Online Sexual Exploitation

A range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child using technology. This could result in financial benefit to the perpetrator.
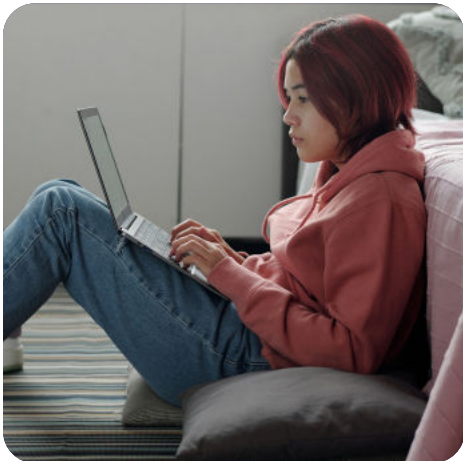
In a rapidly evolving technological world, children are increasingly connected as they navigate the online environment. However, this also poses a harmful risk because this increased presence and exposure on the internet gives offenders an easy way to reach children. These offenders will misuse online environments to sexually exploit minors.

Sometimes the offense is initiated online and then takes place in person; in other instances, the violence takes place entirely behind screens. Even though the abuse occurs virtually, the impact on the victim, their loved ones, and the community can be just as harmful as sexual violence committed in person.

In 2023, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) CyberTipline received more than 36.2 million reports of suspected child sexual abuse online.

— NCMEC, 2024

Types of Online Sexual Exploitation

CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material) — Any visual image of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (a person less than 18 years old).

Human Trafficking — A crime involving the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Currently, social media, gaming, and apps are used to recruit children and teens for trafficking.

Sextortion — When a child or teen is pressured to send nude or sexual images of themselves to someone who is pretending to be a peer, then blackmailed by the predator demanding more sexual content or money with the threat of sharing the images of them with friends, family, or their communities.

Sexting — Sharing and receiving sexually explicit messages and nude or partially nude images using digital devices. Once the image is sent, the receiver becomes the owner of the image and puts the sender at risk of extortion and humiliation. (Extortion: The practice of obtaining something, especially money, through force or threats.)

Nudify — The act of undressing a person using their image and AI (artificial intelligence). These images can be shared to make money or used to coerce the victim. (Deepfake: Refers to the image of a person that has been generated using AI software.)

"13% of Instagram users aged 13–15 self-reported having received unwanted sexual advances via the platform within the previous 7 days."

–Written testimony of Meta employee and whistleblower Arturo Bejar, before the Senate Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law, November 7, 2023

Scan to get more resources online. →

Protect Your Child

Use caution with devices, social media, and communication apps. Delay their use, when possible, especially by young children.

Have ongoing discussions that are intentional and frequent. **Role-play specific scenarios:** "Do I share my school, age, or grade?" "Do I share my name and image?" "Do I share videos of myself?"

Educate your child. Teach them about healthy, age-appropriate sexual relationships, and the difference between sharing public and private information while communicating online.

Provide parental supervision and monitor your child's devices in partnership with your child. Turn off chat settings on apps and games for younger children so they cannot interact with strangers online. Keep any device your child has access to out of the bedroom overnight.

Start a Conversation

Has someone ever asked you to send them money?

Share with your children that unsafe people are tricking children into sending nudes and then threatening to send out the pictures if the child doesn't send money. It's called sextortion. It's a crime. It's not a child's fault, but it is important to be aware of it.

"Even if you slip up, you can always come to me, and I will help you."

What would you do if anyone sent you pictures or asked you to send pictures or videos of yourself that make you feel uncomfortable?

Share with your child that they don't have to and should not send them and they can let you know about it without getting in trouble.

Is your account set to public or private?

Do you communicate with people online that you don't know?

Take Action if your child has been exploited

- Communicate to your child that they can come to you no matter what and you will help them.

- Don't delete anything. Take screenshots of messages, threats, and maintain accounts connected.

- Report to NCMEC CyberTipline (report.cybertip.org) and your local law enforcement. This is a crime!

- Reach out to NCMEC's Take it Down service (takeitdown.ncmec.org/) to have the content removed from circulation.

- Make sure your child is getting professional emotional support as needed.

Scan to learn about the CyberTipline.

Scan to learn about Take It Down.