



the screen guardians

A PARENT'S ACTION GUIDE

What To Do If Your Child Is Victimized

From a Child Crimes Detective

THESCREENGUARDIANS.COM

This section will cover the best things you can do if you find that your child has become a victim of a child predator. The most important concept to remember is that pedophiles have turned grooming into a science. Your child was psychologically manipulated into this relationship and no blame should be placed on them. The worst thing you can do is make them feel guilty or as if they are somehow in trouble with law enforcement. The reality is, children of all backgrounds and with all different levels of morals and integrity have fallen prey to an experienced and practiced child predator.

As a Child Crimes Detective, the number of cases I've had complicated or even completely ruined by a well-intentioned parent has caused me to lose sleep. So, I've compiled a wish list of everything I'd like a parent to do if their child is victimized. Study this list. Print this list. Hang it up on your bathroom mirror. Because, if the time comes to use it, I promise you'll be stressed out and not quite thinking with your full mental faculties. You'll find yourself tempted to do some of the exact things I'm going to ask you NOT to do. But if you've taken the proper steps and studied this list, you'll avoid the most common mistakes and increase the chances I can identify and charge the suspect.

1 Don't Panic

Easier said than done, I know. But here's the deal. The damage is already done so going into panic mode won't help. Take a few deep breaths, hug your child, and ensure they know you love them even though they made a mistake. We can mitigate the damage of some nude photos or videos being sent to a suspect but we can't repair a damaged relationship between you and your child if you treat them like a suspect in this case. The only caveat to this is if you discover your child is missing and has potentially gone to meet with a suspect. That is the time for panic mode. Immediately call 911, inform them what your child was wearing, where you live, and have an up-to-date picture of your child to provide law enforcement when they arrive. Do not wait to do this. The longer you wait, thinking they'll come home or you can go out and find them, the closer you get to losing them forever. I don't mean to scare you, but the statistics show we only have an increasingly smaller chance of finding them with every hour that passes.

Also, consider linking all of your kids' devices to your account so you can see their location in live time. They will most likely take their device with them and you can set up your account through a service like Life360 to see a map containing a geolocation. Some parental monitoring apps will also allow you to monitor their messages. If this is the case, you can discover information about the suspect by reading through and providing law enforcement with their phone number, username, profile picture, etc.

My Top 4 favorite parental monitoring software applications are:

- Aura – Monitors online activity, online gaming, app usage, and online chatting. Gives cyberbullying and predator alerts, as well as online usage alerts and notifies you if the child deletes the application

- Bark – Monitors texts, emails, social media, and app usage. Gives alerts for predators, cyberbullying, suicidal ideation, sexting, and more

- eyeZy – Monitors keystrokes, social media chats, location, photos, videos, internet searches, bookmarks, call history, and more. It also allows you to set “safe” and “danger” zones where you get an alert if your child travels outside or to certain locations.

- mSpy – Monitors social media usage, sent/received SMS and iMessages, locations, keystrokes, calls, photos, videos, and browsing history. You can set alerts based on trigger keywords.

2 Take Their Phone!

Or whatever device they were communicating with the suspect on. Immediately place it into “airplane mode”! This will shut off the device’s connectivity to the network or internet, effectively rendering the phone frozen in its current state. This is vital because if the suspect gets alerted that law enforcement may become involved, they will immediately begin deleting evidence. Unfortunately, for them, when a phone is in “airplane mode” anything they delete on their end will not disappear on your end because the phone is unable to connect to the network and detect the change. Not only that, but your child will be unable to log into their social media accounts on a different device and delete things. They can still login and delete whatever they want, but the changes will not show up on the phone until it is taken out of airplane mode and reconnects to the network. A forensic examination will be done on the phone and all of the data will be extracted before it’s ever allowed to reconnect to the network and delete any data.

DON’T turn the phone off! Charge it to ensure it has 100% battery and leave it on airplane mode. Some data is stored in a temporary cache that is dumped when your phone is turned off and restarts. That temporary cache could contain deleted material that is recoverable, as long as it’s still present in the cache when the forensic examination is completed. If you’ve turned the phone off, it’s most likely gone forever.

