

# Signs that Your Child May Be at Risk Online

**If your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night, your child may be at risk.**

Many children who fall victim to Internet sex offenders spend large amounts of time online, particularly in chatrooms. They may go online after dinner and on the weekends and would rather spend time online than “hang out” with other peers from their school or neighborhood. They may be children whose families have told them to stay at home alone after school. They go online to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit information. While much of the knowledge and experience gained may be valuable, families should consider monitoring the amount of time their children are online.

**You find pornography on your child’s computer.**

Children curious about sex may seek out information online; however, 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 lowering the child’s inhibitions. Parents, grandparents, and guardians should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes from them. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

**Your child receives telephone calls from men or women you don’t know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you do not recognize.**

While communicating to a child victim online is a thrill for an Internet sex offender, it can also be very cumbersome. Most want to talk to the children on the telephone to actually hear the child’s voice. They may attempt to engage in “phone sex” with the children and also may seek to set up an actual meeting for a real sexual encounter. While a child may be hesitant to give out his or her home telephone number, Internet sex offenders will usually give out their contact information. Sometimes the offender will provide the child means to contact him or her through avenues that may avoid detection by their caregivers.



**Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don’t know.**

It is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and all manner of gifts to their potential victims to increase the likelihood that the child will respond positively to him or her. Computer-sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for the child to travel across the country to meet them.

**Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.**

A child looking at pornographic images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.

**Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.**

Internet sex offenders may attempt to drive a wedge between children and their families. They may attempt to accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have and portray themselves as the only one the child can trust. A child may also become withdrawn or explosive after sexual victimization.

**Your child is using an online account belonging to someone else.**

Even if you don’t subscribe to an online or Internet service, your child may meet an offender while online at a friend’s house or the library. Most computers come preloaded with online and/or Internet software. In addition children may set up “free” E-mail accounts such as those that their parents, grandparents, and guardians may not be able to access without the child’s user ID.