

---

# I N S I G H T S

---

FOR FAMILIES

## □ Minimizing the risk of online predators □

- ❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from information provided by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and Microsoft.

The anonymity of the Internet means that trust and intimacy can develop quickly online. Predators take advantage of this anonymity to build online relationships with inexperienced young people. Parents can help protect their kids by knowing the risks related to online communication and being involved in their kids' Internet activities.

### **How do online predators work?**

Online predators do the following:

- ❖ Find kids through social networking, blogs, chat rooms, instant messaging, e-mail, discussion boards, and other Web sites.
- ❖ Seduce their targets through attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts.
- ❖ Know the latest music and hobbies likely to interest kids.
- ❖ Listen to and sympathize with kids' problems.
- ❖ Try to ease young people's inhibitions by gradually introducing sexual content into their conversations or by showing them sexually explicit material.
- ❖ Might also evaluate kids they meet online for future face-to-face contact.

### **How can parents minimize the risk of a child becoming a victim?**

- ❖ Talk to your kids about sexual predators and potential online dangers.
- ❖ Use parental control software.
- ❖ Follow age limits on social networking Web sites. Most social networking sites require that users be age 13 and over. If your children are under the recommended age for these sites, do not let them use them.
- ❖ Young children should not use chat rooms—the dangers are too great. As children get older, direct them toward well-monitored kids' chat rooms. Encourage even your teens to use monitored chat rooms.
- ❖ If your children take part in chat rooms, make sure you know which ones they visit and with whom they talk. Monitor the chat areas yourself to see what kind of conversations take place.
- ❖ Instruct your children to never leave the chat room's public area. Many chat rooms offer private areas where users can have one-on-one chats with other users. Chat monitors can't read these conversations. These are often referred to as "whisper" areas.
- ❖ Keep the Internet-connected computer in a common area of the house, never in a child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a predator to establish a relationship with your child if the computer screen is easily visible. Even when the computer is in a public area of your home, sit with your child when they are online.

(Continued.)

- ❖ When your children are young, they should share the family e-mail address rather than have their own e-mail accounts. As they get older, you can ask your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to set up a separate e-mail address, but your children's mail can still reside in your account.
- ❖ Tell your children to never respond to instant messaging or e-mails from strangers. If your children use computers in places outside your supervision – public library, school, or friends' homes – find out what computer safeguards are used.
- ❖ If all precautions fail and your kids do meet an online predator, don't blame them. The offender always bears full responsibility. Take decisive action to stop your child from any further contact with this person.
- ❖ How can your kids reduce the risk of being victimized?

**There are a number of precautions that kids can take, including:**

- ❖ Never downloading images from an unknown source – they could be sexually explicit.
- ❖ Using e-mail filters.
- ❖ Telling an adult immediately if anything that happens online makes them feel uncomfortable or frightened.
- ❖ Choosing a gender-neutral screen name that doesn't contain sexually suggestive words or reveal personal information.
- ❖ Never revealing personal information about themselves (including age and gender) or information about their family to anyone online and not filling out online personal profiles..
- ❖ Stopping any e-mail communication, instant messaging conversations, or chats if anyone starts to ask questions that are too personal or sexually suggestive.
- ❖ Posting the family online agreement near the computer to remind them to protect their privacy on the Internet.