

Internet Safety

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Is your  
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## DEAR PARENT /CARER

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Our children are our most valuable asset. Our children are also the most vulnerable members of society. Protecting our children against the fear of crime and from becoming victims of crime must be a priority.

Unfortunately, the same advances in computer and telecommunication technology that allow our children to reach out to new sources of knowledge and cultural experiences are also leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and harm by computer sex-offenders.

We hope that this pamphlet helps you to begin to understand the complexities of on-line child exploitation.

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*Chief Executive*  
*Sheffield City Council*

Mike Hedges  
*Chief Constable*  
*South Yorkshire Police*

James Barbour  
*Chief Executive*  
*Sheffield Health*

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*Sheffield Area Child*  
*Protection Committee*



## A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

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On-line computer exploration opens a world of possibilities for children, expanding their horizons and exposing them to different cultures and ways of life. It can also expose them to danger. There are people who try to sexually exploit children through the use of on-line services and the Internet. They seduce children gradually through the use of attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts.

These people are often willing to spend considerable amounts of time, money, and energy to this process. They listen to and sympathise with the problems of children. They will be aware of the latest music, hobbies, and interests of children. Some attempt to gradually lower children's inhibitions by slowly introducing sexual context and content into their conversations. Others immediately engage in sexually explicit conversation with children. Some offenders primarily collect and trade child-pornographic images, while others seek face-to-face meetings with children via on-line contacts.

It is important for parents to understand that children can be indirectly victimised through conversation, i.e. "chat," as well as the transfer of sexually explicit information and material. Computer-sex offenders may also be assessing children they come in contact with on-line for future face-to-face contact and direct victimisation. Parents and children should remember

that a computer-sex offender can be any age or sex - the person does not have to fit the stereotype of a dirty, unkempt, older man wearing a raincoat to be someone who could harm a child.

Children, especially teenagers, are sometimes curious about sexuality and sexually explicit material. They may be moving away from the control of parents and seeking to establish new relationships outside their family. Because they may be curious, children/teenagers sometimes use their on-line access to actively seek out such materials and individuals. Sex offenders targeting children will use and exploit these characteristics and needs.

Some teenage children may also be attracted to and lured by on-line offenders closer to their age who, although not technically child abusers, may be dangerous. Nevertheless, they have been seduced and manipulated by a clever offender and do not fully understand or recognise the potential danger of these contacts.



## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MIGHT BE AT RISK ON-LINE?

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Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.

Most children who fall victim to computer-sex offenders spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. They may go on-line in the evening and at the weekends. They go on-line to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes to look for sexually explicit information. While much of the knowledge and experience gained may be valuable, parents should consider monitoring the amount of time spent on-line.

Children on-line are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are on-line around the clock, many work during the day and spend their evenings on-line trying to find and lure children or looking for pornography.

You find pornography on your child's computer.

Pornography is often used in the sexual victimisation of children. Sex offenders often supply their potential victims with pornography as a means of opening sexual discussions and

for seduction. Child pornography may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal." Parents should be aware of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files from them on diskettes or CDs. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child receives phone calls from men or women you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognise.

While talking to a child victim on-line is a thrill for a computer-sex offender, it can be very awkward and indirect. Most want to talk to the children on the telephone. They often engage in "phone sex" with the children and often seek to set up an actual meeting for real sex.

While a child may be hesitant to give out his/her home phone number, the computer-sex offenders will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can easily find out the child's phone number. Some computer-sex offenders have even obtained free 0800 numbers, so that their potential victims can call them without their parents finding out. Others will tell the child to reverse the charges. Both of these methods result in the computer-sex offender being able to find out the child's phone number.

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

As part of the seduction process, it is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and other gifts to their potential victims. Computer-sex offenders have even sent train 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.

Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will exaggerate and use any minor problems at home that the child might have mentioned. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimisation.

Your child is using an on-line account belonging to someone else.

