

// SAFEGUARDING RESOURCE · FOR EDUCATORS

Spotting Online Exploitation & Abuse: A Guide for **Educators**

Each year, **one in five children** receives an unwanted sexual solicitation online. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) covers a broad range of criminal acts in which minors are exploited for sexual gratification or other personal or financial gain. Knowing the warning signs means you can support victims and report the crime if it happens to a child in your care.

// SPOT THE SIGNS

Children and teens experiencing online CSEA often show the general signs that something is wrong — unexplained changes in mood or behavior, slipping academic performance, or signs of self-harm. Signs more specific to online CSEA include a child or teen who:

- Becomes possessive of their phone or devices, and agitated or fearful if anyone else looks at them; starts using a second phone or another student's phone.
- Spends growing amounts of time online or on social media while withdrawing from their in-person friend group.
- Talks vaguely about a new friend but won't share anything more about them.
- Misses more and more school to talk with online "friends," cancels plans, or drops after-school activities they used to enjoy.
- Receives gifts or unexplained money but won't say where it came from or who gave it to them.

These are common indicators — but every child responds differently to exploitation and abuse. Take note of any behavior that seems out of the ordinary.

// HOW TO REPORT

Act immediately if you know or suspect a student or child in your care is a victim of online CSEA. Follow your school and state protocols for mandatory reporting — and also submit a report through one of these channels:

- **Know2Protect Tipline: 833-591-KNOW (5669)** — information is reviewed and referred to Homeland Security Investigations field offices for potential investigation.
- **Local, state, or tribal law enforcement** directly — call **911** in an emergency.
- **CyberTipline report** with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC): report.cybertip.org

Statistic source: justice.gov/usao-edtx/project-safe-childhood

// RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE

How to **Respond** as an Educator

If a child or teen you know has experienced online CSEA, your response matters enormously. The single most important message: **what happened is not their fault** — even if they feel like it is. The guidance below reflects input from survivors of online CSEA and the investigators who work these cases.

// ALWAYS

- Listen without judgment and be empathetic.
- Validate that you believe them and want to help.
- Empower them to stop the abuse by reporting it — reporting is the best way to make it stop.
- Act immediately on any signs of self-harm or suicidal thoughts.
- Reassure them they are not in trouble with law enforcement and it's not their fault.
- Walk them through reporting and saving all messages, photos, and videos.
- Offer to be there when they tell a parent or trusted adult, or meet with law enforcement.
- Help identify people they can talk to — a parent, counselor, or friend.
- Follow school and state mandatory reporting protocols.
- Know that help is available regardless of the language they speak or their immigration status.

// NEVER

- Engage with the online predator — leave that to law enforcement while you focus on the victim's needs.
- Press for a detailed disclosure or specifics of the abuse — leave that to law enforcement or other professionals.
- Share the situation with more people than necessary.
- Respond with anger or become overly emotional.
- Shame, blame, or judge the child for what happened.
- Use scare tactics that make the child regret coming forward.
- Delete messages, images, or videos.

If you know or suspect a child in your care is a victim of online CSEA, act immediately: dhs.gov/know2protect/how-to-report

// RESOURCES

Survivor support: Know2Protect shares resources and tips for helping victims of online CSEA — dhs.gov/know2protect/survivor-support

Take It Down: NCMEC's free service helps remove online nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before age 18 — takeitdown.ncmec.org

Adapted from "Tips2Identify" and "How2Respond for Educators," published by Know2Protect®, a U.S. Department of Homeland Security campaign against online child exploitation. Learn more at know2protect.gov. Presented in this format by getintocyberjobs.com, a free K-12 cybersecurity education resource.