

Combating Child Grooming on the Internet



Key Points

- Grooming, the process by which predators manipulate children for sexual exploitation, is facilitated online when sexual predators use the Internet to make contact and develop relationships with children.
- Microsoft's approach to combating child predation includes innovative technology tools, education and guidance, internal policies and practices for moderating content and addressing online abuses, and relationships with government, industry, and law enforcement.
- Microsoft strongly supports enacting and enforcing laws against the sexual exploitation of children, and cooperates with law enforcement to bring Internet pedophiles to justice.

BACKGROUND

Child grooming is a process of emotional manipulation by which pedophiles prepare children and youth for sexual exploitation. The grooming process typically involves an adult befriending a young person and then winning his or her trust by showering the youth with flattery, sympathy, gifts of money or modeling jobs, and other personal attention. Finally, the groomer attempts to sexualize the relationship, seeking to control the child and continue the abuse, which may include child pornography or even sex trafficking.

Pedophiles go where children go—and today that includes the Internet. Child grooming goes online when pedophiles use the Internet for the grooming process. Adults may begin the grooming process by visiting forums where youth interact, such as online games (which may use two-way voice and video technology) or chat rooms, or contact children through text messages. Pedophiles may use the information that children reveal about themselves online and target vulnerable youngsters with low self-esteem, family problems, or lack of money.

Sexual exploitation of children is a global problem. However, it is important to keep the online portion of the problem in perspective. According to the Crimes Against Children Research Center in the United States, the arrest of more than 600 online predators in 2006 constituted about 1 percent of all arrests for sex crimes committed against children and youth.

Internet companies have an important role to play in helping to stop predators. They can enforce codes of conduct, deploy monitors in forums used by children, and provide mechanisms for customers to report potential predators.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

Technology tools. Parents can watch over their children online by using safety features built into a wide range of Microsoft products and services.

For example, Windows 8 Family Safety provides tools to help parents monitor their children's online activities. Anyone—adult or young person—with a Microsoft account can specify who can view their profiles or contact them. In addition, Xbox LIVE has Online Safety Settings that enable parents to restrict who children can communicate with and who can see their profiles or friends lists.

Internal policies and practices. To protect users of its online services, Microsoft enforces policies such as a code of conduct, and moderates content and interactions to address illegal activity, inappropriate material, and other abuse.

Partnerships. Combating child predation requires a holistic approach in which technology providers, government leaders, law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations all play vital roles.

- Central to Microsoft's efforts is the Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit (DCU), a worldwide team of lawyers, investigators, technical analysts, and other specialists whose focus includes advancing the fight against the sexual exploitation of children online. To fight cyber criminals, the DCU team forges relationships with leaders in a variety of fields and uses new legal and technical tools.
- Microsoft works with the International Center for Missing & Exploited Children, INTERPOL, and other organizations to encourage governments to combat child predators.

Education and guidance. The Microsoft Safety & Security Center provides age-based guidance for Internet use, including tips on teaching children what's appropriate to view and share online, how to stay safer on mobile devices and in online games, and how to avoid, block, and report inappropriate behavior.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Microsoft strongly supports enacting and enforcing laws against the sexual exploitation of children, including the possession, production, and distribution of child pornography.
- Internet companies should continue to work with governments and law enforcement to help address the problem of child predators online by giving their customers mechanisms for reporting potential predators, enforcing codes of conduct, supporting law enforcement, and spurring further innovation.
- It is essential that governments commission studies and fund academic and industry research to advance Internet safety. Research is particularly important for identifying factors that increase online risks and for dispelling myths that can lead to misplaced efforts to advance Internet safety.



Helpful Resources

Microsoft Security & Safety Center resources for youth safety online
aka.ms/young-safety

Comparison of Microsoft family safety tools
aka.ms/compare-tools

Microsoft's research initiative on the role of technology in human trafficking
aka.ms/human-trafficking-rfp

Crimes Against Children Research Center
www.unh.edu/ccrc

International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children
www.icmec.org