



Internet Predators

Cybersex offenders--cyberstalkers, pedophiles, and predators, whatever name we use to refer to these people--are lurking in the shadows of the Internet. From the safety of their homes, they use the Internet to find their victims and work their way into that victim's confidence. How do they find their victims? The answer: teens find the predators.

What does a sex offender look like? Not like a masked man hiding in dark corners! If you watch the news, you will learn that they could be a police chief, a minister, a teacher or even the man next door. Predators may feel that their behavior is normal because through the Internet they discover many others with the same interests. You would not leave your home at night and walk to the park in complete darkness to meet someone, and yet that little box sitting on a table in a protected area we call our home creates the greatest danger of you becoming a victim of a violent crime.

How do predators find their victims?

- The number one cause of predators reaching kids is a violation of the rules of Internet Safety! Any time you do not follow the rules of Internet Safety you risk leading an online predator right to your doorstep.
- Predators frequently find a child or teen through chat rooms. These offenders have anonymity with the ability to "chat" with anyone they want to without having their identity discovered. They can entice children and teens by appearing to be any age or gender they choose to lure their victim into a trusting relationship. They invest a lot of time in building this trust by offering sympathy and support. They will encourage the child to complain about something and use that to drive a wedge between parent and child.
- They look for children who are lonely and who are new to the Internet. An online predator can take a child with low self-esteem and build them into feeling secure and trusting of this person they believe to be a new friend.
- The offender may "groom" several victims at the same time. After the trust relationship has been built, they may start sending gifts or making phone calls to your child in an attempt to set up a one-on-one meeting.
- They can change innocent pictures into explicit ones perhaps putting the teen with pictures of themselves. They can easily take and store digital photos of their victims without the risk of being discovered by their family or employers. Until the pictures begin to surface online, you may not know that you have become a victim of this type of cyber crime.

Who are their victims?

A recent study of over 1500 Internet users ranging in age from 10 to 17 revealed that approximately 1 in 5 received a sexual solicitation over the Internet in the past year.

- One in 33 received an “aggressive” approach with an individual requesting a meeting; telephoned; or sent regular mail, money or gifts.
- One in 4 had unwanted exposure to explicit pictures.
- One in 17 faced threats.
- Only 10% of the sexual solicitations were reported to law enforcement or ISPs.
- Less than 25% of children receiving solicitations reported the incident to their parents. Don’t be one of these. Tell your parents or an adult you trust. You may save the life of another teen by doing this.

What can you do?

- Tell your parents about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable while using the Internet.
- Your parents may ask for your screen name. They are only doing this to protect you. Trust your parents.
- Never reveal anything personal about you or your family.
- Use only screen names that can be a male or female such as taylor; britt, etc. Don’t use your real name.
- Never use screen names that are suggestive such as “sexyteen.”
- Report any suspicious activity immediately to your parents. They should then call local law enforcement and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 1-800-843-5678. Learn more by going to: North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, <http://www.ncsbi.gov>.
- Above all--**Don’t delay taking action if you think a cybersex offender has confronted you!**

Remember: Predators find kids when the rules of Internet safety have not been kept. Teach your younger brothers and sisters, friends, and parents to stay safe while using the Internet. Don’t let Internet Predators find you or someone you love!

Statistics from: Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Bulletin – March 2005 Issue, <http://www.fbi.gov/publications>

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www.protecteverychild.org