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School Closings Due to COVID-19 Present Potential for Increased Risk of Child Exploitation

Questions regarding this release should be directed to your [local FBI field office](#).

Due to school closings as a result of COVID-19, children will potentially have an increased online presence and/or be in a position that puts them at an inadvertent risk. Due to this newly developing environment, the FBI is seeking to warn parents, educators, caregivers, and children about the dangers of online sexual exploitation and signs of child abuse.

Background

Online sexual exploitation comes in many forms. Individuals may coerce victims into providing sexually explicit images or videos of themselves, often in compliance with offenders' threats to post the images publicly or send the images to victims' friends and family.

Other offenders may make casual contact with children online, gain their trust, and introduce sexual conversation that increases in egregiousness over time. Ultimately this activity may result in maintaining an online relationship that includes sexual conversation and the exchange of illicit images, to eventually physically meeting the child in-person.

In order for the victimization to stop, children typically have to come forward to someone they trust—typically a parent, teacher, caregiver, or law enforcement. The embarrassment of being enticed and/or coerced to engage in unwanted behavior is what often prevents children from coming forward. Offenders may have hundreds of victims around the world, so coming forward to help law enforcement identify offenders may prevent countless other incidents of sexual exploitation.

Abuse can occur offline through direct contact with another individual. During these uncertain conditions, where time with other adults and caregivers has increased immensely, parents/guardians should communicate with their children about appropriate contact with adults and watch for any changes in behavior, including an increase in nightmares, withdrawn behavior, angry outbursts, anxiety, depression, not wanting to be left alone with an individual, and sexual knowledge.

Recommendations

Parents and guardians can take the following measures to help educate and prevent children from becoming victims of child predators and sexual exploitation during this time of national emergency:

Online Child Exploitation

- Discuss Internet safety with children of all ages when they engage in online activity.
- Review and approve games and apps before they are downloaded.
- Make sure privacy settings are set to the strictest level possible for online gaming systems and electronic devices.

- Monitor your children's use of the Internet; keep electronic devices in an open, common room of the house.
- Check your children's profiles and what they post online.
- Explain to your children that images posted online will be permanently on the Internet.
- Make sure children know that anyone who asks a child to engage in sexually explicit activity online should be reported to a parent, guardian, or other trusted adult and law enforcement.
- Remember that victims should not be afraid to tell law enforcement if they are being sexually exploited. It is not a crime for a child to send sexually explicit images to someone if they are compelled or coerced to do so.

Child Abuse Awareness

- Teach your children about body safety and boundaries.
- Encourage your children to have open communication with you.
- Be mindful of who is watching your child for childcare/babysitting, playdates and overnight visits.
- If your child discloses abuse, immediately contact local law enforcement for assistance.
- Children experiencing hands-on abuse may exhibit withdrawn behavior, angry outbursts, anxiety, depression, not wanting to be left alone with a specific individual, non-age appropriate sexual knowledge, and an increase in nightmares.

Victim Reporting

Reporting suspected sexual exploitation can help minimize or stop further victimization, as well as lead to the identification and rescue of other possible victims. If you believe you are—or someone you know is—the victim of child sexual exploitation:

- Contact your local law enforcement agency.
- Contact your [local FBI field office](#) or submit a tip online at tips.fbi.gov.
- File a report with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-843-5678 or online at www.cybertipline.org.

When reporting, be as descriptive as possible in the complaint form by providing as much of the following as possible:

- Name and/or user name of the subject.
- Email addresses and phone numbers used by the subject.
- Websites used by the subject.
- Description of all interaction with the subject.
- Try to keep all original documentation, emails, text messages, and logs of communication with the subject. Do not delete anything before law enforcement is able to review it.
- Tell law enforcement everything about the online encounters—we understand it may be embarrassing for the parent or child, but providing all relevant information is necessary to find the offender, stop the abuse, and bring him/her to justice.

[More information about the FBI's guidance on child sexual exploitation and protecting your kids.](#)

For up-to-date information and accurate information about COVID-19, visit coronavirus.gov, cdc.gov/coronavirus, and usa.gov/coronavirus.