3 Take Screenshots!

On an application like Whisper, messages can be deleted by either user and the message will no longer show up on either user’s message thread. So, if a suspect gets wind of law

enforcement involvement or that you may have found out about your child's dealings with them, they'll immediately start deleting everything. And believe me, these little perverts know what's on the line. So, they're extremely paranoid and will delete messages or entire apps with very little provocation. If you have the chance to take screenshots of the messages before anything is deleted and before the suspect knows you're involved, do it!

Some applications will notify the suspect that screenshots are being taken prompting them to freak out and delete, delete, delete. The Whisper App does NOT do this! And really, even if it did notify the suspect, by the time he figures out what is going on, you should have dozens of screenshots taken already.

And, yes, you need to take screenshots of the nude photos your child sent, as well as the tiny little micropenis the suspect photographed and sent back. I know it's uncomfortable but those images are THE evidence I need to charge a suspect with the sexual exploitation of your child!

4 Do NOT Block the Suspect's Account!

Your immediate reaction will be to block this pervert from ever contacting your child again. Unfortunately, this will often be your first reaction before you decide to contact law enforcement. Many parents don't want to involve law enforcement for fear of looking like bad parents or the embarrassment of a child engaging in this behavior. Some also don't trust law enforcement due to previous dealings or don't want their child to be treated like a suspect. The unfortunate reality is, trying to handle this situation yourself by blocking the suspect or trying to gather information about them will end with all of the evidence disappearing. Blocking a suspect's account will AUTOMATICALLY delete ALL of the messages, images, and videos exchanged between your child and the suspect. Again, that's BAD.

I can also promise you; your child will not be treated like a suspect. As I've said before in this guide, pedophiles have turned grooming into a science and children do not have the proper brain development or rational thinking to realize they're being groomed. They also naturally crave attention and validation. Your child is not the only one to have the wool pulled over their eyes and they won't be the last. The anonymity of most social media platforms also provides your child with what they think is a safe space. Your child will be treated with empathy and respect as the victim of sexual abuse, whether they were physically touched or not.

Lastly, even if you hate cops or have had bad dealings with them in the past, understand that we may disagree on a lot of things but we'll both agree that child predators are scum. We can forge a working relationship around that, right? I don't really particularly care what your criminal record is or if I've dealt with you in less-than-ideal circumstances in the past. That will absolutely not sway my ability to work with you respectfully to protect your child.

5 Do NOT Contact the Suspect Yourself!

This is a big one. In extreme examples, I've had parents try to seek out the suspect themselves and end up being hurt or arrested for committing an act of violence. While I'd love to be there while you beat on the pervert who exploited your child, I also want them to go to prison for a long period of time. I can't make that happen if you kick their ass, go to jail, and give them time to delete all the evidence. Not only that, but your child will be in a vulnerable state and in need of some gentle parenting after an incident like this. If you're in jail, how can you be there for them?

In less extreme examples, parents have contacted the suspect via whatever application their child was using and told them how terrible a person they are. I have some disturbing news for you... They already know and they genuinely don't care. You aren't going to shock them into behaving themselves by calling them a "chomo" or threatening to kill them. As a matter of fact, they'll probably thank you for letting them know you're now involved because they can begin deleting the evidence and get away without repercussion.

6 Give Me Access to the Phone... Please.

If your child is a victim and there is evidence on their phone, we'll need you to sign a Consent to Search Form in order to conduct the forensic download of data. Some parents are hesitant to do this because of privacy issues. Look, I'm trying to arrest a pedophile. I don't really care if your teen smokes pot or has two girlfriends. I promise you, nothing on your child's phone is going to shock me. I've seen it all. And without your consent, I cannot legally download any evidentiary data from their phone. Rendering the entire investigation useless. Unless your child is moving pounds of fentanyl from Mexico on behalf of El Chapo, you have nothing to worry about.

7 Disable Any Parental Controls

Prior to giving us the phone, disable any parental controls, screen time limits, or parental passwords that may cause issues with accessing apps. I'm glad you have them but they could cause issues with the forensic examination and we need unfettered access to the data. Plus... if they worked well your child probably wouldn't be in this predicament. So, review my prior list of good parental monitoring apps and pick a new one.

