

Is Your Child or Teen a Target for Predators?

The Internet has many wonderful uses for children and teens – a place to research information for homework assignments, play games, and more; however, danger also lurks on the Internet in the form of **predators**. A predator stalks or uses lies and secrecy to get close enough to another person to hurt or harm them. More than 74% of 5th graders spend at least an hour online each week and are exposed to 50,000 predators at any given time.

Predators use a process called grooming to gain a child's trust over time. They use indirect information such as similar interests (shopping, sports, clothes, swimming, hiking, fishing, etc.) to get closer to their victims. If your child or teen says they like a particular football team, so will the predator!

Predators rely on establishing trust and will listen to anything your child wants to talk about. In particular, predators try to determine if a child does not have a good relationship with his or her parents and if he or she is bored, lonely, insecure, or curious. A predator wants to become a "friend" or "someone who really understands" your child or teen.

By encouraging secrecy, predators ensure their relationships with children can continue. Often predators will explain to children that other people, especially their parents, will not understand their "special friendship." They do not want your child or teen to tell you or another adult because they know an adult will step in and report them to the police!

Tips on protecting your child or teen

Protect your child or teen from the dangers of a potential predator by following these simple tips:

1. Be careful what screen name your child or teen creates. For example, Sarah14cougars is not an appropriate screen name because it reveals the child's first name, age and school mascot.
2. Instruct them to not give out personal information to anyone online, such as their name, address, phone number, social security number, family and friend's names, age or birthday or school.
3. Keep the computer in a common area, not in your child's room, where you can watch and monitor its use.
4. Forbid your child from entering private chat rooms. Block private chat rooms with safety features provided by your Internet service provider or with special filtering software. Be aware that posting messages to chat rooms reveals a user's email address to others.
5. Always know where your child or teen's internet activity. Let them know that you will be checking on them frequently while they are online.

For more information on keeping your child or teen safe on the Internet, review the following websites:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/PRC/>

<http://www.netlingo.com/>

<http://www.netsmartz.org/index.aspx>

