

Internet Victimization Red Flags For Parents

Here are some possible red flags or indicators that a child may be at risk for victimization via the Internet.

- Your child spends large amount of time on-line, especially at night. Most children who fall victim to computer-sex offenders spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. Children on-line are at greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are on-line around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings on-line seeking pornography or trying to locate and lure children.
- 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 normalize sex between children and adults.
- Your child receives phone calls from people you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long-distance, to numbers you don't recognize. While talking to a child victim on-line is a thrill for a computer-sex offender, it can be very cumbersome. Most want to talk to children on the phone. They often engage in "phone sex" with children and try to set up an actual meeting for real sex. A child may be hesitant to give out his/her home phone number, however, computer sex offenders readily will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can instantly obtain a child's phone number. Some computer-sex offenders have even obtained toll-free 800 numbers, so potential victims can call them without their parents finding out. Others will tell children to call collect. Both of these methods result in the computer-sex offender being able to find out a child's phone number.
- Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone they don't know. As part of the grooming process, sex offenders usually send letters, photographs, and gifts to their potential victims. Computer-sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for a child to travel across the country to meet them.
- Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen 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 is using an on-line account belonging to someone else. Even if you don't subscribe to an on-line service or Internet service, your child may meet an offender while on-line at a friend's house or at the library. Most computers come preloaded with on-line and/or Internet software. Computer-sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.
- Your child becomes withdrawn from the family. Sex Offenders both on and off line work very hard to drive 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.

Tips For Online Family Safety

- 1.) Encourage the Internet to be a family activity. Navigate through the Internet with your child. Get to know the Internet and any services your child uses or sites they like to visit. Have your child show you what he or she does online.
- 2.) Help them bookmark child-friendly web sites or create a favorites folder containing sites you approve. This allows your children easy access to safe and familiar sites previously viewed and approved by you.
- 3.) Place the computer in a common area of the house with the screen facing the center of the room so you can see what your child is doing online and be there if they need support.
- 4.) Educate yourself and your children about the positive and potentially dangerous aspects of the Internet. Remind your child that when they go online, they are dealing with real people and real businesses.
- 5.) Set clear ground rules on what your child can and cannot do while online. This includes when they can be online, for how long, and what activities they can participate in while using the Internet 6.
- 6.) Teach your children that Internet safety means never giving out personal information over the Internet. This includes never creating a user ID that reveals a child's full name, age, sex, birthday, or year of graduation. Offenders can search by these numbers when scanning chat rooms for potential victims.
- 7.) Never allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they have met online without parental permission. If a meeting is arranged, make the first one in a public place, and be sure to accompany your child and to meet the parents of, and or the person your child is to meet.
- 8.) Instruct your child not to click on any links that are contained within an E-mail sent from an email address they don't recognize. Such links could lead to sexually explicit or otherwise inappropriate websites
- 9.) Inform your children not to respond to email, chat comments, or newsgroup messages that are hostile, belligerent, inappropriate, or in any way make them feel uncomfortable. Responding further encourages the person. If they do encounter a bad experience, encourage them to come talk it over with you.
- 10.) Read through and get to know any filters or blocking software you may use. Be aware of its limitations.

- 11.) Once you have a peer-to-peer application installed, anyone in the world can access and copy files from your home PC. Don't install peer-to-peer applications. Peer-to-peer networking applications allow computers to communicate directly with each other, rather than through a central server like a website. Limewire, Gnutella, Morpheus, and Kazaa are some of the bigger names in peer-to-peer networking. An Internet filter installed will not protect your pc from allowing in objectionable material and will not block peer-to-peer file sharing.
Child pornography is widely available through peer-to-peer file sharing. In a single day, the Gnutella peer-to-peer network had 464,000 search requests for child pornography. P2P networks allow files to be copied totally anonymously. Child pornography is illegal, however, it is widely available in peer-to-peer networks because it is difficult to trace back to its original source. You may even have illegal child pornography on your PC without being aware of it.

- 12.) If someone sends you or your child messages or images that are obscene, lewd, or indecent with the intent to harass, abuse, annoy, or threaten, or if you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while online, contact your local law enforcement and report the incident to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Toll free at: 1-800-843-5678 (the lost) or www.missingkids.com