

# Online Predators

Ensuring the safety of children and young people online is one of the most significant issues facing parents, carers and educators today. Predators are sophisticated and utilise whatever means at their disposal to gain the trust of vulnerable children and young people and lure them to various harms. In order to combat this, it is essential to be aware of the hidden dangers of being online.

Young people are currently being targeted for sexual exploitation, radicalisation, bullying, money laundering, drug running, scams, terrorist activities, activism and many more illegal and harmful activities.

The tactics used by some predators can be broken down into steps to assist in identifying how people are targeted. These steps don't always happen in this order, however below is a guide to some of the steps used by predators.



Contact can be made anywhere that chat takes place online. This includes via: social media, gaming sites, photo sharing, YouTube and 100's of other sites. Often predators will pretend to be a friend of a friend or find a similar interest, such as games, to initiate the contact.

Online interactions are completely different to friendships offline. No one knows how old the person is, or if they are male or female. You don't know if you are talking to a computer chat app that someone has made to go looking for people to start chatting with. You don't have the same senses online that you have offline. These senses and your intuition offline are essential to let you know if you feel good about the person, if you feel safe with them or if you sense something isn't quite right. It is impossible to tap into these senses online. It is also impossible to know if you are a similar age or if they are male or female. Online meetings are not the same as offline meetings. Honesty and a sense of safety is especially difficult to glean when you are online.

Predators are known to use bots (robots programmed to run automatically across the web to complete specified tasks such as post to a public profile) to scan the internet looking for public profiles to send a message and initiate a chat. It can be difficult to know if you are responding to a bot or a real person. When a person responds to the bot, the predator can then take over and chat to the target. Bots are used to scan and contact thousands of profiles quickly.

## How to protect children online

Ensure all social media and gaming profiles are private. Most social media profiles are public until they are turned to private.

Where possible supervise any open forum chat. Often young people join chat rooms to get help with games, cheat sheets and computer settings. There are thousands of open forums online for gamers and interest groups.

## Suggested topics for discussion:

1. Identify the chat sites the child or young person is familiar with using.
2. Identify any gaming sites that allow multiplayer options. (Predators often approach children here.)
3. Identify the difference between public and private profiles.

This varies according to the site however, public profiles can be viewed by anyone allowing everyone to see personal details. Private profiles keep posts and details available to only those that have been befriended. Some sites allow for posts to be marked public or private.

4. Identify the setting to turn a profile setting to private.

Profile settings differ according to the site the young person is on. Each gaming and social media site has a help section to guide you on how to turn the settings to private.

## Step 2 We r friends

At this stage of the online contact, information is shared and the predator will like everything the young person likes. They will also try to find out information about them and appear to support them in everything they say. The idea is to create the perception of being likeminded and supportive. The aim is to quickly hook the young person into feeling understood, heard and believed. Open questions are asked to get the young person sharing information and this strategy allows the predator to collect details and find out as much information as possible about the child or young person, so they can target them subtly and covertly. Their behaviour is so sophisticated that children and young people are convinced they are a new friend interested in playing a game and getting to know them. It is rarely obvious that this is an adult trying to dupe and harm them.

### Suggested topics for discussion:

1. What is appropriate online chat?  
This may vary according to the age of the young person. Parent control monitoring programs may be appropriate.
2. Why would a stranger ask personal questions online?  
The aim of this question is to assist the young person in questioning what kind of questions are appropriate and to think about what information should go online.
3. When is it ok to chat online and to whom?  
This may vary according to the age of the young person.

## Step 3 Checklist

When a predator is targeting someone their success relies on gaining the trust of the target and not getting caught. To do this they look for any vulnerability in the young person so they can attempt to focus on it or fulfil it. If the person is lonely the predator may suggest chatting often. If the person is angry, they will agree and build on the anger or injustice to incite a stronger view point. They will run through a checklist of vulnerabilities until they find one that will work for them.

The predator will also start to check the environment of the child or young person and ask about who is around that may detect what they are doing. They will check who is at home, where the computer is in the house, what close friends the child may have and if the child or young person is likely to tell anyone about what they are doing or the online conversations they are having.

The predator is checking to see if they can gain the child or young person's trust and if they will get caught.

### Suggested topics for discussion:

1. Identify up to 5 safe people to discuss internet activity with.  
The aim of this question is to assist the young person in identifying who they have offline that can support them in their online activity.
2. Identify the difference between online chat and offline chat.  
When gaming online most chat is limited to the game and game tactics. When playing offline we have all the environment factors and our senses that add to a much fuller experience. Even when people have been playing a game with someone online for a long period of time they will still know very little about them and their life away from the game.

