

Child Sexual Exploitation Online

If your child has access to a computer or other smart device they are at risk of internet sexual exploitation, regardless of their age. You can help protect your child by reviewing the information below and by ensuring that you have open communication with your child about healthy sexuality and about their online activities. **Open communication is the best protection.**

Step 1: Know the Facts

Millions of child sexual abuse material files are in circulation at any given moment. Child sexual abuse material is defined as imagery or videos which show (or depict) a child engaged in explicit sexual activity.

Hundreds of thousands of “dark” website users view, share, and store child sexual abuse materials on sites that are only accessible with special software that maintains anonymity.

75% of children share personal information online.

66% of children reported they have been asked by someone they met online to communicate privately on a different platform.

33% of teens are “friends” with people online they don’t actually know in real life.

30% of 18-24 year-olds were approached sexually online when they were children.

20% of teens have received unwanted sexual solicitation.

15% of teens have sent a sexual text message (sex).

Step 2: Understand the Problem

Sexting: When someone creates, sends, or shares sexual messages, images or videos online. Sometimes kids engage in sexting voluntarily, sometimes they are tricked or manipulated into doing so.

Grooming: When someone (acquaintance, friend, stranger) builds trust with a child to gain access to and control over the child. Over time the person brings sexual content into the relationship and may threaten or pressure the child into doing what they ask, including asking to meet in person.

Sextortion: A type of blackmail that happens when someone (acquaintance, friend, stranger) threatens to send a child’s personal image to friends, family, or other people if the child doesn’t pay them, do what they ask, or provide more sexual content. Teenage boys are the most common victims.

Exposure to Sexual Imagery: When children see sexually explicit content while online (watching videos, visiting websites, conducting searches or playing games).

Step 3: Protect Your Children By...

Having Open Communication: Start having conversations about internet safety and about healthy sexual development early. Let your child know that you are available to talk any time, ask open-ended questions, show an interest in your child’s online life, and avoid judgement. Discuss and practice what to do if someone approaches them online.

Supervising Online Activities: Know your child’s passwords and user IDs; discourage use of headphones while online; know the age recommendations for movies, games, and apps; supervise younger children when they are online; and set up parental controls using filtering software. Go to this link for instructional videos.

<https://www.nypreventsexabuse.org/>

Being Careful What You Share: Parents can inadvertently provide pedophiles, digital kidnappers, and identity thieves with too much information. For example, if you post a photo of your child indicating it is the child’s birthday and include the child’s name and location, that personal information can be used to exploit your child.

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Step 4: Teach and Ensure Your Children...

Use Privacy Settings: Make sure your child restricts other people's access to their online profile, only letting people they actually know and trust be their friend or follow them online.

Use Appropriate Screen Names and Passwords: Make sure your child uses appropriate screen names and passwords that do not include personal information such as birthdate or location.

Be Selective: Make sure your child does not open e-mails, texts, links, messages or files from people they do not know.

Protect Their Privacy: Make sure your child keeps personal information such as location, schedule or contact information private to protect them from strangers, stalking, and identity theft.

Be Wary of People Not Known in Real Life: Make sure your child does not accept gifts from or agree to meet someone they don't know in real life.

Say No and Tell a Trusted Adult: Make sure your child knows to immediately let a parent know if someone offers to give them something or asks to meet. Teach them to say no to anything that makes them uncomfortable and tell a parent or trusted adult immediately.

Understand Their Body's Reaction to Sexual Content: Make sure your child knows that they may experience a physical reaction in their genitalia in response to sexual images or communication which only means that their body is working the way it is supposed to – and nothing more. Physical arousal does not imply consent.

Step 5: Remind Your Children...

They Cannot Control Who Sees What They Post/Text: They can never be 100% certain who will see what is sent. For example, they may send a text or snapchat to a friend but that friend's phone could be lost, hacked, or viewed by someone else not intend to see what was sent.

Everything Lives Forever Online: They may think that they deleted a text or photo but someone could have taken a screen shot of it or shared it with someone else. Every post/text can have negative effects throughout their life, including in college and job applications.

People Are Not Always Who They Say They Are: They may think that they are interacting with someone just like them, but unless the person is known in real life, they really cannot be sure who they are talking to.

Think Twice Before Posting: They should never send anything or ask anyone to send something that they wouldn't want their parents to see. They can say no or end the conversation if someone asks them to take a picture of themselves naked or partially naked. Once they have shared a picture, they can never take it back and it could lead to embarrassment and/or blackmail to send more.

Don't Reshare or Comment on Other's Personal Images: If they receive or have access to someone else's personal images, they should not reshare or participate in the sharing of the images because it is illegal and could harm the other person as well as themselves.

