

How to Keep Your Kids Safe from Online Sex Traffickers



What makes your child vulnerable to a predator?

- If your child seeks love and acceptance
- If your child wants to fit in
 - If your child feels misunderstood
 - If your child is insecure
 - If your child is lonely

EVERY TEEN feels ALL of this from time to time.
Every child is vulnerable.

Predators make it their business to find out what a child's hopes, dreams, and hurts are ... so they can exploit them.

How Online Predators Work

Online predators know they can make as much as hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on each child they traffic. Because of this, traffickers will often take their time grooming a child – sometimes spending months or even years – to ensure the child is loyal to them before they begin exploiting them for profit.

They will woo the child with conversation that seems fun, safe, and even meaningful, keeping their true intentions (and sometimes identity) hidden from their victim.¹

**ONLINE GROOMING
CAN TAKE PLACE QUICKLY –
OR OVER AN EXTENDED
PERIOD OF TIME.**

¹“How Do Predators Groom Kids?” *Internet Safety 101*, Enough Is Enough, internetsafety101.org/grooming



▶ THEY SEEM LIKE A FRIEND:

Predators may conduct research on the child such as looking up their social media profiles.

Predators will be friendly and might even send gifts online.

They may order an electronic gift card for any store, such as Amazon, delivered to your child's inbox and accessed via their phone.

On gaming sites, predators often buy upgrades to video games through an online form of payment such as bitcoin and win the child's trust by "helping" them get to the next level. They may also share tips for winning more often. Soon, the child feels they have a new friend.

From here, it's a short step to being willing to meet up. The in-person relationship begins.

OR the predator may begin to exert pressure on the child to participate in online sexting, sharing compromising photos – "I gave you that; now you have to do this for me" – then the information they share is used to coerce them.



▶ THEY DEVELOP TRUST:

Predators will appear sympathetic and understanding regarding a child's problems, and act as if they are the only ones who can appreciate and help them.

Predators may shower their victims with compliments and send them gifts, developing an emotional dependency while preying on the child's insecurities and emotions.

They make promises that appeal to the child's needs or vulnerabilities. Such as:

"No one understands you, but I do."

"You won't have to be alone anymore."

"Your life is hard, and I will make it better."

"I know how you can make a lot of money."

The same tactics are used to recruit spotters and recruiters. Junior and high school-aged boys may especially be drawn in with the promise of money if they will simply "spot" or identify an at-risk child and tell the predator all about them. Then the predator uses this information to lure the child and begins to groom them.

▶ THEY SHARE AND KEEP SECRETS:

This is designed to gain the confidence of the child and to become a “best friend.”

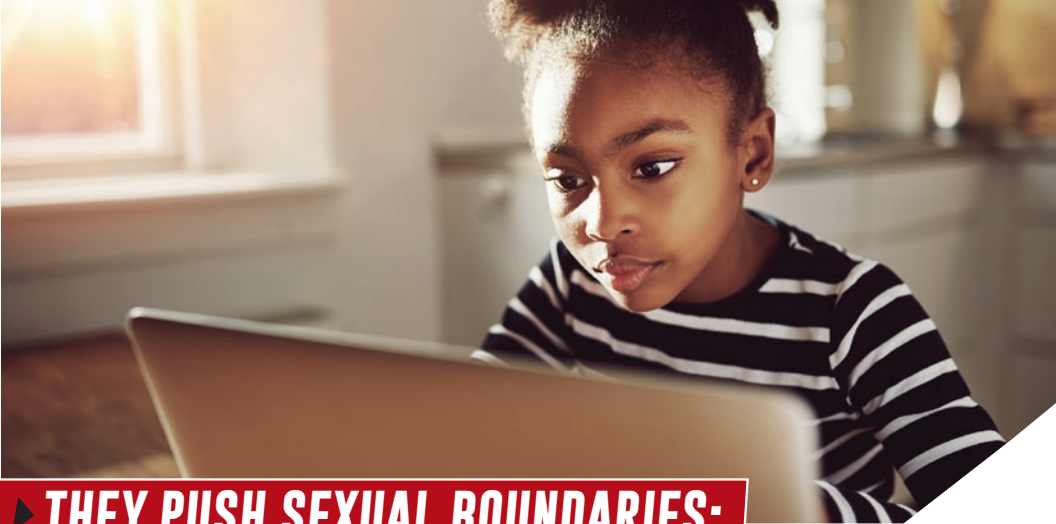
Victims often become dependent on their relationship with the predator, a relationship they most likely interpret as romantic. This allows the predator to control behavior as the online grooming process progresses.

Sharing secret desires, wishes, cares, and hopes are among the ways they establish intimacy with the child.

They tell the child a “secret” and then follow with *“Please don’t tell anyone. This is ours together.”*

Then they get the child to share something personal and assure them, *“This is just between us. You can trust me. I won’t tell a soul.”*





▶ **THEY PUSH SEXUAL BOUNDARIES:**

As the conversation and relationship progress, the predator will gain the confidence of the child and test their boundaries by exposing them to sexual conversation and pornography.

