓ Respect your boundaries.

✓ Don't pressure you to respond immediately.

✓ Don't ask for personal information you're uncomfortable sharing.

✓ Don’t ask you to hide your friendship.

✓ Respect your answer if you say “no.”

Noah’s Story Continues: Pause Before You Share

The next afternoon, Noah logs back on to play another game. Everything seems normal until another message pops up: “Hey Noah, how’s it going?”

”I was just thinking, I don’t even know what you look. Send me a picture.”

Noah doesn’t answer. A few seconds later, another message appears: “Come on…don’t you trust me? Everyone else does, we share pictures all the time.”

Noah still doesn’t feel comfortable and realized he didn’t even know if the person on the other end was really another teenager. So he didn’t send the picture. Instead, he closes the conversation and talks with a trusted adult. He trusted his instincts when something didn’t feel right.

Sharing photos, videos, and messages with friends is a normal part of life. The important question isn’t whether someone asks. It’s how and what they ask for, and how they respond if your answer is no.

Healthy friends respect your answer. They don’t pressure you. They don’t make you feel guilty. They don’t ask you to prove your friendship.

Pause and Think

Which response shows respect?

☐ “Come on.”

☐ “Don’t you trust me?”

☑ “No problem. I understand.”

Someone who respects you also respects your answer. That’s why you should always pause before you share. Before sending a photo, message, or screenshot, ask yourself:

✓ Do I want to share this?

✓ Do I have permission to share it?

✓ Would I be comfortable if everyone I know saw it?

✓ Could someone save or share this, even if I deleted it later?

Taking a moment to pause can help you make a decision you’ll feel comfortable with later.

The Reality

No one should ever make you feel guilty for protecting your privacy. Healthy friendships are built on trust—not pressure.

Remember This

You never owe anyone your photos, your location, your passwords, or your personal information.

SECTION 4

MEET SOPHIE

Just as Ava learned that relationships can gradually change and Noah discovered that online friendships can shift over time, Sophie learns that respect is just as important in dating relationships.

Sophie's first date went even better than she expected.

Sam took her to dinner, and the conversation came easily. They talked about music, school, and summer plans. When Sam walked Sophie to her car, he asked: "Can I give you a hug?" Sophie smiled and said, "Sure."

Sophie and Sam started spending more time together. They talked almost every day, texting, snapping, hanging out. One night when they were texting Sam asked Sophie to send him a private picture. Sophie knew people shared pictures all the time, but she didn't feel comfortable sending what he wanted.

When she hesitated, Sam said: "If you really trusted me, you would send it." Then he added: "It's really no big deal but I thought we were a lot closer than that."

Sophie cared about Sam, but now she felt pressured and unsure of what to say.

Notice the Difference

Notice how different the two conversations feel. On their first date, Sam asked and gave Sophie a real choice. Later, when Sophie hesitated, he tried to make her feel guilty so she would change her mind.

Healthy relationships don't make you prove that you care. Someone who respects you always accepts your answer. Someone who wants to pressure you tries to change your mind.

Which conversation showed respect?

☑ "Can I give you a hug?"

☐ “If you trusted me…”

Consent Is About Respect

People often think consent only applies to dating or physical relationships, but we practice consent every day. Consent is really about everyday respect. It means recognizing that every person gets to decide what they are and are not comfortable with.

Consent can sound like:

- “Can I borrow this?”
- “Is it okay if I post this picture?”
- “Would you like a hug?”
- “Are you comfortable with that?”

Each question gives the other person a real choice.

Five Things to Remember

Consent is:

✓ Freely Given — Never pressured, guilted, or forced.

✓ Specific — Saying yes to one thing does not mean saying yes to everything.

✓ Ongoing — Anyone can change their mind at any time.

✓ Informed — Everyone understands what they are agreeing to.

✓ Mutual — Everyone’s boundaries and choices matter.

”No” is a complete answer.

Which Response Shows Respect?

Which response shows respect?

☑ “Thanks for letting me know.”

☐ “Come on…”

☐ “If you cared about me…”

You shouldn’t have to argue with someone in order to gain their respect. Respect should come naturally.

The Reality

Sometimes saying no feels uncomfortable. But people who care about you should never make you feel guilty for having boundaries. You do not need a perfect explanation. If something does not feel right, that's enough.

Remember This

You never owe someone your time, attention, photos, affection, or physical contact because they were nice to you.

SECTION 5

YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

If something feels confusing, uncomfortable, or unsafe, you do not have to handle it by yourself. You can talk to someone you trust at any time, even if you're not sure what's happening.

You do not need proof before asking questions. You deserve support at any point, for any reason.

Helping a Friend

There might be a time when a friend tells *you* that something feels wrong. You don't have to solve the problem or have all the answers.

The most helpful things you can do are:

✓ Listen without judging.

✓ Thank them for trusting you.

✓ Believe what they are telling you.

✓ Do not promise to keep a secret if someone might be unsafe or at risk of being hurt.

✓ Help them talk with a trusted adult.

✓ Keep checking in.

You could simply say something like: "I'm glad you told me. Let's talk to an adult we trust together."

Your Support Team

Who are three trusted adults you could talk to if you ever needed help? Thinking about that now can make it easier to reach out later.

Remember This

Being a good friend doesn't mean you always have to have all of the answers. Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is help someone ask for help.

SECTION 6

TAKE THIS WITH YOU

So you've met Ava, Noah, and Sophie. Each of them faced a different situation. Ava learned that grooming often happens gradually. Noah discovered that the same unhealthy patterns can happen online. Sophie learned that consent is about respect and is freely given, not the result of peer pressure.

Although their stories were different, the same concepts apply: Healthy relationships are built on respect, honesty, trust, and appropriate boundaries. And that's something we can all keep in mind.

Healthy Relationship Habits

Healthy relationships don't just "happen" by accident. They are built by the choices we make every day, whether we realize it or not.

✓ Respect your own boundaries—and other people's boundaries.

✓ Choose honesty over uncomfortable secrets.

✓ Practice asking for consent in everyday situations.

✓ Treat people online with the same respect you show in person and demand the same back.

✓ Trust your instincts if something doesn't feel right.

✓ Be the kind of friend who listens, believes others, and encourages them to get help. And make sure you surround yourself with the same kinds of people.

✓ Remember that asking for help is a sign of strength.

Resources & References

If you ever have questions or need support, start by talking with a trusted adult—a parent, caregiver, teacher, school counselor, coach, or another adult you trust.

You can also learn more from organizations dedicated to helping young people build safe, healthy relationships:

- Beau Biden Foundation — Education and resources to help protect children and build safe environments.
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) — Help and reporting resources for online exploitation, inappropriate images, and missing children.
- Thorn — Information and tools focused on protecting young people from online sexual exploitation.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 or contact a trusted adult right away.

One Last Thing

Thank you for reading this book.

When I first started volunteering with the Beau Biden Foundation, I assumed unhealthy situations would always be easy to identify. What I learned changed the way I think. I hope this book has helped you feel more confident in recognizing healthy relationships, trusting your instincts, and knowing when it’s okay to ask for help.

End On This Note

Knowledge doesn’t create fear. It builds confidence.