



PROTECTING CHILDREN AT HOME – Internet Safety Tips for Parents*

The comfort of knowing that your child is safe from danger when at home has unfortunately changed with the advent of internet sexual exploitation. Online computer exploration opens many possibilities for children as they navigate the world-wide web. Children are often more computer savvy than their parents, making supervision a challenge. Parents need to be aware that there are individuals who attempt to sexually exploit children through the use of the internet. These individuals may be any age or sex. Some of these individuals try to seduce children through the use of attention, affection, kindness and even gifts. They listen to and empathize with the problems of children. They are in tune with the latest songs and games. These predators gradually try to lower children's inhibitions by slowly introducing sexual content into their conversations. Other predators immediately engage in sexually explicit conversation with children. They may try to solicit pornographic images or seek face-to-face meetings. Internet offenders manipulate young people into criminal sexual relationships by appealing to their desire to be appreciated, understood, take risks, and find out about sex. Parents need to be aware of this growing problem. Younger teenagers are a particularly vulnerable population as they are beginning to explore their own sexuality and have an interest in sex, romance, adventure, and independence.

According to the Crimes Against Children Research Center, each year, one in every 25 children receives an online sexual solicitation where the solicitor tried to make offline contact.

Signs that your child may be at risk

- Your child spends large amounts of time online, particularly at night
- You find pornography on your child's computer
- Your child receives phone calls from adults you don't know, or is making calls to numbers you don't recognize
- Your child receives gifts from someone you don't know
- Your child turns the monitor off or changes the screen when you come into the room

- Your child becomes withdrawn from the family

What a parent can do to help

- Talk to your child about the sexual victimization and online danger
- Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in the bedroom
- Utilize parental controls and blocking software
- Find out what computer safeguards are used in their schools, library and in their friends' homes
- Understand that even if your child was victimized, it is not their fault; the offender bears complete responsibility for their actions

Special tips for teens

- Be smart about what you post on the Web and what you say to others. It is a lot more public than it seems
- Provocative and sexy names and pictures can draw attention from people you don't want in your life
- Posting or sending sexy photos of yourself can get you into big trouble with the law. If you are underage, they may be considered child pornography, a serious crime. You also have no control over where the photos are sent once you send them
- Be careful what you download or look at. Some images are extreme, and once you see it—it's in your mind forever
- Adults who talk to you about sex online are committing a crime. So are adults who meet underage teens for sex. Some teens may think it is fun but it is serious trouble and best to report it to the police
- Be careful if you go to meet someone you met on the internet. You may think you know them well, but you don't. Go with a friend; tell your parents. Meet in a public place. Make sure you have your cell phone and an exit plan

Keeping children safe on the internet is challenging. The best strategy is to work with your child on making good choices. Should you think your child is being targeted you should contact your local or state law enforcement agency, the FBI or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for help. For more information visit: http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/cac/crimes_against_children/.

*Materials adapted from the websites of the U.S. Dept. of Justice, FBI, and the Crimes Against Children Research Center.