Through continuous exposure, the predator hopes to lower the inhibitions of the victim and exert influence over them. The process continues until the child feels comfortable sending them compromising sexual photos, which the predator can then use for extortion or blackmail: *“Do as I tell you or I’ll send your photos/ messages to your parents or post them on social media.”*

▶ **THEY SELL LIES:**

The predator will introduce the victim to new “friends” and maybe even get them hooked on drugs so they “need” him more. The predator keeps the child “swept off their feet.” They get jealous easily, flattering the child that they want the victim to be “only” his. Eventually they begin to control all the child’s movements, and schedule.



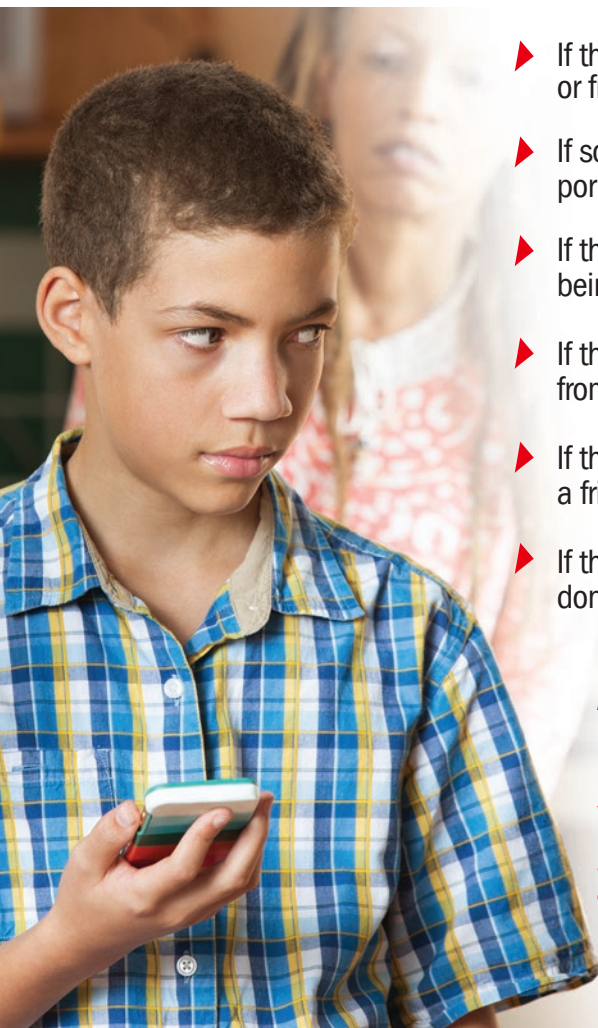
▶ **THEY FLIP A SWITCH:**

Once the predator has met with the child and engaged in illicit activities (either in-person or online), he begins to make threats. The predator warns the child he will carry out the threats if he or she does not agree to cooperate. This form of blackmail is intended to maintain power and control, and keep the victim silenced.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS



That Children Might Be Communicating With an Online Predator:²



- ▶ If they withdraw from family or friends
- ▶ If someone is sending them pornography
- ▶ If they are overly obsessed with being online
- ▶ If they hide their device screens from others
- ▶ If they receive expensive gifts from a friend you don't know
- ▶ If they become upset when they don't have wifi access or cell service

Any of these signs could indicate the presence of a problem – so **IF YOU THINK YOU SUSPECT OR SEE SOMETHING, err on the side of caution.**

² "Warning Signs." Internet Safety 101, Enough Is Enough, internetsafety101.org/predatorwarningsigns



Consider taking the following 4 actions:

- 1** Approach your child to warn them. Say something like: “It is your life, these are your friends. However, as you move about, as you contact new people in person or on devices, I can’t very well protect you. I want to help you learn how to make yourself safer, to be the guardian of your own privacy and security.” **THIS IS NOT A ONE-TIME CONVERSATION!**
- 2** Contact law enforcement with your hunch about the predator.
- 3** Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST and ask for advice on your situation.
- 4** Obtain the *Chosen* documentary at SharedHope.org and show the young people in your life how easily boys and girls can be deceived into trafficking when they don’t know the signs!



To find more comprehensive internet safety resources, visit sharedhope.org/InternetSafety.

A more in-depth Internet Safety Guide and educational video series are now available!



Meet Kelly, Shared Hope's very own Internet Safety Specialist. You can join her in our ongoing Internet Safety Video Series, download our comprehensive Internet Safety Guide, and sign up for updates at [sharedhope.org/InternetSafety](https://www.sharedhope.org/InternetSafety).



Shared Hope International
P.O. Box 65337
Vancouver, WA 98665
866-437-5433
[sharedhope.org](https://www.sharedhope.org)

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