



HOW TO PREVENT ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Children can be traumatically harmed by sexual images they see, and exploited sexually by sharing nude images or videos with someone they interact with online. This abuse and exploitation can bring fear and feelings of sadness, depression, guilt, anger, helplessness or emptiness. It can leave a child unable to feel joy or trust, and lower self-esteem. These are serious consequences to a serious crime that parents and other protectors need to be vigilant against.

Prevent online sexual abuse and exploitation when you:

- Talk to children about protecting themselves and respecting others online.
- Monitor who and how your child is interacting with people on cell phones, social media sites and gaming rooms.
- For all platforms, teach children that the way people present themselves online may NOT BE AT ALL who they are or what they're like in person. Some pretend to be children when really they are adults.
- Activate the safety settings in computer and tablet operating systems, search engines and game consoles so you can use protections available to you, knowing it doesn't guarantee 100% safety.

Time, attention and conversation are your best protection tools. Ask children to show you how they use devices. Ask them to let you play, too, or watch over their shoulder. Children may not tell you everything, but ask anyway. Safety conversations go far to grow trust and communication.

Tips about gaming safety

- 1** Take an interest in the games your child plays and wants to buy. Ratings and content are found on the Entertainment Software Rating Board website www.esrb.org.
- 2** Tell your child to NEVER give personal information while gaming and NEVER meet anyone outside of the game. Discuss how much they let people know about themselves when gaming. Ask about what kinds of people they game with.
- 3** Check whether games have features to report inappropriate behavior or moderators.
- 4** Discuss with your child how to respond if someone bothers them while gaming. Ask whether they feel safe gaming online, and why they answer the way they do.

Tips for online safety

- 1** Establish ground rules about types of sites kids can visit and apps they can download.
- 2** Research whether devices will allow unknown people to communicate with your child. Research whether children can make unchecked purchases.
- 3** Teens can be flattered by interest from an older guy or woman. Help them understand that the older person's motives may be exploitive, and reason not to friend them or meet offline.

Smart phones

- 1** Know the risks. Smart phones can make your child susceptible to cyber grooming. An abuser can use the phone to have private conversations, with any frequency and at any hour through calls or texts. Abusers can load apps with credit to buy fast food, coffee drinks and other treats as part of their coercion. Abusers can send and receive inappropriate photographs, as well as threatening messages to prevent disclosure. A GPS-enabled smartphone can reveal your child's location through online posts and uploaded photos.
- 2** Establish clear guidelines and expectations, yet be open so your child will come to you with problems. For example, tell them they need your approval before downloading apps so you understand their functions and content.
- 3** Set up password protection to keep everyone but you and your child from accessing personal information stored on the phone.
- 4** Establish a firm rule that phones are NEVER to be used to take pictures of private parts or naked bodies, theirs or someone else's. Help them understand the images can lead to blackmailing and harassment.
- 5** Activate safety settings and routinely install operating system updates. New versions often contain security fixes.
- 6** Understand location services and teach children about the benefits and dangers. GPS provides helpful maps, but you may want to disable location tags and other location features.
- 7** Review account settings often.
- 8** Teach children to come to you immediately if someone shares sexual messages or images, or asks them for sexually explicit pictures. Regularly discuss sexting and safety with teens.
- 9** Explain how quickly images can spread online. Once a photo is sent, it's out of your control.

Responding to online sexual abuse

- The most important concern is for the well-being of your child: let them know they aren't to blame and you'll love and support them.
- Report it! Any time a person exposes your child to pornography or receives explicit images sent by a child, contact law enforcement by calling 911. Law enforcement will investigate your report and initiate a team response to caring resources.

This information is adapted from information by National Children's Alliance and Net Smartz Workshop, a program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.