



February 2026

PATH EDUCATION

The following article contains references to sexual exploitation and other sensitive topics. Please take care while reading and prioritize your well-being.

The digital world has created incredible opportunities for communication, but it has also introduced new risks. Among the most concerning trends is the use of coded language by both teenagers and online predators. These codewords can conceal sexual conversations, hide intentions from parents or authorities, and allow predators to groom victims or communicate with other offenders without detection.

Some of what used to be considered texting slang has made its way into modern day IRL (in real life) speak. Aura and Rizz were 2025-2026 additions to the Webster Dictionary, but there are countless more codewords kids use to communicate, particularly about sexual activity.

A recent Department of Justice paper on Technology highlights these issues as well as how technology allows predators to target victims using codewords. See highlights from the report below:

Teen Use of Codewords for Sexual Topics

Teenagers have always used slang to discuss sensitive topics, and the internet has amplified this behavior. Today, many teens use abbreviations, emojis, or seemingly harmless phrases to talk about sex or sexual activity. These coded expressions serve several purposes. First, they help teens avoid embarrassment when discussing personal topics. Second, they provide a sense of privacy, especially when communicating on platforms where parents or others might see their messages.

More importantly, codewords allow teens to bypass content filters and monitoring tools designed to protect them. Messaging apps, social media, and gaming platforms make it easy to communicate quickly and privately.

Smartphones and apps allow users to “communicate by text, email, or countless apps,” giving offenders and youth alike constant access to digital conversations.

Because over half of U.S. children have their own smartphones by age 11, these coded communications often occur outside adult supervision.

What may appear to be harmless slang could actually represent sexual content, making it difficult for parents to recognize warning signs.

How Online Predators Use Code to Groom Victims

While teen slang can be concerning, the use of coded language by predators presents far more serious risks. Online predators frequently use codewords to identify vulnerable children, avoid detection, and manipulate victims.

Predators often begin by forming friendships and gradually introducing coded sexual language. In many cases, offenders pretend to be minors themselves to gain trust. For example, one offender persuaded at least 50 minors to produce sexual images by posing as a modeling agent or another child using social media and messaging apps.

Codewords help predators test boundaries without alarming victims or triggering monitoring systems. These coded conversations may disguise requests for photos, meetings, or sexual acts.

Predator Communication with Other Offenders

Code is also used by predators to communicate with one another. The report notes that online communities allow offenders to “produce, sell, share, and trade child sexual abuse materials” and share knowledge about how to avoid detection.

These offenders often gather on encrypted messaging platforms, anonymous forums, and the dark web. These environments allow them to use coded language freely while hiding their identities. The dark web, in particular, enables offenders to build global networks where they can “discuss their predilections, share material, and hone techniques to avoid law enforcement.”

Some groups even require coded language or proof of illegal activity to join, further normalizing exploitation and making detection more difficult.

Why Codewords Make Detection Difficult

Codewords create significant challenges for parents, schools, and law enforcement. Encryption, anonymous apps, and constantly changing slang make it difficult to monitor conversations. Offenders may also move victims from safer platforms to more private ones to avoid detection.

Because coded language evolves rapidly, what is recognized today may be replaced tomorrow.

Conclusion

Codewords are now a normal part of online communication, especially among teens. However, they also serve as tools for predators to groom victims and communicate secretly with each other. Technology has created environments where offenders can hide behind anonymity, encryption, and coded language. Understanding these risks is critical. Parents, educators, and communities must remain aware that dangerous conversations may be hidden behind ordinary words. By increasing awareness and education, adults can better protect young people from online exploitation and ensure that coded language does not become a pathway to harm.

Think you or someone you know is a victim of exploitation, report the crime here: [NCMEC CyberTip Report](#)

Other articles that may be of interest:

[Examples of teen text speak codes](#)

[Example of teen sexual slang](#)

[California State University, San Bernadino article on AI detecting online predators](#)

[How dark web criminals' language gives them away](#)



The 5th Annual “Stop Human Trafficking Conference” was held on February 14th, 2026 at St. Paul Methodist Church. PATH’s Director of Programs, Jaime Thompson, was featured as a conference speaker, along with Teena Halbig with UNAKY and Jennifer Beagle with Her Hope Kentucky. Attendees learned about sex and labor trafficking and heard about the victims and survivors of these crimes. PATH’s presentation focused on human trafficking in digital environments with special emphasis on the drastic increase of children and adolescents being sexually exploited and trafficked while engaging with applications, gaming sites, and social media platforms. The conference offered attendees the opportunity to learn about current laws and policies that aim to prevent and respond to human trafficking, as well as current legislation proposed at the state and/or federal level that will increase protections and accountability.

[WAVE3 coverage](#)

[WHAS11 coverage](#)



Teena Halbig, UNAKY and Jaime Thompson, PATH

PATH hosted a Human Trafficking 101 virtual presentation for the University of the Cumberlands on February 18th, 2026. Students enrolled in criminal justice and social work programs participated in the 75 minute session. After the presentation, the 14 participants had the opportunity to ask questions about human trafficking signs and how to take action to report reasonable suspicions.

PATH IN THE BOARDROOM

PATH welcomed new board members at the end of 2025. PATH is proud to introduce you to Yamiley Antoine, one of our newest board members.



Yamiley Antoine, MSSW, LCSW

Yamiley graduated from Transylvania University with a bachelor's degree in Psychology and received her Masters in Social Work from the Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville. She is currently the Associate Executive Director at Family and Children's Place Child Advocacy Center.

Yamiley has received training from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the FBI, the National Criminal Justice Training Center, and the National Child Advocacy Center.



PATH's Board of Directors held a vote at the February board meeting to establish the next Chair Elect. Congratulations to Bonnie Wheeler, who will assume her chair elect duties immediately. The Board will vote in a new set of officers this summer. Bonnie will assume the Chair duties with that vote.



PATH AND YOU



The beginning of a new year is a great time to get organized and do all those little things we planned on doing at the end of last year. Maybe one of those items was signing up for Kroger Community Rewards and making PATH your beneficiary.

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or

Sign in to your account at kroger.com, go to My Account, Select Community Rewards from the left hand menu, search for PATH Coalition of KY, click Enroll.

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