Protecting Children From Online Predators

(NAPSA)—More than 25 million children go online regularly. Unfortunately, some child predators are taking advantage of this fact by approaching children online with the intent to meet them for a sexual encounter offline.

According to the Department of Justice, 1 in 5 children is sexually solicited over the Internet. That's why parents should get involved in their children's activities on the Internet and always know with whom they are chatting online.

Online lingo, such as "ILU" (I Love You), "CYO" (See You Online), and "a/s/l" (Age/Sex/Location) are commonly used by Internet-savvy kids. Yet a national study found that less than five percent of parents are familiar with the shorthand used by children online. Unfortunately, many online predators know and use the lingo to become friendly with kids. "Shorthand like 'POS' for 'parent over shoulder' and 'WTGP' for 'want to go private' will stop being a mystery to parents as they become more Internet savvy, and that will keep kids safer," says Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC).

NCMEC recently partnered with the Ad Council to sponsor a national multi-media campaign called Help Delete Online Predators. The effort is meant to help parents learn ways to minimize their children's risks of being victimized. It offers these tips:

• Take steps to educate yourselves about the Internet.

• Place the family computer in a common area, not a child's bedroom.

A SEXUAL PREDATOR DOESN'T NEED A CROWBAR OR AN OPEN WINDOW TO GET INTO YOUR CHILD'S ROOM.

By getting involved in your children's online lives, you can help protect them from sexual predators.

• Teach kids that people online are not always who they say they are.

• Talk with children about not giving out personal information over the Internet.

"The Web is an incredible resource for kids, but we need to equip our children to deal with the reality of today's online world by educating them in how to spot troublesome behavior and make smart decisions," says Allen.

To learn about kids' chat shorthand and to get tips on how to talk to your children about online threats, visit www.cybertipline.com or call 1-800-THE-LOST.