ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN YOUTH

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What is it?

Sexual exploitation refers to the use of sex, or sexual images in order to make money or gain advantage. Advantage is using someone's weakness for one's benefit. Online sexual exploitation is any form of sexual abuse occuring on the internet.

Source: Cambridge Dictionary (2025)

What are the signs?

If the person/people you are communicating with are:

- sending you unwanted images, videos, requests for livestream
- asks you sexual questions or make inappropriate sexual comments
- asking to perform sexual requests on webcam without consent and/or makes you watch them perform sexual acts
- sharing private images or videos with others without your consent

Sources: NSVRC (2024), KIDSHELPPHONE (2023)

What are the risks?

When we post something online we can never be sure who can access it. This is why it's important to be informed about online safety, especially the risks such as:

- Being manipulated; on online platforms it's very easy to lie about your intentions and pretend to be someone else just to gain another person's trust.
- Personal information being used against you; once you give out any personal information online there is always a risk for it being used for someone else's gain.
- Losing control; sharing information gives control to someone else. Once you send something out you typically can't undo it.

Sources: Homeland Security (2024), National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (2023), NCMEC (2025)

Statistics

A CyberTipline through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children had a total of 36 million reports in 2023. The highest categorization of reports included possession, manufacture, and distribution of child pornography, online enticement of children for sexual acts, and unsolicited obscene material sent to children. It also outlined from 2021 to 2023 an increased reporting of online enticement more than 300%.

Source: NCMEC (2025)

How do I prevent this?

Youths: If you are feeling unsafe, targeted, or pressured by an online presence and/or exposed to unwanted content, block the account if possible and reach out to a trusted guardian.

Parents: Make a list of boundaries for online communication with what you are okay and not okay with. Consider rules that can help keep your child/children safe. For example, reviewing games and social media apps before letting your child/children download them.

Schools: Teach students how to prioritize their safety and comfort online, encourage them to go to a trusted adult if they have questions or need to talk. Spread awareness on the topic by bringing in speakers to talk with students. Teach students what to watch for, when to contact authorities, and where to go for help.

Communities: Share around prevention programs that members of the community can use to report activity and learn about prevention strategies that can be shared around. This can help create a safer environment in the community.

Sources: U.S. Department of Justice (2023), DOJ (2025)