

# How to Keep Your Kids Safe from Online Sex Traffickers



# What makes your child vulnerable to a predator?

- If your child seeks love and acceptance
- If your child wants to fit in
  - If your child feels misunderstood
  - If your child is insecure
  - If your child is lonely

EVERY TEEN feels ALL of this from time to time.  
Every child is vulnerable.

Predators make it their business to find out what a child's hopes, dreams, and hurts are ... so they can exploit them.

## How Online Predators Work

Online predators are looking to lure your child.

Online grooming can take place quickly – or over an extended period of time, sometimes many months, even years.

Initial conversations online can appear innocent, but often involve some level of deception.

As the predator (usually an adult) attempts to establish a relationship to gain a child's trust, they may initially lie about their own age – or may *never* reveal their real age to the child, even after forming an established online relationship.

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## ▶ THEY APPEAR FAMILIAR

Predators may conduct research on the child such as looking up their profile.

Predators will be friendly and send gifts online.

They may order an electronic gift card for any store, such as Amazon, delivered to your child's inbox and accessed via their phone.

On gaming sites, predators often "buy" upgrades to games, add-on rewards, through an online form of payment such as bitcoin and win the child's trust by "helping" them get to the next level. They may also share tips for winning more often. Soon, the child feels they have a new friend.

From here, it's a short step to being willing to meet up. The in-person relationship begins.

OR the predator may begin to exert pressure on the child to participate in online sexting, sharing compromising photos – "I gave you that; now you have to do this for me" – then the information they share is used to coerce them.

## ▶ THEY DEVELOP TRUST

Predators will appear sympathetic and understanding regarding a child's problems, and act as if they are the only ones who can appreciate and help them.

Predators may shower their victims with compliments and send them gifts, developing an emotional dependency while preying on the child's insecurities and emotions.

They make promises that appeal to the child's needs or vulnerabilities. Such as:

***"No one understands you, but I do."***

***"You won't have to be alone anymore."***

***"Your life is hard, and I will make it better."***

***"I know how you can make a lot of money."***

The same tactics are used to recruit spotters and recruiters. Junior and high school-aged boys may especially be drawn in with the promise of money if they will simply "spot" or identify an at-risk child and tell the predator all about them. Then the predator uses this information to lure the child and begins to groom them.



## ▶ THEY ESTABLISH SECRETCY

This is designed to gain the confidence of the child and to become a “best friend.”

Victims often become dependent on their relationship with the predator, a relationship they most likely interpret as romantic. This allows the predator to control behavior as the online grooming process progresses.

Sharing secret desires, wishes, cares, and hopes are among the ways they establish intimacy with the child.

They tell the child a “secret” and then follow with *“Please don’t tell anyone. This is ours together.”*

Then they get the child to share something personal and assure them, *“This is just between us. You can trust me. I won’t tell a soul.”*

The process continues until the sharing is sexual in nature, possibly involving compromising photos, or something that the predator can use for extortion or blackmail: *“Do this or I’ll send the photos/email to your social media or your mom or dad.”*





## ▶ **THEY ERODE BOUNDARIES**

As the conversation and relationship progress, the predator will gain the confidence of the child and test their boundaries by first exposing them to pornography, then asking for nude photographs and videos.

Through continuous exposure, the predator hopes to lower the inhibitions of the victim and exert influence over them: *“Do as I say or I’ll put these on YouTube, send them to your parents, post them for all your friends to see....”*

## ▶ **THEY SELL LIES**

The predator will introduce the victim to “new” friends – may introduce him or her to drugs so they “need” him more. The predator keeps the child “swept off their feet.” They get jealous easily, flattering the child that they want the victim to be “only” his. Eventually they begin to control all the child’s movements, and schedule.



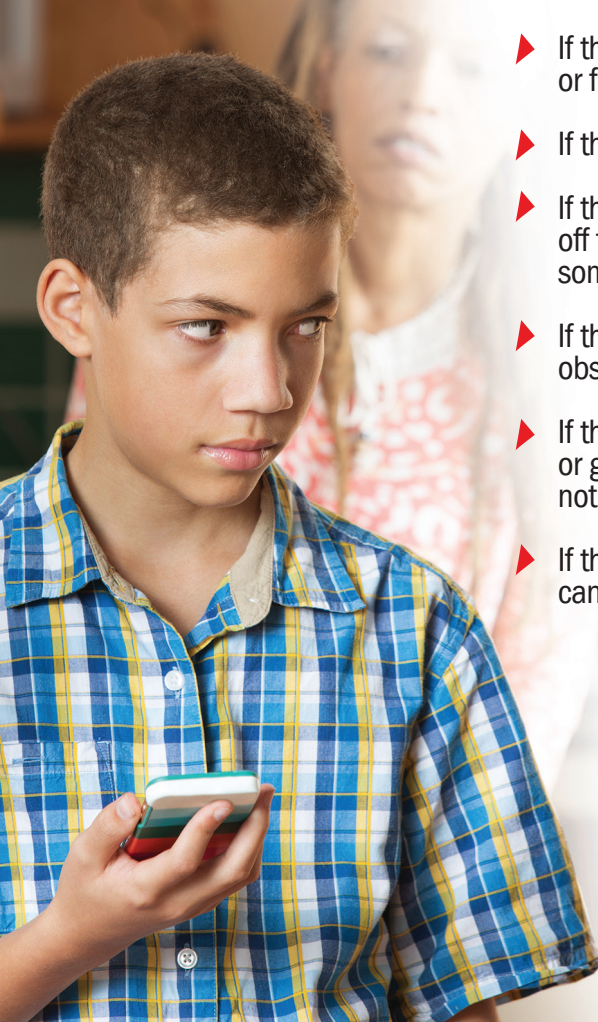
## ▶ **THEY USE DIRECT INTIMIDATION**

Once the predator has met with the child and engaged in illicit activities, he begins to make threats. The predator warns the child he will carry out the threats if he or she does not agree to cooperate. This form of blackmail is intended to maintain power and control, and keep the victim silenced.

# KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS



## That Children Might Be Communicating With an Online Predator:



- ▶ If they withdraw from family or friends
- ▶ If they download pornography
- ▶ If they change screens or turn off the computer when someone enters the room
- ▶ If they become secretive or obsessive about online activity
- ▶ If they receive phone calls or gifts from people you do not know
- ▶ If they get upset when they can't be online

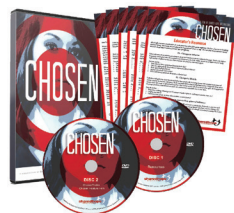
**Any of these signs could indicate the presence of a problem – so **IF YOU THINK YOU SUSPECT OR SEE SOMETHING**, err on the side of caution.**





## Consider taking the following 4 actions:

- 1** Approach your child to warn them. Say something like: “It is your life, these are your friends. However, as you move about, as you contact new people in person or on devices, I can’t very well protect you. I want to help you learn how to make yourself safer, to be the guardian of your own privacy and security.” **THIS IS NOT A ONE-TIME CONVERSATION!**
- 2** Contact law enforcement with your hunch about the predator.
- 3** Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST and ask for advice on your situation.
- 4** Obtain the *Chosen* documentary at [SharedHope.org](http://SharedHope.org) and show the young people in your life how easily boys and girls can be deceived into trafficking when they don’t know the signs!



***A more in-depth resource guide and educational video series will be available soon.***



*We're excited to introduce our Shared Hope specialist on Internet safety, Kelly. You can meet her, preview her talk on technology dangers and safety tips, and sign up for updates at [sharedhope.org/InternetSafety](http://sharedhope.org/InternetSafety).*



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