

The Internet Part 4

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In a 6 part series, I have been discussing the findings of *Online Solicitation of Children: A Report Regarding the Use of the Internet to Facilitate the Commission of Sex Crimes Including Recommendations for Ensuring Child Safety*. In previous articles I have looked at the sex crimes that are committed on the internet, the victims of these crimes, and the prevalence of these crimes. In this issue I will focus the attention on the actual offenders of internet sex crimes.

Such as any sex offender, there is no set demographic or stereotype of who an internet sex offender is. As members of the community we have to discount any preconceived notions that have about sex offenders. They are not dirty old men in trench coats and they are not some stranger offering candy. In more than half of the internet sex crimes, the offender is someone that the child knows. A majority of offenders are male and they come from all different races and socioeconomic backgrounds. The one constant attribute is that they have a good understanding of computers. These individuals have all the latest equipment and are up to date with latest terminology and “lingo”. The one thing to always remember is that anyone is capable of being a sex offender.

Many offenders are patient. They prepare a potential victim by establishing a relationship, building trust, which then turns into intimacy, and eventually sexual contact. What the internet has allowed is that an offender can get close to a potential victim in half the time. The offender will target victims by getting on child friendly sites that will allow the offender to find vulnerable emotional immature children. In some cases the offender will pretend to be a child or the offender will just be an understanding “cool” adult. The offender will initiate a conversation with the child in a public forum. The conversation will focus on school, hobbies, parental relationships, or other child interests. The purpose of this is to establish a close relationship. The child will be praised and made to feel special. The whole goal is to establish trust and control.

The conversation will then be pulled into private sites or messages. At this point the discussion will begin to change. Boundaries will now be tested. The child will begin to be asked personal questions regarding their body or other issues. The offender’s next step depends on the reaction of the child. By this point the child needs to report the individual. Sadly in some cases the child has developed a relationship with the offender and will respond to their questions. At this point the offender will begin a more sexually suggestive dialogue. The offender may also ask for photos of the child or may even send photos of him/herself.

The internet offender is very good at what they do. They are experts at getting in close to their targets. In part 6 of this series we will discuss how a parent can help deter online offenders. In part 5, the focus will be on the most prevalent of all online sex crimes, child pornography.