

## **INTERNET SAFETY – WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW**

Online computer exploration opens a world of possibilities for children. However, while expanding their horizons they can be exposed to dangers. There are individuals who attempt to sexually exploit children (predators) through the use of online services and the Internet.

Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or exploiting their relationship. They will:

- accentuate any minor problems at home
- listen to and empathize with the problems of children
- often devote considerable amounts of time, money, and energy to this process.

### **HOW DO ONLINE PREDATORS WORK?**

Predators will:

- find kids through social networking, blogs, chat rooms, instant messaging, emails, discussion boards, and other websites
- seduce their targets through attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts
- know the latest music, fashion, sports, movies and hobbies likely to interest kids
- try to ease young people's inhibitions by gradually introducing sexual content
- frequently evaluate the kids they meet online for future face-to-face contact
- send out "random" text messages in hopes of getting a teen to respond and begin communicating

### **AS A PARENT WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

- Talk to your kids about sexual predators and potential online dangers
- Use family safety settings and utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software; all account settings for children and teens should be set to private.
- Follow age limits on social networking websites. Be aware that most social networking sites require that users be age 13 and over. If your children are under the recommended age for these sites, **DO NOT LET THEM USE THEM.**
- Spend time with your children online. Have them teach you about their favorite online destinations.
- Keep the computer in a common room, not in your child's room.
- Limit the time your child can be on the computer: experts say no more than two hours a day.
- Have the cell phone checked in with a parent at a certain time each night to prevent its use during the night.
- Always maintain access to your child's online account and check their email.
- Create a relationship with your child that fosters trust and open communication.

- Turn off the Geotaging feature on your child's cell phone , apps, and software (see the last two resources for instructions).
- (deleted this bullet about computer safeguards since other bullets were added)
- Instruct your children:
  - To never communicate online with someone they don't know in person.
  - To never arrange face-to-face meeting with someone they met online
  - To never upload (post) pictures of themselves to people they do not personally know
  - Approve all photos and videos before your child posts them.
  - To never give out identifying information such as their name, address, school name, or contact numbers
  - To never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing
  - That whatever they are told online may not be true

## **START A DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CHILD**

Use these discussion starters to get an Internet safety conversation going with your child. The more often you talk to them about online safety, the easier it will get, so don't get discouraged if they don't respond immediately.

- What do you know about online predators?
- Have you ever met anyone online who asked you to meet face-to-face?
- What would/did you do if someone asked to meet you in person?
- Has anyone ever tried talking to you online about inappropriate or sexual things?
- How would someone online try to gain your trust?
- Why would someone online want to gain your trust?
- What are the possible risks of trusting someone online?
- Why is it important that you come to me if someone makes you feel uncomfortable online or if someone you haven't met in person tries to start an online conversation?

## **WARNING SIGNS**

Watch for the following warning signs that your child is a victim of an online predator:

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| - Having trouble sleeping            | - Not wanting to go to school            |
| - Acting sad or withdrawn            | - Falling behind in school work          |
| - Showing a disinterest in computers | - Becoming anti-social                   |
| - Crying for no apparent reason      | - Switching screens when a parent enters |

If you suspect that your child is a victim of an online predator contact your local law enforcement agency and/or your Internet provider immediately.

Today children are increasingly communicating away from supervision and in ways that are often unknown by adults. Children organize their social lives through these mediums. Friendships are made and broken. Parents need to be the one trusted place kids can go when things go wrong online or offline.

## **RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation  
(<http://www.fbi.gov/state-services/publications/parent-guide>)
- National Center For Missing & Exploited Children (800-843-5878)  
(<http://www.netsmartz.org/predators>)
- Cyber Tipline (800-843-5678)
- PureSight Online Child Safety

- (<http://www.puresight.com/Useful-tools/organizations.html>)
- Microsoft Safety & Security Center  
(<http://www.microsoft.com/securityfamily-safety/predators.aspx>)
- National Crime Prevention Council ([www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org))
- Information on how to turn off the Geotagging feature for different smartphones  
(<http://www.icanstalku.com/how.php>)
- Disable software that will search for Geotagging information and delete it  
(<http://www.geotagsecurity.com/>)



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## **RULES FOR ONLINE SAFETY CONTRACT**

**I WILL** only use the computer and be online for \_\_\_\_\_ hours a day.

**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 feel uncomfortable.

**I WILL** never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first 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 respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the service provider.

**I WILL** talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

**I WILL** not give out my internet password to anyone (even my best friends) other than my parents.

**I WILL** be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.

**I WILL** only communicate with individuals my parents allow me to communicate with online.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_