# Internet Safety and Children / Teens

Technology has been a wonderful gift to expand the horizons of learning for children, teens and adults. But this same technology can expose children and teens to dangers. Sexual predators will often use the Internet to sexually exploit children and teens. They will often spend a great deal of time gradually seducing minors by establishing trust – they listen to children's stories, connect with their interests, give advice. Then they may slowly introduce sexual subjects into the conversation or lure the child/teen into a face-to-face meeting.

Since some children and teens are curious about sex and sexually explicit material, going onto the Internet is an easy way for sex offenders to take advantage of the opportunity to exploit them. Predators may gradually desensitize children/teens in order to lift inhibitions around talking about sex.

Here are some simple rules for children and teens about online Internet safety:

1. **Keep your identity private**.

    - Never give your name, address, phone number, school name, birthday, photograph or any other personal information to someone online. Predators will do anything to gain access to your information and may use lures to do so. For example, they may say that you need to give them some information in order to gain access to a chat room or a site they are recommending to you! Don't fall for that! Or, they are astute in getting information from your screen name. Often people use a birth date in their screen name. This is a giveaway that you are a child or teen, which attracts the attention of the predator.
    - Realize that people are not always who they say they are. You may think you are speaking to a peer, when in fact, it is a predator in disguise, all the time gaining information from you they will use later. This is particularly true of "teen only" chat rooms – it's impossible to tell who is a real teen!

2. **Never respond to e-mail messages, social media messages, chat comments or newsgroup messages from anyone you do not know or those that are hostile, inappropriate, or in any way make you feel uncomfortable.**

    - The best response is to simply get away from the site and make an adult aware of it. In public chat rooms, there is usually a monitor who will screen the comments, but not so in private chat rooms. Be wary when someone asks you to leave the public chat to join him or her in a private chat room. A private chat room gives predators free rein to say whatever they want to you.
    - Never open a spam e-mail message as this may automatically get you into a database for future inappropriate messages. Always know your sender.
    - Be wary of those who try to isolate you by turning you against friends and family. This is a common lure to get children/teens to turn their allegiance to the predator.

3. **Never, ever, arrange to meet someone you meet online without parental permission and supervision.**

    - Always let a parent know of any invitation to meet someone. If your parent is assured that this might be a peer who wants to make a friend, meet the person in a public place accompanied by your parent. Never meet someone alone!!! If your parents say no, trust them. It's NO!

4. **Always talk with your parents to establish rules and expectations for going online.**

    - For your own safety, parents need to be able to monitor a child/teens' Internet activity. The computer should always be in a public place in the house. Parents may use some sort of chip or filter to deny access to certain types of material. Parents may put limits on the amount of time a child/teen is online, as well as for what reasons a child/teen can be online.

**Warning Signs for Parents / Guardians**

- Is your child/teen spending large amounts of time online, especially at night?
- Is your child/teen using an online account that belongs to someone else?
- Does your child/teen quickly change the screen or turn the computer off when you come into the room?
- Does your child/teen make phone calls to someone you don't know, receive mail or gifts from someone you don't know?
- Do you find pornography or inappropriate material on the computer?
- Is your child/teen becoming increasingly isolated from the family and being drawn to the computer instead of interacting with friends?

Parents, learn everything you can about the Internet, and teach your children/teens appropriate "netiquette".

## For more on Internet safety see:

www.missingkids.com - The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children site. Click on "Parents and Guardians" for information about missing children, reporting exploitation, and how to keep your child/teen safe. This site has information on child/teen sexual exploitation prevention as well as leads on individuals reporting exploitation.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has excellent brochures about preventing cyber-based sexual crimes such as: Child Safety on the Information Highway, Teen Safety on the Information Highway and NetSmartz: Keeping Kids Safer on the Internet.

www.safekids.com - Find advice on fun and safe family Internet use.

www.safeteens.com - Find advice for teen-online Internet safety.

# Tricks/Lures used by Sexual Abusers

**Bad News Trick**
The abuser tells a child that something bad has happened (sickness or the death of a parent, for example) and that the abuser was asked to pick up the child and bring him/her home.

**Bribe Trick**
The abuser offers something special that the child may want, then asks for sexual favors in return.

**Can I Help You Trick**
The abuser may give assistance to a child when needed or may offer to help the family of the child by offering rides or by offering to baby-sit. These activities put the abuser in a position of trust in the eyes of the child.

**Drug and Alcohol Trick**
Drugs or alcohol are given to the child to make it easier for the abuser to take advantage.

**Game Trick**
Wrestling, tickling, accidental or deliberate contact with genitalia as part of the rule of a game played with a child.

**Help Me Trick**
The abuser may ask for help from a child: directions, help looking for a pet, help carrying heavy packages to the car, etc.

**Internet Trick**
Abusers will try to get personal information from a child. Often they will pretend to be the same age as the child to establish friendship. Sometimes they will send the child sexual material, or they will try to set up a meeting.

**Position of Power or Authority Trick**
The abuser may be in a position of power or authority (coach, teacher, police officer, and priest) and use their position to insist that children be obedient to their request.

**"You are special" Trick**
The abuser gives special attention or favor to a child to gain trust for future sexual abuse.