

For Parents to Address Sexual Predators

When your teen tells you of something that bad happened online, or you notice something wrong with your teen (depressed, withdrawn, more secretive) and find out that someone online has victimized them, here are some guidelines to address the situation.

1. Remember that your teen has been the *victim* of an online sexual predator, someone capable of tricking, pressuring, and threatening your teen into cooperating with demands.
2. Reaffirm that you *love* them.
3. Reaffirm that they are *not* in trouble and that it is *not* their fault!
4. Ask them to tell you what happened. But do not get into much detail. Offer support.
5. ***Immediately*** call the police.
6. Do ***not*** look at the computer or cell phone, leave it all untouched for law enforcement. You do not want to see the communications. They will be vulgar in nature. Just focus on your teen's wellbeing and reiterate that you love them. Turn the computer and cell phone over to law enforcement immediately.
7. The ***best revenge*** is allowing law enforcement to catch the predator and prosecute them. This type of crime is not just a local offense but likely a federal offense. Allow law enforcement to do their job. There are likely many other victims who have not yet come forward. ***The last thing we want is for you to tip the predator that you are on to them.***

Remember that teens make mistakes, even when you tell them what to do or not to do. The most important thing is that they know you love them and will protect them. Helping them feel safe and loved is the most important thing. After law enforcement is involved, it is advisable to have your teen see a counselor or therapist to help them heal.

The emotions your teen likely will experience include but are not limited to:

1. ***Fear*** of the threats the predator made, fear of others finding out, and fear of loss of your support and love.
2. ***Shame*** for having kept a secret and for having cooperated and actively participated in the sexual activity/abuse.
3. ***Depression*** for the helplessness and despair they experience.
4. ***Anger*** for being taken advantage of.
5. ***Untrusting*** of others' intentions due to having been lied to and manipulated.
6. ***Dirty*** for the sexual abuse and of course for being blamed for it.

Contact a local therapist to provide support for your teen. Your family should also participate in sessions to help the entire family heal and be able to support the victim. Cooperate with law enforcement.