

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MIGHT BE AT RISK ONLINE

Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night – Most children that fall victim to computer sex offenders spend large amounts of time online, particularly in chat rooms. They may go online after dinner and on the weekends. They may be latchkey kids whose parents have told them to stay at home after school. They go online to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit information. While much of the knowledge and experience gained may be valuable, parents should consider monitoring the amount of time spent online.

Children online are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are online around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings online trying to locate and lure children or seeking pornography.

You find pornography on your child's computer - Pornography is often used in the sexual victimization of children. Sex offenders often supply their potential victims with pornography as a means of opening sexual discussions and for seduction. Child pornography may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal". Parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes from them. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize – While talking to a child victim online is a thrill for a computer sex offender, it can be very cumbersome. Most want to talk to the children on the telephone. They often engage in "phone sex" with the children and often seek to set up an actual meeting for real sex.

While a child may be hesitant to give out his/her home phone number, the computer sex offender will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can readily find out the child's phone number. Some computer sex offenders have even obtained toll-free 800 numbers, so that their potential victims can call them without their parents finding out. Others will tell the child to call collect. Both of these methods result in the computer sex offender being able to find out the child's phone number.

Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know – As part of the seduction process, it is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and all manner of gifts to their potential victims. Computer sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for the child to travel across the country to meet them.

Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room – A child looking at pornographic imaging or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.

Your child becomes withdrawn from the family – Computer sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

Your child is using an online account belonging to someone else – Even if you don't subscribe to an online service or internet service, your child may meet an offender while online at a friend's house or the library. Most computers come preloaded with online and/or internet software. Computer sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS COMMUNICATING WITH A SEXUAL PREDATOR ONLINE?

Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about the dangers of computer sex offenders. Review what is on your child's computer. If you don't know how, ask a friend, coworker, relative, or other knowledgeable person. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.

Use the Caller ID service to determine who is calling your child. Most telephone companies that offer Caller ID also offer a service that allows you to block your number from appearing on someone else's Caller ID. Telephone companies also offer an additional service feature that rejects incoming calls that you block. This rejection feature prevents computer sex offenders or anyone else from calling your home anonymously.

Devices can be purchased that show telephone numbers that have been dialed from your home phone. Additionally, the last number called from your home phone can be retrieved provided that the telephone is equipped with a redial feature. You will also need a telephone pager to complete this retrieval.

This is done using a numeric display pager and another phone that is on the same line as the first phone with the redial feature. Using the two phones and the pager, a call is placed from the second phone to the pager. When the paging terminal beeps for you to enter a telephone number, you press the redial button on the first (or suspect) phone. The last number called from that phone will then be displayed on the pager.

Monitor your child's access to all types of live electronic communications (i.e., chat rooms, instant messages, Internet Relay Chat, etc.), and monitor your child's email. Computer sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child online, they will continue to communicate electronically often via email.

Should any of the following situations arise in your household, via the internet or online service, you should immediately contact your local or state law enforcement agency, the **FBI**, and the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**:

- Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography,
- Your child has been sexually solicited by someone who knows that your child is under 18 years of age,
- Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone that knows your child is under the age of 18.

If one of these scenarios occurs, keep the computer turned off in order to preserve any evidence for future law enforcement use. Unless directed to do so by the law enforcement agency, you should not attempt to copy any of the images and/or text found on the computer.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MINIMIZE THE CHANCES OF AN ONLINE EXPLOITER VICTIMIZING YOUR CHILD?

Communicate, and talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential online danger.

Spend time with your children online. Have them teach you about their favorite online destinations.

Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in your child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a computer sex offender to communicate with a child when the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.

Utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software. While electronic chat can be a great place for children to make new friends and discuss various topics of interest, it is also prowled by computer sex offenders. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored. While parents should utilize these mechanisms, they should not totally rely on them.

Always maintain access to your child's online account and randomly check his/her email. Be aware that your child could be contacted through the U.S. Mail. Be up front with your child about your access and reasons why.

Teach your child the responsible use of the resources online. There is much more to the online experience than chat rooms.

Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places, outside your normal supervision, where your child could encounter an online predator.

Understand, even if your child was a willing participant in any form of sexual exploitation, that he/she is not at fault and is the victim. The offender always bears the complete responsibility for his or her actions.

Instruct your children:

- to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online,
- to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the internet or online service to people they do not personally know,
- to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number,
- to never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images,
- to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing,
- that whatever they are told online may or may not be true.

Frequently Asked Questions:

My child has received an email advertising for a pornographic website, what should I do? Generally, advertising for an adult, pornographic website that is sent to an email address does not violate federal law or the current laws of most states. In some states it may be a violation of the law if the sender knows the recipient is under the age of 18. Such advertising can be reported to your service provider and, if know, the service provider of the originator. It can also be reported to your state and federal legislators, so they can be made aware of the extent of the problem.

Is any service safer than the others?

Sex offenders have contacted children via most of the major online services and the internet. The most important factors in keeping your child safe online are the

utilization of appropriate blocking software and/or parental controls, along with open, honest discussions with your child, monitoring his/her online activity, and following the tips of this pamphlet.