CREATING A
SAFE ENVIRONMENT

This newsletter on Creating a Safe Environment is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children safe at home, at church and in all places in our community. We welcome article ideas and feedback. Contact communications@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee or volunteer of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, victims are encouraged to contact the victims' assistance coordinator:

DEBORAH HOUSEL
Phone (585) 328-3228, ext. 1555
Toll-free 1-800-388-7177 E-mail: dhousel@dor.org

RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
BivonaCAC.org / 585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8479 / chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795 / cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
cacfingerlakes.org / 315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization: d2l.org

Steuben County:
Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org / 716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
nyscarcc.org / 866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team: 585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6

Protecting Our Children from Strangers and Predators Online

Children can easily encounter predators online; and predators know the places children hang out online and how to develop online relationships with them. In this article, we cover the patterns typical of online predators, the likely places where children can encounter them, how you can minimize the risks of your child becoming a victim, and how to respond if you sense that your child is being targeted by an online predator.

Chances are that your child will never be the victim of an online predator. However, that doesn't mean that you or your children should be naive. You and your children need to be smart about the reality today. We live in a networked, social world. Therefore the "places" where children can encounter strangers online is becoming increasingly complex. Online services and technologies are often "faceless." It's this online "anonymity" that makes technology an attractive vehicle for predators.

It can be easy for children to build relationships and develop trust with those they talk with online. Predators know this. They will use that anonymity to pretend to be something or someone that they aren't just to develop relationships with children.

Hopefully you've already talked with your children about the dangers of strangers. However, no matter how much you think you've talked about the topic of strangers and predators with your children, the reality is that youth are oftentimes naive and can be duped by bad people who use social engineering tricks. As part of your parenting toolkit, you need to know how online predators work, the places where children can potentially meet strangers online, and what to do if you feel that your child is being targeted.

Patterns of Online Predators

Online predators tend to follow certain behavioral patterns to find children. As parents,

you need to know some of these tendencies.

In general, online predators will tend to:

• Find places where children are. With today's technology, this means social networks, chat rooms, blogs, email, message boards and forums, IM, and any place where they can interact with children.

• Search Profiles. Children profiles on social network sites often include photos of themselves, their gender, age, and where they live. Children who make it a point to provide detailed profiles are providing predators with the information they are looking for.

• Seduce. Online predators will try to get attention, sympathy, and affection from children. It's not uncommon for targeted children to even receive physical gifts as part of this.

• Learn about children's interests. Predators will know about the latest movies, music, viral videos, hobbies, and other things that young people will be interested in.

• Be their friend. It may seem odd, but predators will make an effort to listen and sympathize with problems and issues that children may be dealing with.

• Gradually build to sexual content. Predators will gradually introduce sexual conversations, photos, and videos to try and break down children's inhibitions.

• Evaluate. Using the mechanisms above, online predators will often start to evaluate which children they will attempt to meet in person.

## Places where children can meet strangers online

There are some "places" in the digital world where children are more likely to come into contact with strangers and predators. The online services parents need to be most careful with are chat rooms, message boards and forums, social networking sites, instant messaging, and e-mail. These aren't the only services, however.

Mobile phone, computer apps and games have multiplayer capabilities over the Internet. It's common for youth to invite a complete stranger to be an opponent (or on the same team) with them. Networked apps and games oftentimes have chat and other features that predators could use. Therefore, don't assume that the seemingly innocent game that you allow your child to play isn't also capable of connecting your children to complete strangers.

How to minimize the risk

There are a number of proactive steps to take. We suggest you think about the following in your family:

• Talk to your children about online strangers and predators. It's a very scary topic, but don't pretend that online dangers are non-existent. When you talk to your children about strangers make sure they understand that strangers exist both in the real world and the online world.

• Secure your devices and home network with parental controls. Use parental control solutions for computers, mobile phones, and other devices.

