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Source: Sergeant Luis Menendez-Sierra,
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Children (ICAC) Task Force, Houston

Q. *What are the steps parents should take if they find predatory interactions on their child's device?*

A. First stop and take a deep breath. Don't make any rash decisions or start deleting texts, pictures or messages. Take the phone, tablet, game system or whatever electronic device is being used and place it on airplane mode. This stops anyone from remotely deleting possible evidence. Remember that a lot of devices are now connected to each other. A good example is the Apple iWatch which is connected to the iPhone. Law enforcement needs all the information on the devices. It's important not to speak to the suspect on the device or tell them that you have or are going to call Police. If you do this, they will vanish. Just preserve the evidence and contact law enforcement.

Q. *Can predators make contact through gaming systems? Which online games would you warn parents about?*

A. Predators have started to move into the gaming world. They have easy access to children and spend many hours with them becoming their friends. I won't name any specific games but all the most popular games pose a level of danger. If you are able to talk to other people while you are playing the game, then there is a level of danger there. The predators act as if they are the same age as your child and communicate for hours on end until they gain their trust and then things can get out of control very quickly.

Q. *What have you seen as the average age of an online predator?*

A. There really isn't an average age. We have caught male and female suspects ranging from 18 to 78 years of age, who come from all races and socio economic backgrounds.

Q. *Knowing the maturity level varies from child to child, what is the average age a parent should feel their child is ready to safely manage an Instagram account?*

A. Considering that Instagram is one of the main targets for child predators, I would be overly cautious when allowing anyone under the age of 15 an Instagram account, and even then I would be concerned. This all comes down to each individual child and the discernment of the parent who knows that child best. Trust but verify what is being posted.



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Q. *What are the legal ramifications of sexting?*

A. When sexting involves juveniles sending photos of themselves, they are in essence performing the crime of production and distribution of child pornography. Law enforcement will more than likely not file a case against a juvenile for self pro-

duction but that is not the issue. The issue is that those pictures never disappear. The images always end up in the hands of the wrong person who uses them as blackmail or other means to extort the juvenile. This is called Sextortion and is a major issue.

Q. *What is your position on teens telling parents their devices are private and checking content is an invasion of privacy?*

A. Parents have every right to check their child's phone. It is not a privacy issue, but a safety issue. As a parent you have to know what is on your child's phone, as you are ultimately responsible for your child. I strongly urge parents to get involved and make sure they know what is going on in their child's devices. Install monitoring software that can track communication, pictures and locations.

Q. *Is there any additional information you want to share with parents?*

A. Communication is key!! Have that conversation with your child. Make sure they understand that they have to be cautious and cannot trust everyone they meet online. A good rule to follow is that your child should know everyone they are communicating with. If you as a parent can't confirm who the person is, where they go to school and who their parents are then that person can be anyone and should not be communicating with your child. If your child hides their phone from you, or uses their phone in a private area frequently, then you need to see what is going on.



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