

Sadistic Online Exploitation (SOE)

NetSmartz®



Sadistic Online Exploitation (SOE) involves violent online actors who coerce or manipulate children into sexually exploitative conduct, including the production of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), the sexual exploitation of other children, and other abusive acts used to facilitate sexual exploitation.

More than 100 groups engaging in SOE have been reported to NCMEC. When talking to children about the issue, it is strongly recommended to avoid mentioning the names of these groups. Children are naturally curious and may search for them online, which offenders may take advantage of to target and groom them.

Common Offender Tactics



Initiating Contact

Offenders often work in groups and may even be other children. They may first contact children on gaming platforms, social media sites, or open forums where children are posting about their mental health struggles and seeking support. After initiating contact with the child, they often move the conversation to an encrypted platform.



Grooming

Offenders establish relationships with children, often exploiting existing vulnerabilities related to mental health, body image, or self-harm.



Victimization

Offenders manipulate the child into increasingly extreme behaviors. They may also use financial coercion, initially offering money, gift cards, or in-game currency to entice the child.



Threats

Offenders use threats to victimize children. They may obtain personal information and use it against the child if they do not comply with the offender's demands. If the child refuses, offenders may threaten to:

- Share the child's sexual abuse material online.
- Swat the child's home or school by making a false report so that law enforcement responds with armed intervention.
- Report the family to child protective services.
- Dox the child by publicly sharing the child's private information online.

What Are the Signs?

SOE can be hard to identify. Children may be reluctant to share what is happening due to fear or a sense of loyalty to the offender caused by psychological manipulation. Keep an eye out for these signs:

**Self-Generated Sexual Content:**

The child may exchange sexually explicit content of themselves or other people.



New or unfamiliar emojis, icons, or new slang: The child may use coded language, emojis, icons, or other symbols when communicating with the offender(s).

**Unusual behavior with money or digital payments:**

The child may have more access to money than usual — such as gift cards, gaming currency, or other online payment methods.



Changes in online activity: A child may spend significantly more time online, seem anxious about being online at certain times, or become more secretive about their online interactions.

**Changes in behavior, mood, or emotional well-being:**

The child may show signs of increased anxiety, fear, or mood swings. They may appear more withdrawn, sad, depressed or easily upset.

What to Do

Stay involved in your child's online life and talk to them about what's safe to share online. If you suspect your child is a victim of sadistic online exploitation:

- **Stay supportive and calm**
- **Document all communications**, including messages, images, and social media handles. Do not delete anything.
- **Ask professionals** working with the child if they are trained in recognizing online exploitation.
- **Contact law enforcement**, your local police department or the ICAC in your state.
- **Report online child sexual exploitation** related to SOE to NCMEC at [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org) or by calling **1-800-843-5678**

Resources

CyberTipline

A free tool to report suspected or confirmed child sexual exploitation. Reports can be made 24 hours a day at [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org) or by calling **1-800-843-5678**.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

A free, confidential crisis line providing emotional support to anyone experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideations. Available 24 hours a day via **call, text, or chat at 988, or visit [988Lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)**.

Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program

National network of coordinated task forces, representing federal, state, and local law enforcement, dedicated to investigating, prosecuting and developing effective responses to internet crimes against children.

To learn more or connect with your state's ICAC Task Force, visit [ICACTaskForce.org](https://www.icactaskforce.org).