Even if you don't subscribe to an on-line service or Internet service, your child may meet an offender while on-line at a friend's house or the library. Most computers come pre-loaded with on-line and/or Internet software.

Computer-sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.

Your child has encrypted (coded) material on the computer.

Smart on-line child sex offenders use encryption. While encryption can be used for legitimate reasons, if you find encrypted material on your child's computer, you ought to check out what they are doing with it and who they are in contact with etc.



## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS COMMUNICATING WITH A SEXUAL PREDATOR ON-LINE?

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Talk openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about the dangers of computer-sex offenders, however embarrassing or awkward this might feel. It could prevent your child from being harmed.

Check what is on your child's computer. If you don't know how, ask a friend, colleague, relative, or other knowledgeable person. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.

Use the Call Return Service (1471) to find out who is calling your child. You can withhold your number by dialling 141 before the number you wish to call. Call barring is also available (usually for a small charge) to prevent calls from certain numbers coming into your phone. This feature prevents computer-sex offenders or anyone else from calling your home anonymously.

Caller display services are also available to show you the number of a caller before you pick up the phone. (This may not be available on some of the cable networks.) To use this service you will need

display equipment which can be purchased from major high street stores.

Monitor your child's access to all types of live electronic communications (i.e. chat rooms, instant messages, Internet Relay Chat, etc.), and monitor your child's e-mail. Computer-sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child on-line, they will continue to communicate electronically often via e-mail.

You should immediately contact the Police if:

*Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography.*

*Your child has been sexually solicited by someone.*

*Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone.*

If one of these situations occurs, keep the computer turned off in order to save any evidence for future legal proceedings. Unless directed to do so by the Police, you should not attempt to copy any of the images and/or text found on the computer.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MINIMISE THE CHANCES OF A SEXUAL PREDATOR VICTIMISING YOUR CHILD?

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Talk to your child about sexual victimisation and potential on-line danger.

Spend time with your children on-line. Let them teach you about their favourite on-line destinations.

Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in your child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a computer-sex offender to communicate with a child when the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.

Use parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software. Your retailer can advise you on blocking software. While electronic chat can be a great place for children to make new friends and discuss topics of interest, it is also prowled by computer-sex offenders. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored. Parents should direct their children to moderated chat rooms (ones that are monitored constantly) as these are likely to be safer and/or more appropriate.

While parents should use these aids, they should not totally rely on them.

Always have access to your child's on-line account and randomly check his/her e-mail. Be up front with your child about access and the reason why.

Teach your child about the proper use of the Internet. There is much more to the on-line experience than chat rooms.

Find out what computer safeguards are used by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places, outside your normal supervision, where your child could come across an on-line predator.

Understand, even if your child is a willing participant in any form of sexual exploitation, that he/she is not at fault; he/she is the victim. The offender always bears complete responsibility for his or her actions.

Tell your children never to:

*arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line*

*upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the internet or on-line service to people that they do not personally know*

*give out identification such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number*

*download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images*

*respond to messages that are suggestive, obscene, aggressive or harassing*

Tell your children that whatever they are told on-line may or may not be true.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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My child has received an e-mail advertising a pornographic website, what should I do?

Report it to your service provider and, if known, the service provider of the originator. Report it to the Police, so they can be made aware of the extent of the problem.

Is any service safer than the others?

Sex offenders have contacted children via most of the major on-line services for the Internet. The most important factors in keeping your child safe on-line are the use of appropriate blocking software and/or parental controls, along with open, honest discussions with your child, monitoring his/her on-line activity, and following the tips in this pamphlet.

Should I just forbid my child from going on-line?

There are dangers in every part of our society. By teaching your children about these dangers and taking appropriate steps to protect them, they can benefit from the wealth of information now available on-line.



## HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

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**Internet** - An immense, global network that connects computers via telephone lines and/or fibre networks to storehouses of electronic information. With only a computer, a modem, a telephone line and a service provider, people from all over the world can communicate and share information with little more than a few keystrokes.

