

Dear Parent:

Children are our most valuable assets. Unfortunately, they are also the most vulnerable members of society.

Protecting our children from becoming victims of those who prey on them is a continuing priority of mine.

While computers and technology allow our children to experience new sources of knowledge and culture from around the world, the very nature of this technology can also leave them vulnerable to exploitation and harm.

I hope that this brochure helps you better understand the complexities of on-line child exploitation. For further information or to report an internet crime, please contact my office at (908)231-7100.

Sincerely,
Wayne J. Forrest
Prosecutor

What Are Signs That Your Child Might Be At Risk On-Line?

Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.

Most children that fall victim to computer-sex offenders and hate organizations spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. They go on-line to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit material. Parents should consider monitoring their children's on-line activities.

Children on-line are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While sex offenders are on-line around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings on-line 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 show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal." Parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

You find hate group literature and symbols, or information about buying or assembling weapons or bombs.

Hate groups usually try to win children over with glossy literature, symbols (such as swastikas or burning crosses), or racially and ethnically-offensive *Doom*-like games to desensitize children to their insidious messages. They often glorify the use of weapons and the assembly of explosive devices. As with pornography, parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide hate files and games on diskettes. Again, this may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child receives phone calls from someone you do not know, or makes calls - sometimes long distance, to numbers you do not 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 the children on the telephone. They often engage in "phone sex" with the children and seek to set up an actual meeting.

While a child may be hesitant to give out his/her home phone number, the computer-sex offenders will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can readily find out the child's phone number. Some computer-sex offenders have even obtained toll-free "800" numbers so that their potential victims can call them without their parents' knowledge. Others will tell the child to call collect. Both of these methods result in the computer-sex offender being able to discover the child's phone number.

Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you do not know.

As part of the seduction process, it is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and all manner of gifts to their potential victims. Computer-sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for the child to travel across the country to meet them.

Your child turns the computer monitor off, or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.

A child looking at pornographic or hate images, or having illicit or explicit conversations, does not want you to see it on the screen.

Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.

Computer-sex offenders and hate organizations will work very hard at driving a wedge between children and their families. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

Your child is using an on-line account belonging to someone else.

Even if you do not subscribe to an on-line service or Internet service, your child may meet an offender or talk to a hate organization while on-line at a friend's house. Most computers come pre-loaded with on-line or Internet software. Computer-sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.

Somerset County Prosecutor's Office

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www.scpo.net

TIPS HOTLINE 1-888-577-TIPS (8477)

A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety



Somerset County
Prosecutor's Office
Wayne J. Forrest
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What Should You Do If You Suspect Your Child Is Communicating With A Sexual Predator Or Hate Group On-Line?

1. Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about the dangers of computer-sex offenders, and hate groups.

2. Review what is on your child's computer. If you do not know how, ask a friend, co-worker, relative or other knowledgeable person. You can also go to **www.scpo.net** to obtain detailed step-by-step instructions on how to search your child's computer. Pornography, Nazi symbols, or any kind of sexual communication can be warning signs.

3. Use the Caller ID service to determine who is calling your child. Most phone companies offer a service that allows you to block your number from appearing on someone else's Caller ID, and allows you to reject incoming calls that try to block their number. This rejection feature prevents people from calling your home anonymously.

4. Review your phone bill to see if your child has been calling long distance or "900" numbers that you do not recognize. Additionally, you can retrieve the last number called from your home by using your phone's, or your phone company's, re-dial feature.

5. Monitor your child's access to all types of live electronic communications (*i.e.*, chat rooms, instant messages, Internet Relay Chat, etc.) and monitor your child's E-mail. Computer-sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child on-line, they will continue to communicate electronically, often via E-mail.

6. By reviewing your computer's, or Internet Service Provider's, "history" files, you can review the last places (typically the last 20) web sites your child has visited using his/her computer.

7. Should any of the following situations arise in your household, via the Internet or on-line service, you should immediately contact your local police department or the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office at (908) 231-7100:

- Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography;
- Someone solicits your child or anyone in the household to participate in a crime;
- Your child has been sexually solicited by some one who knows that your child is under 18 years of age;
- Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone who knows your child is under 18 years of age.

If one of these scenarios occurs, stop using the computer in order to preserve any evidence for future law enforcement use. Unless directed to do so by the law enforcement agency, you should not attempt to copy any of the images or text found on the computer.

What Can You Do To Minimize The Chances Of An On-Line Exploiter Victimizing Your Child?

1. Communicate and talk to your child about sexual victimization, bigotry, prejudice, and potential on-line dangers.

2. Spend time with your children on-line. Have them teach you about their favorite on-line destinations.

3. Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in your child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a computer-sex offender to communicate with a child when the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.

4. Utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software, but do not totally rely on them. While electronic chat can be a great place for children to make new friends and discuss various topics of interest, it is also prowled by computer-sex offenders. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored.

5. Always maintain access to your child's on-line account and randomly check his/her E-mail. Be aware that your child could be contacted through the U.S. Mail. Be up front with your child about your access and reasons why.

6. Teach your child the responsible uses of the resources on-line. There is much more to the on-line experience than chat rooms.

7. Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places,

outside your normal supervision, where your child could encounter an on-line predator.

8. Understand that even if your child was a willing participant in any form of sexual exploitation, he or she is not at fault and is the victim. The offender always bears the complete responsibility for his or her actions.

9. Instruct your children to:

- never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line;
- never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet, or on-line service to people they do not personally know;
- never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, phone number, or school name;
- never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance they could be sexually explicit images;
- never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, hateful, violent, belligerent, or harassing.
- be aware that information they find on-line may not be true.

Should I just forbid my child from going on-line?

There are dangers in every part of our society. By educating your children to these dangers and taking appropriate steps to protect them, they can benefit from the wealth of information now available on-line.