8 Set Up an Interview for Your Child

We will most definitely want to conduct an interview with your child. We'll allow you to pick the date and time (within reason) and we'll most likely come to you. I prefer to interview your child at your house instead of having them brought to the station because they're most comfortable at home and we don't want them to feel like they're in trouble. If they're young enough, sometimes

Detectives will have a forensic interviewer who specializes in interviewing children conduct the interview if they're not trained themselves.

The interview is very important, although I know it will make you uncomfortable to have your child recall all of the trauma they went through. The unfortunate reality is, I need every bit of detail I can get to ensure the suspect has no chance of finding a sympathetic juror or a judge who allows for "mitigation" leading to probation instead of jail time. It's hard for a juror or judge to be sympathetic to the suspect when your child provides details about how the suspect made them feel forced or coerced into providing sex videos during the conversation.

Lastly, as difficult as it will be, you need to allow me to interview your child without you present. I know, that grates on every protective nerve you have in your body. However, do you think your 14-year-old daughter is going to tell me the suspect coerced her into sticking a hairbrush into her anus on video if you're sitting there listening? The answer is no. They're already feeling embarrassed and ashamed. They will absolutely gloss over important details if they have to tell their story in front of a parent they don't want to disappoint.

9 Encourage Your Child to Cooperate with the District Attorney's Office

Going through court hearings and sitting in front of judges can be scary. Get with your District Attorney's Office and figure out your options for having your child testify. Sometimes the DA's Office can simply record your child's testimony privately and then play it for the jury if it's determined it would negatively affect your child's mental health to testify on the stand. However, they may tell you he/she needs to testify in person. If this is the case, get resources from the court system that will help guide your child. A Victim Advocate will be assigned and will help your child through the process. It won't be fun. Especially because they'll have to be in the same courtroom with their abuser. But it's necessary to ensure the suspect goes to prison for an extended period of time. With no victim testimony, it's very hard to get maximum penalties.

10 Visit www.takeitdown.com

Take It Down is a free service that can help you remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos taken of you, or your child, when you (or they) were under 18 years old. You can remain anonymous while using the service and you won't have to send your images or videos to anyone. Take It Down will work on public or unencrypted online platforms that have agreed to participate. This service is offered through the National Center for Exploited and Missing Children (NCMEC) works with Detectives directly to provide online "cyber tips" that provide information to us about potential child crimes. But the most impactful thing they do is work with you to get the images and videos removed from the Internet.

Users can anonymously submit hash values of online nude, partially nude or sexually explicit photos and videos depicting a child under 18 years old to NCMEC. NCMEC then shares these hash values with participating platforms to help remove the content. In 2022, the average take-down time following a NCMEC notification for image or videos was less than 2 days!

Not only this, but they can offer you services to help your child cope with the traumatic event of being exploited sexually. Their team can provide free assistance and support by discussing legal issues, providing counseling recommendations, identifying community support, and offering guidance on removing child sexual exploitation content from the Internet. They offer crisis intervention to families as well as local referrals to appropriate professionals for longer-term support.

NCMEC also has a network of trained parent volunteers who have been impacted by the sexual exploitation of a child and can provide guidance and support to families in similar situations.

Lastly, you are entitled to FINANCIAL COMPENSATION! Locate an attorney to help you understand your legal rights and pursue monetary restitution. A child whose sexually exploitative photos are shared online has a legal right to seek monetary restitution from all offenders who create, share, or possess these images. Because the process to seek monetary restitution is complex and often confusing, it is helpful for you to have an attorney when you navigate the legal system. NCMEC can talk you through these legal issues and help find an attorney who will work on your behalf.

You don't have to navigate screen time alone.

This guide is part of The Screen Guardians Parent Resource Library — real tools, real voices, real support, grounded in research, not fear. For more help starting hard conversations and protecting your kids online, explore the Parent Portal at thescreenguardians.com/parent-portal or join our free newsletter at thescreenguardians.com/subscribe.

Not anti-technology. Pro-child.