• Don't bypass age limits on sites. It's not a mistake if you don't see your child's age listed. Most social networks and chat sites do not allow children under 13 to join. Never bypass a site's age restrictions as you are also bypassing age-specific protection features. If your kid isn't of age to use a certain site, then they shouldn't use it. Parents should never help their children create accounts if they are not of age.

• Don't allow young children to use chat rooms and message boards. When they are older and they are interacting with others online, monitor what they are doing, what they are talking about, and who they are talking with. Make sure you know what
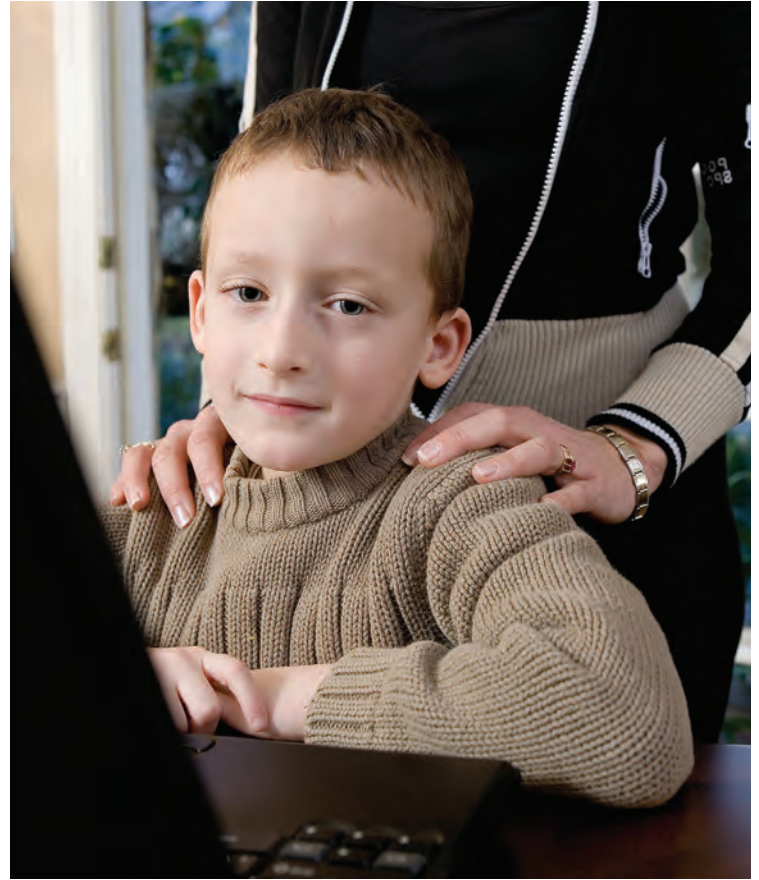
message boards, social networks, groups, and chat rooms they are involved with. Children can use public chat rooms and message boards, but they should not be engaging in private, one-on-one conversations online in private chat rooms that cannot be monitored.

• Keep and use computers and Internet-enabled devices in a public area. This simple yet powerful step helps you know and monitor what's happening in your family's digital world. It's more difficult for your child to talk to a stranger online if the computer, gaming device, or mobile phone is used in a public space in your home. Guide them by making it a habit to be with your child when they are online. If they are using computers outside of your home, such as at the library, school, or a friend's home, find out what parental controls are on those computers and how they are being monitored.

• Be smart with email. Young kids should be using kid-friendly email services that allow parents to monitor and approve emails. Young children should not have their own email accounts through the major email services. Some parents setup family email accounts that they can monitor.

• Don't respond to strangers. Teach your children that they should never respond to instant messages, text messages, "friend requests" on social networks, or emails from people unknown to them. In fact, they should tell you immediately if they receive any communication from someone they don't know.

• Act quickly; but act with love. Even if you were to follow every possible precaution, your child still might become the target of a predator. Love your children. Don't blame them. Predators are the ones actively seeking out children and predators are always the ones responsible. Above all, act quickly. Follow the steps outlined below if you think your child is being targeted.

