

Internet Safety and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and Minor Sex Trafficking

With the growth of internet use around the world the internet has become a facilitator and catalyst of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and minor sex trafficking. Traffickers use the internet for grooming and recruiting youth, tracking their movements, and for advertising services. Traffickers can groom and recruit youth to become victims of CSEC through use of social media on mobile phone apps and online websites.

Grooming, Enticement, and Recruitment Online

- Sex traffickers lure youth into an online relationship, with the ultimate goal of meeting in person. Traffickers use a deliberate process to identify and recruit their victims through scouting, manipulating and trapping. Often, the interactions may begin as seemingly benign chats in which the trafficker befriends and gains the youth's trust, friendship, or love. In other cases, youth are tricked by false promises of a job, or given expensive gifts. The end game of the trafficker (or pimp) however, is to force or manipulate their target into prostitution.¹
- Traffickers often seek out children online who appear vulnerable, depressed, seem emotionally isolated from family and friends, have low-esteem or appear to have a lot of unsupervised time. Though all young people (boys, girls, and trans youth) are susceptible to online recruitment, runaway and homeless youth, as well as victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, war or conflict, or social discrimination are especially targeted by traffickers.
- If a trafficker is already communicating with a child, he or she can piece together clues from what the child mentions while online.

How Adults Can Help to Keep Youth Safe When Using the Internet:

Most social gaming, apps, and websites also have the capability for direct or private messaging by others who use the same site or app. Some of these examples include 1) Online gaming (World Of Warcraft, League of Legends, Minecraft, etc.); 2) Social Media Sites and apps - (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc.); and 3) Messaging apps (Kik, Omegle, WhatsApp, etc.). It's important to understand what apps youth are using, and what the capabilities are for direct messages or private conversations.

¹ Adapted from *Internet Safety 101 - Sex Trafficking*; Enough is Enough
<https://internetsafety101.org/trafficking>

- Monitor internet use of the youth, including phones and apps;
- Check the youth's "Friends" lists and who they are contacting and encourage them to remove anyone they do not know or trust;
- Make sure youth understand what personal information is, and to be sure not to post it, and are not posting personal information
- Help youth make their account private
- Vet internet sites and apps that youth want to use. Learn how those sites and apps work;
- Talk to youth about online safety;
- Encourage youth to report inappropriate posts or pictures to the website or app;
- Encourage youth to block suspicious profiles;
- Research technology used by youth; many electronics have access to internet and webcams;
- Open a casual conversation about who the youth speaks to online;
- Advise youth to report criminal behavior to the police

Tips to Give Youth to Help Keep Themselves Safe When Using the Internet²

These are some conversation points to mention while speaking to youth about internet safety:

- Parents and the youth should think about how different sites work before deciding to join a site. Some sites will allow only a defined community of users to access posted content; others allow anyone and everyone to view postings.
- Speak to youth about keeping your information to yourself. They shouldn't post their full name, Social Security number, address, phone number, or bank and credit card account numbers — and they shouldn't post other people's information, either.
- Remind them to be cautious about posting information and choosing screen names that could be used to identify or locate them offline. This could include the name of their school, sports team, clubs, and where they work or hang out.
- Mention they should only post information that you are comfortable with others seeing — and knowing — about them. Many people can see the page, including teachers, the police, the college they might want to apply to next year, or the job they might want to apply for in five years.
- Remind them that once they post information online, they can't take it back. Even if they delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people's computers.

² Autism Speaks. (2011). Internet Safety, Social Networking and Technology. Retrieved from https://www.autismspeaks.org/docs/family_services_docs/transition/Internet.pdf



international organization for adolescents



- Advise them to be wary if a new online friend wants to meet them in person. Before the youth decides to meet someone, make sure they find out what they can about the person: They should ask whether any of their friends know the person, and see what background they can find through online search engines.
- Tell them to consider not using a picture of themselves. It could be altered and used in ways they did not intend. If they do choose to use a picture of themselves, make sure it would be something appropriate for family to see.
- Advise the youth to trust their gut if they have suspicions. If they feel threatened by someone or feel uncomfortable because of something online, they should tell an adult they trust and report it to the police and the social networking site.

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