

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 sex offenders may use this medium to lure children into sexual activity or peddle illegal images of child pornography.

## **Online Children at Risk**

Child sex offenders who once targeted children at playgrounds and parks can now reach children more easily by using the Internet to mask their identities. They can often overwhelm children with attention and gifts, devoting considerable time and money to “groom” a child 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 sex offenders 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 produced and trafficked 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 — about 95 percent — involve both the U.S. Mail and the Internet.

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

*“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

investigate child sexual exploitation involving the U.S. Mail and the Internet. As a result, the Postal Inspection Service actively participates in Project Safe Childhood, a DOJ initiative that employs a multidisciplinary approach to protecting children. The initiative uses resources from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; multiple venues of prosecution; and community outreach programs.

## Reducing Online Risks

As a parent, you can reduce the chances that a sex offender will reach your children by talking with them about their Internet activities, setting rules for their Internet use, and posting rules near their computers. U.S. Postal Inspectors recommend you follow these guidelines:

*One in seven children, ages 10 to 17, has been sexually solicited or approached via the Internet. Only about 12 percent told a parent about it.*

*In 56 percent of the cases, [the children] did not tell anyone about it.*

— Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D.,  
Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later,  
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

- Familiarize yourself with social networking, file-sharing, and online communication sites (e.g., instant messaging, text messaging, and chat rooms) used by your children.
- Place your children's computer in an area where you can supervise online activity. Find out what computers your children use away from home (e.g., at school, at a friend's home, or at the library), and make sure they're supervised at those locations as well.
- Ensure your children use child-friendly search engines, or use filters on other search engines.
- Know who communicates with your child online. Sit with your child at the computer and have him or her identify each person with whom he or she communicates, including those on buddy lists and e-mail accounts. Monitor chat room activities.
- Set up Internet accounts and primary screen names in your name, not your children's, and retain controlling passwords. Ensure that the screen names the children use won't identify them as children.
- Use filtering or monitoring software for all of your home computers. Good products list accepted sites and give children access only to pre-approved sites.

- Ask your children to check with you before posting photos of themselves or their friends. Photos may contain information that reveals their home, school, or clubs and teams they belong to, and could even put them and their friends at risk.
- If someone unfamiliar contacts your child online, tell your child not to respond but encourage him or her to tell you about it. Your child needs to 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.

*"What's risky [for kids on the Internet] is giving out names, phone numbers, and pictures to strangers and talking online with them about sex."*

— Janis Wolak,  
Crimes Against Children  
Research Center

## Online Safety Tips

Ensure your children understand these principles to stay safe on the Internet:

- Online communications are for "real-life" friends and family members — period.
- Personal information such as an address, telephone number, school name, information about friends, or e-mail addresses should never be given to anyone online.
- Once your child posts something online, anyone can see it — including people who can use the information to harm your child.
- Passwords are private. They're only for you and your children.

## Report Suspicious Activity

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

If you suspect someone is attempting to sexually exploit your child over the Internet, do not delete any material. Do not shut down the computer, but turn off the monitor and report your concerns

*"The best way for parents to confront the danger is to talk openly about sexual matters. As adults, we need to get over our discomfort with that."*

— Janis Wolak,  
Crimes Against Children  
Research Center

immediately to your local law enforcement agency and NCMEC at [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).

## **What Are Your Children Saying Online?**

Do you know what language your children use online? Below are some examples of Internet acronyms. The acronyms change, and new ones are constantly introduced. Visit [www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.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

MorF = Male or Female

SorG = Straight or Gay

LMIRL = Let's Meet In Real Life

KPC = Keeping Parents Clueless

TDTM = Talk Dirty To Me

IWSN = I Want Sex Now

NIFOC = Nude In Front of Computer

GYPO = Get Your Pants Off

ADR or Addy = Address

WYCM = Will You Call Me?

KFY = Kiss For You

MOOS = Member of the Opposite Sex

MOSS or MOTSS = Member of the Same Sex

NALOPKT = Not a Lot of People Know That

For more information about how to protect your child from online sex offenders, visit the Web site of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at <http://postalinspectors.uspis.gov>.



DEPARTMENT  
OF JUSTICE

CHILD EXPLOITATION  
& OBSCENITY SECTION

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