**Internet Service Provider (ISP)** - Examples of ISPs are Freeserve, AOL, Compuserve and MSN. These services offer direct access to the Internet. They often also provide an electronic-mail service for their customers. ISPs often provide space on their servers for their customers to maintain World Wide Web (www) sites. Educational and governmental organisations also provide Internet access consistent with the service provided. Since most ISPs do not require a credit card or any other proof of age it is possible that children could be bringing CDs into the home or going on-line and joining up without parents knowing about it. So watch out for that and unusually high telephone bills.

**Public Chat Rooms** - Usually cover a broad range of topics such as entertainment, sports, game rooms, children only, etc. These are not normally monitored by anyone. A small number of Chat Rooms are moderated i.e. they are monitored constantly either

by having a real live person in attendance effectively policing what is being said and what goes on, or by software which watches out for specific words e.g. of a sexual nature, which can trigger a rapid intervention to kick out an offender.

Electronic Mail (E-Mail) - There are two types of e-mail commonly in use on the Net. Server based e-mail, and Web-based e-mail, e.g. Hotmail. The former will almost invariably be provided by an ISP, but the vast majority of companies providing Web-based e-mail are not ISPs. They are companies who provide this as a service to draw people back to their web site. These accounts are easy to open and generally require no proof of identity, address, age etc. Partly because of this some chat room hosts will not let you in if you only have a Web-based e-mail address, but this is not true of all of them.

Anonymity can be maintained by the sender by pre-setting what the receiver will see as the "from" address. Another way to conceal one's identity is to use an "anonymous re-mailer," which is a service that allows the user to send an e-mail message repackaged under the re-mailer's own header, stripping off the originator's name completely.

Chat - Real-time text conversation between users in a chat room with no expectation of privacy. All chat conversation is accessible by all individuals in the chat room while the conversation is taking place.

Instant Messages - Private, real-time text conversation between two users in a chat room.

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) - Real-time text conversation similar to public and/or private chat rooms on an ISP.

Newsgroups - Like a giant notice board where users post messages and information. Each posting is like an open letter and may have attachments, such as graphic image files (GIFs) or pictures. Anyone accessing the newsgroup can read the postings, take copies of posted items, or post responses. Each newsgroup can hold thousands of postings. Currently, there are over 29,000 public newsgroups and the number is growing daily. Newsgroups are both public and private. There is no listing of private newsgroups. A user of private newsgroups has to be invited into the newsgroup and be provided with the newsgroup's address.

ICQ - An on-line instant messaging service. You can create a list of family, friends etc and ICQ uses this list to find your friends and tell you as soon as they go on-line. You can then send messages, etc.

Text Messaging - You can send text messages from a computer to a mobile phone and between mobile phones. This is usually a free service and is very popular. It can also be abused by sending threatening, bullying or harassing messages.

## USEFUL NUMBERS



South Yorkshire Police	0114 220 2020
Crimestoppers	0800 555 111
Childline	0800 1111
NSPCC Helpline	0800 800 500
Child Protection Unit (Social Services)	0114 273 4934
Internet Watch Hotline	0845 600 8844

## USEFUL INTERNET SITES



Chatdanger  
[www.chatdanger.com](http://www.chatdanger.com)

Internet Watch Foundation  
[www.internetwatch.org.uk](http://www.internetwatch.org.uk)

NCH  
[www.nch.org.uk](http://www.nch.org.uk)

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This booklet is available on websites [www.sheffield.gov.uk](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk)  
and [www.acpc.gov.uk](http://www.acpc.gov.uk)

Copies of the wording of this booklet can be made available  
on request in large print, audio tape, floppy disc, Urdu,  
Bengali, Arabic, Chinese and Somali please contact the  
Child Protection Unit telephone 0114 273 4934.

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*Safer Sheffield Partnership*



*We would like to thank the FBI for the text content contribution*