

*"There is massive consumer demand in this country for sex with kids. And it has never been more blatant or more normalized than today in this era of the Internet. We are paying a price as a society because of it."*

—Ernie Allen President & CEO National Center for Missing &



[www.vast.ngo](http://www.vast.ngo)

## **A Parent's Guide to Online Safety**

(Much of this material has been provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The information was prepared from actual investigations involving child victims, as well as investigations where law enforcement officers posed as children.)

Online exploration opens a world of possibilities for children; however, it also makes them vulnerable to being exploited sexually. There are individuals who attempt to sexually exploit children through the use of online services and the internet. Parents and children should remember that a computer-sex offender can be any age or sex: the person does not have to fit the caricature of a dirty, unkempt, older man wearing a raincoat to be someone who could harm a child.

Some of these individuals gradually seduce their targets through the use of attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts. These individuals are often willing to devote considerable amounts of time, money, and energy in this process. They listen to and empathize with the problems of children. They will be aware of the latest music, hobbies, and interests of children. These individuals attempt to gradually lower children's inhibitions by slowly introducing sexual context and content into their conversations.

There are other individuals, however, who immediately engage in sexually explicit conversation with children. Some offenders primarily collect and trade child-pornographic images, while others seek face-to-face meetings with children via online contacts. It is important for parents to understand that children can be indirectly victimized through conversation, i.e. "chat," as well as the transfer of sexually explicit information and material.

Children, especially adolescents, are sometimes interested in and curious about sexuality and sexually explicit material. Because they may be curious, children/adolescents sometimes use their online access to actively seek out such materials and individuals. Sex offenders targeting children will use and exploit these characteristics and needs. Some adolescent children may also be attracted to and lured by online offenders closer to their age who, although not technically child molesters, may be dangerous. Nevertheless, they have been seduced and manipulated by a clever offender and do not fully understand or recognize the potential danger of these contacts.

### **Minimize the Chances of an Online Predator Victimizing Your Child**

1. Talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential online danger. Warn children about potentially dangerous people who may try to befriend them online.

2. Set guidelines for how your child uses the computer and cellphone. At a minimum, guidelines should include:

Instruct your children:

- ✓ Recognize that I will be checking your email, Instagram (etc.), contact list, chat room conversations regularly, with and without you being present, not because I don't trust you, rather because I don't trust those who seek to harm you through taking advantage of your innocence and your momentary lapses in judgment.
- ✓ Turn off the computer when you aren't using it.
- ✓ Cover your webcam when not in use.