

ONLINE LURING

Operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, Cybertip.ca is Canada's national tipline to report the online sexual exploitation of children. The tipline accepts reports with regard to child sexual abuse images (child pornography), online luring, children exploited through prostitution, child-sex tourism, child trafficking, making sexually explicit material available to a child, and agreement or arrangement with another person to commit a sexual offence against a child.

Since September 2002, the tipline has received over 67,000 reports from the public with regard to concerns about children being sexually exploited online. Following assessment by our analysts, approximately 1,000 (1.5%) reports submitted by the public were classified as unique online luring incidents.

In December 2012, Cybertip.ca will be releasing a full research study examining 264 unique luring reports submitted by the public between September 2007 and June 2011. Some reports about online luring came from family members of the young person being victimized as well as the victims themselves. A percentage (63%) of these reports also included text and chat logs, which aided researchers in further examining the interactions and techniques offenders used in luring children online.

Preliminary results reveal:

- 85.9% of identified victims were girls
- The mean age of the victims was 13 years
- The mean age of the suspects was 25
- In 50% of the cases, reports were listed as being made by a family member, with almost 31% being made by the victim
- In 24% of the cases, the young person was threatened by the suspect, with the largest number of threats involving the distribution of existing images of the victim
- In 93.4% of the cases, suspects made specific requests for images or there was a discussion of previously uploaded images. In 30% of these particular cases, it was indicated that the young person had sent images to the suspect
- In 38.6% of the cases, instant messaging was indicated as the technology used by suspects to lure victims
- In 35.5% of the cases, suspects either sent victims sexual images of themselves, or requested the young person to go on webcam whereupon the young person would see a sexualized image of the suspect

With support from Bell, the final research report will be released at the end of the year. The purpose of this study is to further examine the interactions and techniques offenders use to lure children online, as well as ways in which children resist such advances, in order to better inform prevention education and strategies so we as a society can both keep children safer on the Internet and catch those individuals who offend against children.

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Cybertip.ca receives and addresses online and telephone reports from the public with regard to the online sexual exploitation of children. All reports that pertain to incidents that appear to be in contravention of the Criminal Code (Canada) are sent to law enforcement for possible investigation. Any information regarding a child potentially in need of protection is forwarded to the appropriate child welfare agency.

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THE ONLINE GROOMING PROCESS

Online grooming is typically a process that involves an adult manipulating a child online to increase compliance and sexually exploit that child. The following are some of the tactics utilized by offenders to sexually exploit children online.

Sharing Photographs and Exposure to Sexually Explicit Information

In our analysis of luring reports submitted to Cybertip.ca, it was common to see suspects encouraging children to send images of themselves.

- In 93.4% of the assessed Cybertip.ca luring reports, there were specific requests for pictures (either still or moving), or discussion of pictures that had previously been uploaded, that could be classified under Canadian law as child pornography. Many of these took place within minutes of the suspect making first contact with the young person.
- In 30% of these cases it was indicated that the young person had sent sexual images to the suspect.
- A percentage of the suspects seemed more interested in sending sexual images of themselves (35.5%). In many of these instances, photographs were not requested by the young person, nor were they expected.

Exposing a child to sexually explicit material is a tactic that is often used by offenders. The goal is to normalize sexual activity as well as sexually inappropriate exchanges between adults and children. Additionally, the sharing of sexually explicit photographs, often of the youth themselves, can be used to extort and threaten children into complying further with the offender's demands.

Uttering Threats

In at least 24% of the luring reports the young person was threatened into complying with the suspect's requests. Some of the threats included:

- Distribution of existing images of the child through social networking sites or to a list of contacts known to the young person (including their parents)
- Compromising the young person's computer or their accounts
- Offline violence if the young person did not comply and meet the suspect in person

Persistence

Of the 166 unique chat logs analysed, many began with repeated invitations for the young person to go on webcam (sometimes occurring up to 30 times), followed by requests about wanting to meet in person.

Sexually Inappropriate Behaviour

In all of the assessed luring reports, content became sexual, regardless of apparent intent, very often with explicit acknowledgement that the young person was underage.

- Chat logs often began with a greeting, such as 'hi hottie', 'how r u today?' followed by a request for information about age, sex and location, before quickly moving on to requests for photographs or for online sex.
- Where the young person showed no resistance and did not either terminate the chat or seek help from someone else, the conversation was often explicit, and included descriptions of a variety of sexual acts.
- Even in the context of 'romantic relationships' the sexual content was often positioned as introducing the young person to the pleasures of sex. If the young person agreed to these requests, what quickly followed was a request to undress.

Child sexual offenders often try to break down a child's personal boundaries to gain their trust and normalize sexual behaviour. Examples of suspects crossing sexual boundaries and engaging in inappropriate behaviour included:

- Making sexually explicit comments
- Using flattery
- Asking questions about sexual development (e.g. sexuality, puberty)
- Engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child (e.g. masturbating on a webcam)
- Sharing sexually explicit material



Model in Image. Intended as Illustrative.

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