



# EDUCATOR GUIDE TO ONLINE EXPLOITATION AND DIGITAL SAFETY



## PREDATORS PREY WHERE KIDS PLAY!

Every person in the world, including children, flourishes in a positive support system. With the increase and transition to remote learning, kids are spending more time away from those positive support systems, making them more vulnerable to negative influences.

**We can't monitor our kids 24 hours a day, but we can gain knowledge on these issues to protect our youth while they are using technology.**

As an educator, share the following guidance with your peers and students to ensure online safety for our youth.

**If not monitored, the internet and social media can be dangerous places for young people.**

Over the past several years, authorities have seen an increase in the number of cases involving children and teens being threatened and coerced into sending explicit images. With this in mind, let's look at some online practices that educators should be aware of.



**Students have a desire for attention, self-discovery, and validation through adolescence and puberty, and are at a greater risk than ever of becoming a victim of online predators.**

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

## ONLINE GROOMING

Online grooming is a term used to describe the tactics abusers use digitally to sexually exploit minors with a power dynamic over them to take advantage of them. It can happen quickly or over time. **Online grooming relies on exploiting a child's insecurities and trust to shift expectations of what safe behavior is.** These "relationships" often result in leveraging fear, shame, and threats to keep a child silent.



## SEXTING



Sexting is sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually obscene messages, nude photographs, or videos. There's no such thing as risk-free sexting. The biggest risk is messages being forwarded, posted, or shared without consent.

### Some risks of sexting include:

- **Permanency:** a student can't "unsubscribe" a sext.
- **Blackmail (Sextortion):** sexual messages could be used to manipulate a student in the future.
- **Emotional health:** if someone shares a student's message without their consent, it could affect their mental and emotional well-being.
- **Physical safety:** a student could be harassed or bullied.

## DID YOU KNOW THIS IS A FELONY?

The Alabama Child Pornography Act makes it a felony to produce (create), distribute, or possess obscene images, videos, and other materials that depict a minor younger than 17 engaged in an act of sexual conduct or lewd exhibition of nudity of the breasts or genitals."

Production of Obscene Matter is a Class A Felony. (Ala. Code Sections 13A-12-197, 13A-5-11 Possessing Obscene Matter is a Class C Felony. (Ala. Code Sections 13-12-192, 13A-5-11). Convictions under the Alabama Child Pornography Act are sex offenses.

## BUYING DRUGS ONLINE

Buying illegal drugs online is now common among youth. Unknowingly, they buy and take these drugs laced with lethal substances, like fentanyl. Fentanyl can be added to pills incorrectly labeled as common pain, anti-anxiety, ADHD, or other prescription medications, potentially leading to overdose or death.

## CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is an aggressive, threatening, or mean-spirited activity conducted via electronic communication (email, social media posts, text messages, etc.). This includes body shaming and hate/bias speech.



## PORNOGRAPHY

In today's digital world, pornography is easily accessible on any digital device. **Exposure to porn at a young age gives kids a misrepresentation of reality.** Porn depicts relationships as meaningless.

The average age kids are being exposed to porn is 11 years old. Many kids are being exposed as young as five years old. Some kids watch porn and then act out these sexual acts on their younger siblings or school peers.



## ONLINE GAMING AND PRIVACY

**As kids use online games, there are those who want to harm them in these digital spaces.**

Make sure kids know who is and isn't appropriate to connect with online. Games and apps are designed to be addictive! These are just a few of the many games that can be harmful, but any game that has an open chat or direct messaging feature makes it easy for a child to be contacted and taken advantage of.

The metaverse is a digital world that allows virtual user engagement by mixing social networking, online gaming, augmented reality, and virtual reality. There are numerous metaverses in this digital space with few rules and new, confusing issues. Imagine a world where a child is virtually "groped" by someone walking around the virtual world, or the increased availability of virtual reality porn via VR goggles with few parental controls. Kids should never create usernames that are derivatives of their real names, or that reveal any other personally identifiable information.

**Predators take bits and pieces of information from games and other sources to access additional information about kids online. Once this information is gained, they use it to contact kids with inappropriate messaging, or even face-to-face meetings that could lead to exploitation.**

ROBLOX

Discord

XBOX

FORTNITE

Meta

## TALKING POINTS FOR YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS .....



### BE INVOLVED

Make it a priority to be involved with your students' lives. Be aware of who they are interacting with online through games and apps.



