

# Internet Safety Tips for Adolescent Home Computer Use

While on-line 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 on-line 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 on-line 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 on-line 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.

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 on-line 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 on-line 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.

## What Are Signs That Your Child Might Be At Risk On-line?

- **Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.**
- **You find pornography on your child's computer.**
- **Your child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize.**
- **Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.**
- **Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.**
- **Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.**
- **Your child is using an on-line account belonging to someone else.**

Below is a suggested list of rules for "Online Safety" that can be discussed with your child and posted near a home computer.

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/ telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I will not give out my Internet password to anyone other than my parents.
- I will be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.



## What Should You Do If You Suspect Your Child Is Communicating With A Sexual Predator On-line?

- 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. Block the caller.
- Devices can be purchased that show telephone numbers that have been dialed from your home phone. Check out the numbers you don't recognize.
- 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 e-mail. Computer-sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child on-line, they will continue to communicate electronically often via e-mail.

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

1. Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography;
2. Your child has been sexually solicited by someone who knows that your child is under 18 years of age;
3. 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 On-line Exploiter Victimized Your Child?

- Communicate, and talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential on-line danger.
- Spend time with your children on-line. Have them teach you about their favorite on-line 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 on-line account and randomly check his/her e-mail. 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 on-line. There is much more to the on-line 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 on-line 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 on-line;
  - to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet or on-line 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 on-line may or may not be true.

### Want More Information? Check out these Internet Safety Sites...

**Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**  
*www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm*  
A Parents Guide to Internet Safety

**GetNetWise** - *http://kids.getnetwise.org*  
A public service brought to you by a wide range of Internet industry corporations and public interest organizations

**WiredSafety** - *www.wiredsafety.org*  
The largest online safety, education and help group in the world

**Safekids.com** - *www.safeteens.com*  
A guide for teens on safety on the Internet

**Surf like a hero—not a zero** -  
*www.netsmartz.org/index.htm*  
An informative site for teachers, parents and students covering the topics of cyber ethics, and cyber crime in a well done, understandable manner

### From the netsmartz.org website:

It was found, based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,501 youth, ages 10 to 17, who use the Internet regularly that:

- Approximately 1 in 5 received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet in the last year.
- One in 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation — a solicitor who asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; sent them regular mail, money, or gifts.
- 1 in 4 had an unwanted exposure to pictures of naked people or people having sex in the last year.
- 1 in 17 was threatened or harassed.
- Approximately 25 percent of young people who reported these incidents were distressed by them.
- Less than 10 percent of sexual solicitations and only 3 percent of unwanted exposure episodes were reported to authorities such as a law-enforcement agency, an Internet Service Provider, or a hotline.
- Only 25 percent of the youth who encountered a sexual solicitation or approach told a parent. Almost 40 percent of those reporting an unwanted exposure to sexual material told a parent.
- Only 17 percent of youth and approximately 10 percent of parents could name a specific authority, such as the FBI, CyberTipline, or an Internet Service Provider, to which they could make a report, although more said they had "heard of" such places.
- In households with home Internet access, one third of parents said they had filtering or blocking software on their computer at the time they were interviewed.