HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD'S BEEN A VICTIM OF ONLINE ABUSE?

Here are some warning signs to look for. If you've seen any of the following, you have some reason for concern:

- *Your child is spending long hours online (especially in the evening after 10:00 pm).* Children online are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are online around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings online trying to locate and lure children or seeking pornography.
- *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. It may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal".
- *Phone calls from people you don't know.* 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.
- *Unsolicited gifts to your child arriving via the mail.* 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 quickly turns off the computer when you enter the room.* A child looking at pornographic images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.
- *Withdrawal from family activities and friends.* Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.
- *Reluctance or fear to discuss Internet activities.*

If you suspect online "stalking" or sexual exploitation of a child, report it to the Suffolk Police Department at 923-2350, and the Cyber Tip Line via The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800/843-5678, or www.cybertipline.com. Leads forwarded to the site are acknowledged and shared with the appropriate law-enforcement agency for investigation.

IS IT COMMON FOR KIDS TO BE SOLICITED FOR ONLINE SEX?

The scary answer is *YES*. A national study conducted by the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center on behalf of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children compared the online experiences of teens and preteens who use the Internet on a regular basis found that:

- Approximately 1 in 5 children aged 10 to 17 received a sexual solicitation online.
- 1 in 33 youth received an aggressive sexual solicitation – a solicitor who asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; sent them regular mail, money, or gifts.
- 1 in 4 had unwanted exposure to sexual images. And 1 in 17 was threatened or harassed.
- Over 20% of online predators' targets are 13 or younger.

One of the most distressing things found in this study was that LESS than 10% of the sexual solicitations were reported to authorities.

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY

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

Internet Safety

Protecting Our Children

provided by
C. Phillips "Phil" Ferguson
Commonwealth's Attorney

Mills E. Godwin, Jr. Courts Building
150 North Main Street
Suffolk, VA 23434
Phone (757) 514-4365
Fax (757) 514-4400
www.suffolk.va.us/cwatty/
www.suffolk.va.us/cwatty/vwsp/

GUIDELINES TO SAFE SURFING WITH THE CHILDREN

In the real world, one aspect of responsible parenting is to never allow children to wander aimlessly and alone into unknown territories. This is especially true in the vast cyberspace called the "internet", where constant parental supervision is strongly advised. We need to strike a balance for our respect of the wonders of the internet with the responsibility for accountability, self-discipline, and safety. The best defense is for parents to make exploring the online world a family affair.

KIDS' GOLDEN RULES TO INTERNET SAFETY

1. I promise not to give out any personal information such as my address, telephone number, my parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without first asking my parents' permission.
2. I understand that some people online pretend to be someone else. Sometimes they pretend to be kids, when they're really grown ups. I will tell my parents about people I meet online. I will also tell my parents before I answer any e-mails I get from or send e-mails to new people I meet online.
3. I promise to tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable, scared or confused, and I promise I won't keep online secrets from my parents.
4. I promise never to agree to "meet" with someone I met online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, it must be in public and I agree to bring my mother or father along.
5. I promise never to send a person my picture or anything else over the Internet or through the post office without first checking with my parents.

6. I promise not to respond to any messages that are mean or that in any way makes me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If someone sends me a message like that, I promise to tell my parents right away so that they can contact the service provider.
7. I will check with my parents before downloading or installing software or doing anything that could possibly hurt our computer or jeopardize my family's privacy.
8. I will be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law, and if someone asks me to do something I am not supposed to do, I will tell my parents.
9. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online and appropriate areas for me to visit. I won't enter private chat rooms, and I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.
10. I will not give out my Internet password to anyone (even my best friends) other than my parents.
11. I will not order anything online without asking my parents or give out any credit card information, and I will not fill out any form online that asks me for any information about myself or my family without asking my parents first.
12. If I see something I do not like or that I know my parents don't want me to see, I will click on the "back" button or log off.
13. I will help my parents understand how to have fun and learn things online and teach them things about the Internet, computers and other technology.

PARENTS' TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR KIDS SAFE ON THE NET

♦ Post the list of "Kids' Golden Rules to Internet Safety" near your computer monitor and review it with your children regularly.
♦ Think about using filtering or Internet monitoring software on your computer. Investigate the safeguarding programs or parental control options your online service provider might offer.
♦ Be sure to read any website's privacy policy before submitting any personal information. Also make sure that a website offers a secure connection before sending credit card information.
♦ Federal law states websites geared towards children are not permitted to request personal information without a parent's permission. Take a few minutes and discuss with your children the meaning of personal information and why they should never give it out online.
♦ If your child uses instant messaging, chat rooms or e-mail (and whose kids don't!), talk to them about why they should never agree to meet an online "friend" in person.
♦ Keep the computer in the family room or another open area of your home -- *never in the child's bedroom.*
♦ Have your children show you the things that they do online, and visit their favorite sites or chat rooms. Get to know their "online friends" just as you would any other friend.
♦ Make sure that your children use child-friendly search engines when completing homework.
♦ All Internet accounts should always be in the parent's name with the parents having the primary screen name, administrative passwords, and blocking and/or filtering devices enabled.
♦ Make sure your child doesn't spend all of their time on the computer. People, not computers, should be their best friends and companions.