

A U.S. Postal Inspector's
Guide to

Internet Safety for Children



The Internet is a global community that allows people to share information instantly and anonymously, anytime and anywhere.

Despite its many advantages, the Internet is a potential source of danger to your children. Child predators may use this medium to lure children into sexual activity or peddle illegal images of child pornography.

Online Children at Risk

Child predators who once targeted children at playgrounds and parks can now reach children more easily by using the Internet to mask their identities. They often lavish children with attention and gifts, devoting considerable time and money to “groom” them for sexual exploitation. They will listen and empathize with children’s problems, and learn about their music, hobbies, and interests in order to relate to them. As children’s inhibitions are lowered, they begin to feel more comfortable with their “online friend.” Over time, sexual themes and materials are introduced into the relationship.

Some predators will approach children online and encourage them to produce and send pornographic images of themselves. These offenders may trade the images worldwide, victimizing the child for the rest of his or her life.

Postal Inspectors Protect Children

For more than a century, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service® has investigated the sexual exploitation of children. It was the first federal law enforcement agency to aggressively identify, target, and arrest individuals who produce and traffic in child pornography. Specially trained Postal Inspectors investigate crimes related to the sexual exploitation of children nationwide. Today, the majority of child exploitation cases investigated by Postal Inspectors involve both the U.S. Mail® and the Internet.

The Postal Inspection Service partners with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Department of Justice’s (DOJ’s) Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section to investigate child

“This person becomes their best friend. It’s a specific point-by-point process where a predator tries to make friends, make trust, make it a secretive affair, and then basically turns victims against their families.”

— Jeff Godlis,
i-SAFE (nonprofit group
for Internet safety
education) director of
communications

sexual exploitation involving the U.S. Mail and the Internet. The Postal Inspection Service actively participates in Project Safe Childhood, a DOJ initiative that combines law enforcement efforts to prevent, investigate, and prosecute child exploitation and community outreach programs to raise public awareness.

Reducing Online Risks

As a parent, you can reduce the chances that a predator will reach your child. U.S. Postal Inspectors recommend you follow these guidelines:

- Familiarize yourself with the various technologies children use to communicate — computers, cell phones, gaming systems, laptops, tablets, and other mobile devices.
- Keep the computer in a high-traffic area of your home where you can monitor your child's activity.
- Establish rules and limitations for social networking, photo-sharing, gaming, and other online communication sites and applications used by children.
- Take an interest in your child's online activities and learn whom they communicate with, including who is on their friends list.
- Use filtering or monitoring software for all of your computers and devices. Good products list accepted sites and give children access only to pre-approved sites.
- Encourage communication. Let your child know he or she can talk to you without repercussion. Children may do or see things online that they shouldn't, but don't want to tell anyone because they're afraid of losing Internet privileges.

Additional tips and resources for all audiences can be found online at netsmartz.org. NetSmartz teaches Internet safety skills in age-appropriate modules.

Online Safety Tips

Talk with your child about safety and personal boundaries, and post these guidelines by the computer:

- Personal information shouldn't be shared online — that includes address, phone number, e-mail address, school name, or information about friends.
- Passwords are private — just parents and kids can share.
- Use the privacy settings of social networking sites.
- Only communicate online with “real life” friends and family. Never meet face-to-face with someone you met online.
- Remember that EVERYONE can see what you post. Don't post inappropriate pictures.
- Say something if anything or anyone makes you feel uncomfortable.

Report Suspicious Activity

Your early involvement and open communication can prevent your child from becoming a victim of a predator. Report suspicious online activity when something does not feel right to you or your child. Trust your intuition!

- If you suspect someone is attempting to entice your child online, do not delete any material, and do not shut down the computer.
- Immediately contact your local law enforcement agency and make a report to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at www.cybertipline.com or call 1-800-THE-LOST.

What Is Your Child Saying Online?

Do you know what language your child uses online? Children and teens use Internet acronyms to communicate, sometimes to alert others of parents nearby. Be aware of these acronyms and understand that new ones are constantly introduced. Visit www.missingkids.org or do an online search for “Internet acronyms” for more examples and updates.

POS = Parent Over Shoulder

PIR = Parent In Room

P911 = Parent Alert

PAW = Parents Are Watching

PAL = Parents Are Listening

ASL = Age/Sex/Location

LMIRL = Let's Meet In Real Life

KPC = Keeping Parents Clueless

ADR or Addy = Address

WYCM = Will You Call Me?



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