### IMPORTANCE OF PRIVACY SETTINGS

Share with them about the importance of having the correct privacy settings being used in all apps and online gaming platforms and encourage them to talk with their parents, or trusted adult, to set these privacy settings.

### MANDATORY REPORTER

As a mandatory reporter, be sure to document and report anything about your student, or their surroundings, that may be a sign of harm, neglect, or exploitation. If a student comes to you regarding a sexually explicit image they received, let them know not to share it and to delete the images. Have an open conversation with your student and their parents about your school's reporting protocol. Otherwise, the consequences could be even more severe. **The owner of a phone, computer, or device with nude photos of anyone underage stored on it could be charged with possession.** If the photos go to someone in another state (which happens easily), there could be federal felony charges. [Children's Trust Fund Overview on Mandatory Reporting and Erin's Law.](#)



## CREATE A SAFE SPACE

**Fear of getting in trouble is a major factor in a child's decision to avoid asking for help.** Online predators and exploiters know this, and a child will often be subjected to prolonged sexual abuse rather than risk discovery by a parent or teacher. If a student has engaged in sending explicit posts, or receiving them, remain calm and supportive. The student is likely the victim of a crime and needs your support and protection, not criticism or punishment. Talk to their parents or caregivers and consider seeking help from a therapist or counselor if any incident causes you to be concerned about the mental health of your student.

## PROMOTE DIGITAL WELLNESS

**Talk with your students about setting boundaries with their technology. Creating healthy tech habits is an important part of protecting your students online and in your classroom.**

## TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS

**Keep lines of communication open with your students.** Reinforce they can talk to you about any pressure they receive, that you will be supportive and non-judgmental, and you will help them.



# RESOURCES

## ALABAMA

[Alabama Family Central](#) is a collaboration of state agencies and partners supporting Alabama's families with resources, services, and more to help raise health, happy kids.

Call Childhelp at 800-422-4453 to report abuse. For Internet Safety resources, visit [Family Services of North Alabama](#).

The [Parenting Assistance Line \(PAL\)](#) provides helpful assistance to moms, dads, grandparents, caregivers, and anyone who wants to nurture a happy, health family. Whether you need a sympathetic ear or real resources, PAL's specialists are there for you! Available from 9am-4pm, Monday-Friday. Call, text, or use the online chat option. Messages can be left at any time. Call. 866-962-3030.

[NAMI Alabama Crisis Line](#): 800-273-8255.

[National Alliance on Mental Health \(NAMI\) – The Crisis of Youth Mental Health](#)

We need to listen to our young people. We need to commit to keep learning about what they are going through, and we need to invest in them. We can't afford to lose any more young people to suicide or to allow them to suffer in silence any longer. Our young people need us — and we need them. **Call NAMI Helpline at 800-950-6264 M-F, 9am-9pm CST. In a crisis, text "NAMI" to 741741 for 24/7, confidential, free crisis counseling.**

Watch and share our Digital Safety Videos.



## NATIONAL

Thorn for Parents ([Be Your Kid's Safety Net - Thorn for Parents](#)) puts more control into parents, and kids, hands. They offer discussion guides for talking to kids between the ages of 7 and 17. You can sign up for text alert reminders for conversations. These provide simple ice breaker conversation starters about the most difficult topics in today's digital world.

[NetSmartz](#) is NCMEC's online safety education program that provides age-appropriate videos and activities to help teach children be safer online with the goal of helping children to become more aware of potential online risks and empowering them to help prevent victimization by making safer choices on- and offline.

If you are aware your student might be, or is being exploited online, contact their parents or caregivers, and report through your mandatory reporting protocols. **You can call the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 800 800-THE LOST (800-843-5678) or make a report at CyberTipline at [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).** NCMEC's CyberTipLine is the nation's centralized reporting system for the online exploitation of children. All tips remain confidential. Available 24/7.

You can also email [gethelp@ncmec.org](mailto:gethelp@ncmec.org).



Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people between 10 to 24. Sometimes they feel as though their struggle is being underestimated by their age. But we need to listen to them and let them know help is available.

**Call or text 988.** Calls are confidential. Visit the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) any time.



**LEARN MORE AT:** [ctf.alabama.gov/digital-safety](http://ctf.alabama.gov/digital-safety)

Guide made possible by funding through the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention.