

INTERNET INFORMATION

While online computer exploration opens a world of possibilities for children, expanding their horizons and exposing them to different cultures and ways of life, they can be exposed to dangers as they hit the road exploring the information highway. There are individuals who attempt to sexually exploit children through the use of online services and the Internet. Some of these individuals gradually seduce their targets through the use of attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts. These individuals are often willing to devote considerable amounts of time, money, and energy in this process. They listen to and empathize with the problems of children. They will be aware of the latest music, hobbies, and interests of children. These individuals attempt to gradually lower children's inhibitions by slowly introducing sexual context and content into their conversations.

There are other individuals, however, who immediately engage in sexually explicit conversation with children. Some offenders primarily collect and trade child pornographic images, while others seek face-to-face meetings with children via online contacts. It is important for parents to understand that children can be indirectly victimized through conversation, i.e. "chat", as well as the transfer of sexually explicit information and material. Computer sex offenders may also be evaluating children they come in contact with online for future face-to-face contact and direct victimization. Parents and children should remember that a computer sex offender can be any age or sex. The person does not have to fit the caricature of a dirty, unkempt, older man wearing a raincoat to be someone who could harm a child. Often times offenders pose as a different age and/or sex in an attempt to lure children.

Children, especially adolescents, are sometimes interested in and curious about sexuality and sexually explicit material. They may be moving away from the total control of parents and seeking to establish new relationships outside their family. Because they may be curious, children/adolescents sometimes use their online access to actively seek out such materials and individuals. Sex offenders targeting children will use and exploit these characteristics and needs. Some adolescent children may also be attracted to and lured by online offenders closer to their age who, although not technically child molesters, may be dangerous. Nevertheless, they have been seduced and manipulated by a clever offender and do not fully understand or recognize the potential danger of these contacts.

This guide was prepared from actual investigations involving child victims, as well as investigations where law enforcement officers posed as children. Further information

on protecting your child online may be found on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website at. Other websites for additional information include: Web Wise Kids at www.webwisekids.com, and Child Safety at www.netsmartz.org, which provides an interactive site focused on internet safety for kids, teens, parents, and educators.