

**Online
Predators:**
What You
Need To
Know To
Protect Your
Child Today.



BEAU BIDEN FOUNDATION[®]
FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

The Internet and social media platforms have kicked the doors wide open for child predators to hunt, lure, and groom victims online.

Every day there are at least 500,000 predators online. 1 in 5 children report they've been solicited or contacted by a predator in the last year.

Chances are a child you know has had this experience. It's frightening to think about and terrifying for a child caught in a predator's trap.

How do predators find children online?

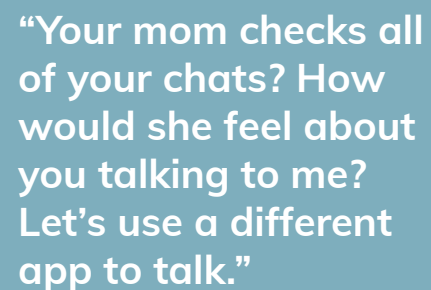
Oftentimes children inadvertently fall into the traps set by predators. 46% of children give information away about themselves online – perfect tools for predators to use to identify victims, build trust and establish relationships around shared interests.

How it starts:

A predator targets a child in a public chat, on a social media platform or in an online game. The predator may comment on a social media post or send a direct message. To gain trust, predators will typically lie about their age – they may adopt a persona that's just a bit older than the potential victim.

Conversations start innocently enough, and a predator may offer small tokens of appreciation, praise, or a willingness to listen at any hour. As the connection develops over time, the predator will offer the child small gifts – in the case of online gaming, the resources or currency used in the game. Perhaps it's a gift card or something seemingly innocent the child may not be able to purchase themselves.

Predators then take the conversation further by asking more private questions, often in a different, more secretive app to test the child's boundaries. Questions turn more personal, as they ask about other relationships the child has – with parents, friends, teachers, other adults. Predators use this information to build walls between a child and peers in their lives to further isolate them.



“Your mom checks all of your chats? How would she feel about you talking to me? Let's use a different app to talk.”



How it progresses:

The goal of the predator is to establish a secret or special relationship with the child – a relationship the child protects.

Once boundaries are tested, the bond is strengthened and the child protects the predator instead of themselves - the predator then begins to slowly sexualize the interactions with the child. As discussions turn sexual, the predators plays to a child's natural curiosity about sexuality: the predators may share nude or partially nude images of themselves or of other children. Discussion around sexual activity primes the child for ongoing sexual conversations.



The predator will likely begin to ask for sexually explicit images and/or videos of the child.

Unfortunately, children will often share explicit images or videos of themselves – from partially clothed to fully nude.

*** Once a child shares images and videos, the predator now has another form of control over a child: the predator threatens to share the images with parents or friends in order to force the child to provide more images and videos. This is known as **sexortion - and it's illegal.****

The key here is power and control – online predators seek to exert control over their victims. From monopolizing the child's time to shaming the child into providing explicit images, the predator moves the relationship from emotionally dependent to emotionally controlling and abusive.

How to help prevent it:

The Internet has granted predators unparalleled and open access to children and sexual content about children. The “Wild West” of the Internet is not a thing of the past – it is rampant with criminal activity and it is up to us to combat online predators. You probably wouldn’t be comfortable with your child playing Frisbee with a 35-year-old stranger - but they’re playing with adults they don’t know online every day.

Please review the tips and questions below to help get the online safety conversation started with your children. We also encourage you to maintain an open and honest dialogue around Internet usage with your children as they get older – the conversation with your 6-year-old is not the same conversation with your 16-year-old.

» Things you can do:

- Pay attention to items your child may have that you did not provide, such as a mobile phone, gift cards, or clothing.
- Ask yourself if your child is being secretive about online activity.
- Talk to your child about online predators in the same way your parents talked to you about “stranger danger” – but be specific.
- Talk to your child about what they’re sharing online. Help them understand how personal information can be used by predators to begin a conversation or establish trust.
- Talk to your child about how to shut down a conversation with someone they suspect is a predator. For example, if your child is asked for their home address, suggest they respond with the address of a local police station.
- Monitor your child’s device. Know what apps they’re using, and the chat functions those apps have built in to them.
- Read their chats.



Things predators may say and that you should be warning your children about.

- Why don’t we talk privately, in a different app?
- Do your parents check your phone or read your conversations?
- Are you a model? You could be, and I can help you with that.
- What’s on your mind? You seem upset – anything you want to talk about?
- Can we meet? Where? (Public places are not safe to meet someone they don’t know.)
- Do you like movies? What kind of music do you like? I love that!



»» Questions you can ask:

You will probably be angry – with your child and yourself. Remember that your child is scared and needs your guidance. Things may have escalated quickly – or slowly. Your child lost control of the conversation. Take a deep breath, remember they are a child and calmly ask:

- Do you remember when this started?
- Do you think you may have told anyone else about your conversations? Did you save any of them?
- Do you remember if you've shared any information like our address, your school, your hobbies or activities?
- Have you sent any pictures?

Your child may not know or remember the answers to these questions – and that's ok.

»» What to do if your child is a victim?

1. Call the police.
2. Take screenshots of the chats, save the communication your child has had with the predator.
3. Block the predator.
4. Report the predator to the app or platform.
5. If your child shared any nude or partially-nude images, contact the CyberTipline at 1-800-THE-LOST or www.CyberTipline.org



Conclusion

I hope the ideas and tips in this eBook help you better understand how predators use social media platforms and the Internet to find, lure and groom children.

The Internet is a very dangerous place for children. As parents and caregivers, it's our responsibility to protect children from dangerous situations and empower them to stand up for themselves.

You might be wondering what you should do next. I have a suggestion: Take a look at the list below of 15 Apps Parents Should Know, and then talk to your child about the apps they have on their device. Then, if you haven't already, download our free [Electronic Device Agreement](#). Review it with your child and have them sign it. In my experience (as a parent and as a former prosecutor), having rules and expectations written down really helps.

You can also find more free resources at www.BeauBidenFoundation.org/Resources, and our eBook "[Seven Things You Don't Know About Your Child's Digital Life](#)".

Our team is always here to answer any questions you may have. Feel free to email me at PDL@beaubidenfoundation.org.

Thank you!

Patricia Dailey Lewis, Esq. Executive Director
Beau Biden Foundation for the Protection of Children

» **15 Apps Parents Should Know** Potential harm can come from anywhere — some social media apps can open doors to predators. Please review these 15 apps with your family and have open conversations with your children and teens about how they spend their time on their smartphones and tablets. (Courtesy of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office - updated July 2019)



MeetMe - Dating app that allows users to connect with others based on geographic location



Badoo - Dating and social media app for sharing photos and videos



Holla - Video chat app that allows users to meet people all over the world



Grindr - Dating app geared towards LGBTQ community that uses phone's GPS location to find others



Bumble - Similar to Tinder, but requires females to make first contact



Whisper - Anonymous social network that promotes sharing secrets with strangers



Skout - Location-based dating app that lets users share private photos



Snapchat - Photos and videos shared to the app typically disappear within 24 hours



Ask.fm - Encourages users to allow anonymous people to ask them questions



WhatsApp - Messaging app that allows users to connect worldwide



KIK - Anyone can contact and direct message other users on the app



Calculator% - One of many secret apps that is used to hide photos, videos and browser history



TikTok - Popular app for kids that allows users to create and share short videos



Live.Me - Streaming video app that broadcasts users exact location



Hot or Not - Users can rate profile photos and chat with strangers