#### Step 4 U get me

The predator now has enough information to know if it is safe to introduce the topic that they are aiming to target the young person. The child or young person is comfortable and they have been lured into a false sense of trust and friendship. They've passed the predator's test. They are now a viable target for the predator.

The predator will introduce the topic and start normalising the behaviour that they are focusing on. These include: sharing naked pictures (child pornography), attempting a meet up for sexual abuse or child trafficking and money laundering.

If they are requesting photos and videos from the child or young person, they may say things like: "Have you seen all the naked pictures online". "Did you hear the story about the kids sending pics of themselves?"

They are targeting the child or young person for child exploitation material.

If they are recruiting for extremist groups they may start talking about things that are happening in the world.

They are targeting the child or young person for extremist groups.

If they want the child or young person to pick up a parcel they may start talking about how busy they are and the problems they are having.

They are targeting the child or young person for drug dealing.

### Suggested topics for discussion.

1. What are the differences between playing games for a long time online compared to offline?  
When gaming online most chat is limited to the game and game tactics. When playing offline we have all the environment factors and our senses that add to a much fuller experience. Even when people have been playing a game with someone online for a long period of time they will still know very little about them and their life away from the game.
2. In the money laundering example, did the targeted person really know where in the world the predator lived?
3. What words did the predator use to give the illusion of connection/relationship? Predators often use words such as bro, connection, we are so alike etc.
4. When would someone offline ask you to assist with the transfer of money?  
Offline friends never ask for assistance to transfer money or to take care of it.
5. Can you ever be sure if you are talking to a male or female online?  
It is very easy to disguise gender online. It is known that predators seldom send photos of themselves.

## Step 5 Trapped

Now that the topic has been introduced the target is lead into the trap and taken advantage of. This is the step when the predator gets what they want. They will continue to lavish the target with praise and emphasise the bond between them. They will promise great loyalty and commitment. They will deliver nothing but words and hope. The child or young person they targeted is now following their requests and getting nothing in return but someone who pretends to care.

Their 'target' child or young person is now exposed to a multitude of issues which include: sexual abuse, violence or being charged with criminal offenses.

### Suggested topics for discussion:

1. What are the possible endings to the boy's story?
2. How could the young person have protected himself?  
Possible options:
  - A. At the contact step he was invited to go to a private chat room. Would staying in the public chat room have protected him?
  - B. If he stayed in the public chat room would he have still received the help for this game that he was seeking?
  - C. Could he have asked his parents to go to the shops with him?
  - D. Could he have checked with an offline friend what they thought?
  - E. Are public places a safe way to meet?
3. How did the predator give him a false sense of security?  
The predator discussed his credit card security and spoke about the young person's safety and the need to meet in a public place. This gave the young person a false sense of security. Predators often talk about a fear to assist in giving the illusion of support, trust and understanding. This also gives the target a false sense of safety.
4. When is it ok to meet someone offline?  
It is always dangerous to meet someone offline that you have met online as there is no way or really being sure as to their intention and motivation.
5. Why would someone ask you to go private online?  
Asking someone to go to a private room is often a tactic used by predators so they can ask more personal questions without being seen.
6. When is it ok to go private online?  
There is usually no need to go private online. This can often be a red flag that there may be an ulterior motive.
7. What advice would you give to this 10 year old boy who was targeted in the video?



When the predator has finished getting what they want they will often disappear, start an argument or threaten the child or young person they targeted. This is when they may start blackmailing, exposing or humiliating the target.

This is the devastating stage when the fabricated trust is broken. The child or young person is left knowing they have been scammed, conned and groomed. This can be devastating. It is important when supporting children and young people to remind them that they are never to blame. This type of abuse is insipid and premeditated.

The aim is to make sure children and young people do not fall prey to these perpetrators. If they do, they need to know it is never their fault. Support and counselling is key to their recovery from such trauma.

**Suggested topics for discussion:**

1. Identify why it isn't the child or young person's fault.

Being scammed, conned, groomed, exploited, violated or targeted in any way is always the predator's responsibility. It is the predator that has the intent to harm, deceive and target the child or young person for their own advantage. Exploiting a person's vulnerabilities is a form of assault regardless of the age, culture, sexual orientation, education, gender or capacity of the person targeted.

2. Identify ways to protect yourself online.

Always check with someone offline about any online discussions. Keeping young children's computers in a public place. Keeping profiles private. Limit the information that goes online.

3. What information should you limit online to assist in protecting yourself?

Name, DOB, location, school, photos with location services turned on, (For more information search Geotagging) details of other family members, dates when you are going to be away.

For more information and child safety apps go to <http://www.kcomputerco.com.au>