Tips your children should know to avoid predators and strangers

Children should have the right smarts when it comes to avoiding predators and strangers online. They need to be able to talk to a trusted adult. Preferably, it should be you. Cultivate that loving relationship and safe environment. However, sometimes they might not feel comfortable coming to you. Therefore, let them know its OK to approach a school counselor, teacher or principal.

Children should tell you immediately if they see anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or frightened. They should never use screen names that reveal their gender, personal information or contain sexually suggestive words; they should never reveal their age, gender, or personal information about their family to anyone online or in online profiles. If they need to enter any information to create an account, then that information should be restricted and private so that no one else can see it – and you should review it.

Children should immediately tell their parents or a trusted adult if anyone online starts to ask for their personal information or becomes sexually suggestive. All online communication with that person should stop immediately.

Children need to know that if something sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. They need to keep their smarts about them and not be duped by social engineering tricks others may use on them.

What to do if you feel your child is being targeted

Thinking that your child is being targeted by a predator can be absolutely terrifying. However, there are recommended steps to take if you feel that this is, in fact, the case:

• Contact law enforcement. Local law enforcement is trained to deal with online predators. Do not delay in contacting them and do not be afraid to contact them. The police are there to support you and your family in situations involving online predators.

• Check devices for sexually-themed communication. Check computers, smart phones, and gaming devices for pornographic files or sexual communication. These tend to be warning signs.

• Save evidence. If your child receives sexually explicit photos/videos or is being sexually solicited through email, social media, instant messaging, or any other means, then save that evidence. Pass that evidence onto local law enforcement immediately.

Article courtesy of FaithandSafety.org, a joint project of the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO PROTECT AGAINST ONLINE PREDATORS

A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety:
http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide

Microsoft's Family Safety Center:
http://www.microsoft.com/security/family-safety/predators.aspx\

Google Safety Center
https://www.google.com/safetycenter/

5 Steps to Communicating with your Child about Abuse and Safety

90% of children are sexually abused by someone they know, love or trust.

Open communication is essential to ensuring family safety between parents and their children. Often it is difficult for both adults and children to discuss family safety and child abuse when fear is the driving force of the conversation. There is far less damage that can be done to a child who has been given a foundation of self-protection and self-awareness.

Those who abuse children often target a child's lack of knowledge about their bodies, personal boundaries and sex. Parents must give their children a foundation teaching them to value their bodies and empowering them to know they have a choice about how others treat them. Parents can follow these five guidelines to effectively begin the conversation.

1. Setting the Tone

Timing is key to having the conversation. Identifying an appropriate time to connect is usually a time when no other apparent distractions exist. Parents should plan to use a warm neutral tone to avoid the child experiencing or perceiving anxiety, fear or shame.

2. Reassuring the Child

Reassurance must then be established between the parent and child. Parents should first identify who trusted adults are in the child's life. It is important for parents to stress that it is ok if the child does not feel comfortable telling them certain things and that if anything happens the child can always go back to the identified list

of trusted adults and tell them when there is something wrong.

3. Creating Understandable Guidelines

Personal/body safety guidelines should then be determined including the manageable steps that a child can take.

Some topics to include in your discussion:

- Review safety tips and common lures used by offenders (resource: http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/documents/ProtectingYourChildren.pdf).
- Explain that the child should not accept a ride, gift or invitation from any adult without their parent's permission or consent. This applies to both strangers and non-strangers.
- Use proper names for body parts, like penis, vagina and breasts. Giving nicknames for body parts sends a message to the child that you are uncomfortable talking about them.
- Talk to your child about the differences between secrets and surprises and help them understand that if someone tells them to keep a secret, they should tell you in order to avoid manipulation by a perpetrator.
- Talk about boundaries: "No one should touch your private parts, those are yours."; "It's not ok for someone to show you their private parts."; "It's ok to tell someone NO if they want to touch you, even if they are a grown up."
- Teach children healthy touching: a handshake, pat on the back, high-five, a side hug.
- Teach children it is their prerogative what touch they receive, just as it is others' right to refuse or accept their touches as well. This should include anyone in their lives, including family members, friends and other peers.
- Don't force your child to hug or kiss anyone when they are uncomfortable with it. While this may seem awkward with relatives and other important people, you can explain that you are teaching your child healthy body boundaries.

