

# Predatory behavior online

## Month 3 Meeting 6

Predatory online behavior has become a prevalent issue in recent years, and has presented some dangerous situations for young people. In this lesson, students will discuss online predators, grooming, radicalization, and will learn how to recognize trustworthy versus untrustworthy information on the internet.

**CYBER SWAT**

### Objectives

- Discuss the risks that internet predators pose to teens and younger kids online.
- Continue planning for Cyber Safety Awareness Week.

### Materials

- Printable handout
- Project and presentation planning guide

### Agenda

This week's team meeting plan covers some heavy content. Rather than suggested activities, this plan will introduce students to resources, key terms, and leave room for student-oriented discussion. SROs should consider the best way to facilitate a discussion with their team that addresses these sensitive issues in a safe and respectful manner. Be ready to jump in and make sure everyone feels safe at all times. Remember, team members with personal or secondary experience with this topic will need an advocate.

### Key Terms

**Online predators:** Adults with bad intentions, deliberately and openly cultivating relationships with children and teens.

**Grooming:** a process in which someone builds an emotional connection with and gains the trust of in order to take advantage of the child (NSPCC).<sup>1</sup>

**Radicalization:** the action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues (OED).<sup>2</sup>

### Discussion points

- What are some ways we can be sure the information we are receiving online is trustworthy? Why is this important to understand when thinking about grooming and radicalization?
- Predatory behavior and grooming happens in online and offline spaces alike. Do you think the internet has made minors more easily accessible to people with bad intentions?
- What are some movies and TV shows in which relationships between adults and minors are sensationalized? Do you think these inaccurate portrayals lead to unsafe behavior in real life?

## Things to consider

- Not all online interaction is dangerous or duplicitous. Millions of young people use social media platforms in safe and healthy ways every day.
- Rather than pretending to be peers, or deceiving teens about their identity in any way, predatory behavior online more often involves adults who cultivate inappropriate relationships with teens and children—so that by the time the teen decides to meet the adult in person, they believe themselves to be involved in a “relationship” or “friendship” with this person (UNH).<sup>3</sup>
- It may be useful to reference real news stories regarding predatory behavior between adults and teenagers, including sexual misconduct and radicalization.
- Some online predators have intentions that are not sexual in nature. The “grooming” that takes place when predators are trying to cultivate a sexual relationship is very similar to the “grooming” that can lead to radicalization or violent extremism.

## Student printable handout- Predatory behavior

Online predators aren’t necessarily strangers lurking in the dark corners of the internet, tricking children into risky behaviors. They are often adults with bad intentions who meet and form inappropriate relationships with teenagers. Other times, these behaviors can have the goal of leading teenagers into radical movements.

Using the handout, have team members identify which of the items listed might be red flags, and which ones are nothing to worry about.

	Red flag	Harmless
They give you lots of attention and go out of their way to tell you how special you are.		
They avoid telling you their real age.		
They share a specific mutual interest.		
They leave nice comments on your social media images.		
They want to keep your interactions private or avoid talking in public forums or spaces.		
They tell you not to tell your friends or parents about your interactions.		
You have never met them in person, but they say they’re a friend of a friend.		
They say things like “I know we were supposed to FaceTime today, but my camera is broken.”		

A couple of these things aren’t a big deal when they happen between peers in a respectful way (*sharing a specific mutual interest* and *leaving nice comments on your social media images*). However, most of them should cause concern and any of these can be red flags when they are happening together, and they are all something to be alarmed about when the other person is an adult or authority figure. Talk to the team about identifying these red flags and what to do if they suspect someone is in trouble.

## Project Planning

Continue the planning for Cyber Safety Awareness Week. By now you should have:

- Confirmed presentation dates and topics.
- Delegated tasks for Cyber Safety Awareness Week among team members.

## Additional resources:

- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: <http://www.missingkids.com/home>
- Signs to look for with sexual predators: <https://www.bark.us/blog/grooming-signs-sexual-predators/>