

## **ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION & THE DANGERS TO CHILDREN**

The effects of computers on society have, unfortunately, not been entirely positive. Computers and related networking technologies have created new opportunities for crime, including crime involving sexual exploitation of children.

Online victimization studies speak to the widespread concerns parents have for the safety of their children, who increasingly rely on the Internet for education, entertainment, and socialization. According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, approximately one in seven Internet users between the ages of 10 to 17 fall victim to unwanted online sexual solicitation/exploitation.

Despite the attention to online exploitation of children, the magnitude of the problem is unknown because of the unwillingness of children to report online encounters for fear of embarrassment and parental scrutiny of future Internet activity. A lack of awareness among parents and children of where to report unwanted encounters highlights the problem of using official crime statistics to determine the extent of the problem.

### **DEFINITION – ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Online sexual solicitation/exploitation of children involves sexually-oriented interactions over the Internet: sending or posting sexually explicit images of themselves, taking part in sexual activities via web-cam or smartphone, having sexual conversations by text or online, or threatening to send images, video, or copies of conversations to the young person's friends and family unless the young individual takes part in other sexual activities. Images and videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.

In some cases, young people are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection, or status. NOTE: Child sexual exploitation doesn't always involve physical contact.

Those exploiting the child/youth have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength, and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion, and intimidation are common.

Victimization is taking place while youth are connected to the Internet and/or related networking technologies at home, home of a friend/relative, at school, and in the public library. Despite the presence of guardians (i.e. parents, teachers, and librarians), children are still falling victim to online sexual exploitation at alarming rates. Complicating matters is the increased familiarity with new technologies and services among youth when compared to such technologies and services among ADULTS. Consequently, guardians are unlikely to discover the potential dangers posed by new services until after their children have adopted them.

In an effort to reduce the risk of teens being sexually exploited, it is important to teach them the difference between healthy versus controlling relationships. When a child is sexually exploited there is typically a distortion of the relationship and a misuse of trust by the offender. In order to help teens who encounter adults who present a risk to exploit them, they need to know how to identify concerning behavior and how to respond safely.

Talk to your teen and identify concerning behaviors that children/youth should pay attention to such as the following:

- Asking sexual or overly personal questions.
- Sending or asking for sexual content (i.e. intimate pictures or videos).
- Using pity/guilt to gain compliance.
- Using information shared in confidence to try to embarrass or hurt someone.
- Offering someone money or gifts to do something a child/youth is uncomfortable with.
- Not taking no for an answer (persistence).
- Threats and blackmail.

**TOGETHER** – discuss what problems might arise from activities, such as the following:

- A person sharing intimate pictures/videos with someone else online.
- A person receiving intimate pictures/videos from someone else online.
- A person using Internet/electronic devices to meet up with people a child/youth meets online.
- A person sharing personal information about someone's insecurities, or problems and worries with someone who they do not know well.

## **REFERENCES, RESOURCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (<http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0703ONLINECHILD.PDF>)
- Child Sexual Exploitation (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation/>)
- Tip Sheet: Don't Wait: Everyday Actions to Keep Kids Safe (<http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-4>)
- Parenting Tweens & Teens in the Digital World ([https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P\\_SafetySheet\\_Apps-short\\_en.pdf](https://www.cybertip.ca/pdfs/C3P_SafetySheet_Apps-short_en.pdf))
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police: Internet Based Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Environmental Scan (<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ncecc-cncee/factsheets-fichesdocu/enviroscan-analyseenviro-eng.htm>)
- NHS Choices – How to Spot Child Sexual Exploitation (<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/abuse/Pages/child-sexual-exploitation-signs.aspx>)
- Department of Homeland Security – ICE – Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (<https://www.ice.gov/predator>)