- Tell young children to yell "stop" and to tell an adult if someone hurts or touches them in an uncomfortable way. Create an example or two and ask them to practice yelling "stop!" in front of you.

4. Balancing the Known Threat with Unknown

While it is important to talk about the dangers strangers can present to children, 90% of children are sexually abused by someone they know, love or trust. It is important to go beyond teaching them not to talk to a stranger, go with a stranger or accept things from strangers. Children should be taught to tell their caregiver if anyone tries to harm them or makes them feel uncomfortable, even if it is a family member. If the child's caregiver is the offender, they should tell one of their identified trusted adults. Remind your child that if anyone tricks them into a confusing touch, that it is not their fault and they should come to you for help.

5. Keeping the Door Open for More Questions

Ongoing open conversations are a good way to let your child know you are willing to talk about the subject. Personal safety talks also can become more detailed as your child or teen ages. The important thing to establish with your child is for them to come to you with questions about anything that they are confused or worried about. Your child may not have any questions at first, but as they hear information from friends at school or on television they may need to talk about their fears. Making safety discussions a series of connecting conversations instead of one big talk allows your child to process situations fully and maintains open and healthy communication.

Article courtesy of the Bivona Child Advocacy Center/ Rochester

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE OR CHILD SAFETY
· visit **Bivona Child Advocacy Center's website** at www.BivonaCAC.org or call (585) 935-7800

MORE ONLINE RESOURCES
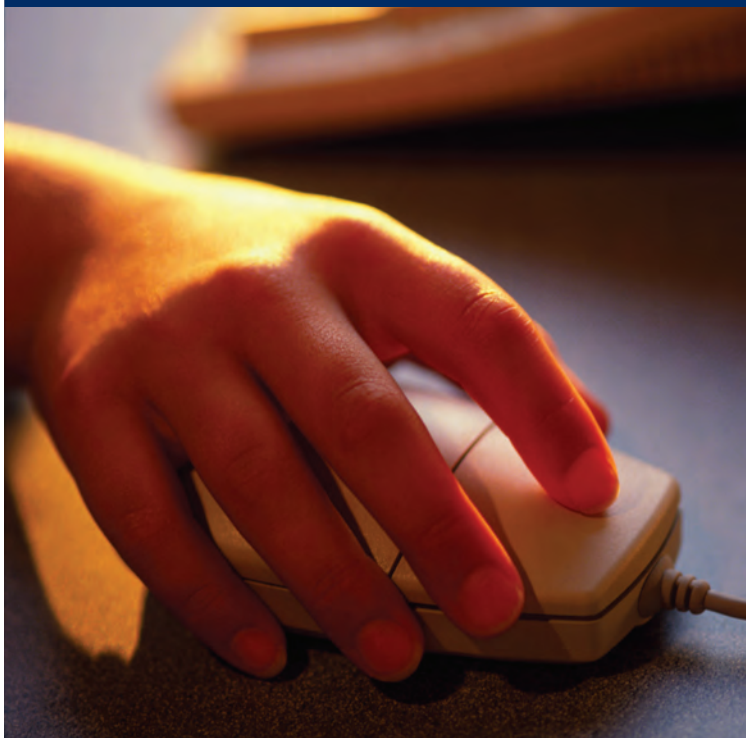
CHILDREN & TEENS' INTERNET SAFETY SITES:

Webronauts Internet Academy:
http://pbskids.org/webonauts/
PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens: http://www.nsteens.org/
A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media
https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns
A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute: http://www.fosi.org/

iKeepSafe: http://www.ikeepsafe.org/
Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety: http://www.faithandsaefty.org
Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America