

## How Can I Protect My Child?

- ♦ Place computer in the family room where the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.
- ♦ Maintain access to your child's account and email.
- ♦ Utilize the safety features offered by your Internet service provider and/or blocking software.
- ♦ Be aware of the online communities your child may be involved in. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored.
- ♦ Keep an open door for your child to inform you of inappropriate online communication.
- ♦ Instruct your children to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number.

### Parents should talk to children about:

- ♦ Talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential online danger.
- ♦ Tell your child that people may not be who they seem. Also, what children are told online may or may not be true.
- ♦ Let your child know that it is okay to say "no" online.

Information and statistics gathered from National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Federal Bureau of Investigation, [www.safetyed.org](http://www.safetyed.org), ASTM International, [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)

## Resources

To report information about child pornography and the online enticement of children, parents can log on to <http://www.cybertipline.com> or call the Tipline at 1-800-843-5678.

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 at 1-800-843-5678.

1. Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography.
2. Your child has been sexually solicited by some one who knows that your child is under 17 years of age.
3. Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone that knows your child is under the age of 17.

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. Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone who is soliciting or providing pornography to your child, without law enforcement support.

National Sexual Assault Hotline  
Free. Confidential. 24/7.

1-800-656-HOPE

# Online Child Exploitation



**taasa**   
TEXAS ASSOCIATION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

6200 La Calma, Suite 110  
Austin, Texas 78752  
[www.taasa.org](http://www.taasa.org)

## Two Kinds of Online Child Sexual Exploitation

While there can be great benefits for children and youth who use the Internet, it also holds potential dangers. The two primary risks to children and youth on the Internet are:

1. **Exposure to inappropriate materials** – A child may be exposed to inappropriate material that is sexual, violent or hateful in nature via email, chat rooms or misleading domain names.
2. **Harmful physical contact** – A child might provide information or may arrange a visit using the Internet as a point of contact.

Online child sexual exploitation is a serious problem. Approximately 1 in 5 children is sexually solicited online.<sup>1</sup> Because you can't see the person whom you are communicating with online, it is very difficult to know if they are telling the truth about who they are. Chat rooms, a popular place for children and teens, are a susceptible place where abusers may look for victims. They may adopt a child/youth identity, strike up friendships with children or youth and then attempt to meet them in person.

Identifying offenders can be very difficult even when the child does report the incident to parents and/or police; one never knows if the age and sex that the individual has given to the victim are accurate. In some cases where meetings have taken place, the person has been much older than the child was led to believe. In others, the offender was, in fact an older man when the child/youth had been told the "new friend" was a female. Despite a few highly publicized arrests that have been made, the United States' rate of conviction for online offenses against children is currently about 1,000 individuals annually (Carr, 2001).

<sup>1</sup> David Finkelhor, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Janis Wolak. Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth, Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2000, page ix.

## What Are 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 online sexual exploitation 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.

### 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. 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 images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.

### Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.

Sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

### 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 from them. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

### 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. Sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.

### 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 offenders 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 sex offender being able to find out the child's phone number.