

All About Online Creeps

The news media and police officers call people who solicit teens online to engage in sex or provide nude images "sexual predators." But the term most teens use to describe these people is "creeps." The new movie, Trust, is causing people to think about these creeps. Trust is based on a true story. Just like many movies and television shows about true stories, this story is highly fictionalized. These incidents are actually extremely rare.

But some teens have been contacted by a creep online. The overwhelming majority of teens easily recognize a creep and simply get away from this person. You, or a friend, might be more vulnerable to the manipulation by a creep if you are feeling lonely or are having problems with friends or your parents. Also it is important to know that creeps are not always, or even often, online strangers. People who you know, including adults or teens, could be creeps.

Manipulation Techniques

The following are the manipulation strategies used most often by creeps:

- **Overly Friendly.** What do teens sometimes crave? Positive attention. What do creeps provide? Positive attention ~ and lots of it. "Wow, you are hot." "Hey, you are really cool." "You are so sexy." "I am so happy I met you." Watch out any time that someone you are communicating with makes you feel "creepy" because they are being too friendly.
- **Overly Eager.** Creeps are overly eager to form a relationship. "You are my new 'best friend.'" "You can trust me and talk about anything." "I will always be there for you." Watch out any time that someone is really pushing hard to form a relationship with, especially if you really do not know this person.
- **One Step at a Time.** Creeps will reward steps that come closer and closer to their objective. "Wow, you are so sexy, send me an even sexier pix." "Wow, this is really hot. Can you really show me your stuff?" This is the same technique that animal trainers use to teach a dolphin to turn a circle. This is called "operant conditioning." This is a really powerful method used for manipulation. Watch out if someone keeps pushing you further and further in a direction you do not really want to go. A request for a nude image is a clear "red flag" that you are communicating with a creep.
- **Threaten a Loss.** Once they think they have you "hooked," creeps may threaten a loss to encourage you to do other things. "If you really loved me, you would send me a nude pix." "If you won't have sex with me, I will send your nude pix to others." This is called blackmail. If anyone ever tries to blackmail you, realize that this person is the one who will end up in big trouble.



Protection Strategies

There are some very important things you can do to prevent having to deal with a creep ~ or recognize if you or a friend has attracted a creep. Ask your friends. You will find that the majority of teens are already taking these steps to save themselves the hassle.

- **Keep it Private.** Use the privacy protections so that only the people you have accepted as "friends" can see your personal information, photos, and updates.
- **Think Before You Post.** Any information and images you post, even with the privacy protections, should present a positive image. Always remember, this material could be shared with others. Don't post information or images that could attract the interest of a creep. Be especially careful when choosing the photo you use for your social networking profile. Never send anyone a nude photo. If you do, this person could send it to anyone and your reputation will be trashed.
- **Connect Safely.** It is generally safe to interact with strangers on safe public sites. But only "friend" people you know, or a trusted friend knows, in person on your protected social networking profile. Anyone who neither you nor a good friend knows could be providing fake information - and if no one knows this person, in person, it can be really hard to tell. Watch out for anyone who demonstrates any "creepy" behavior.
- **Report Concerns.** If you think someone you have been communicating with may be a creep, report this to a trusted adult or the site. It is important to make sure that creeps are not able to hurt someone else.
- **Be a Helpful Ally.** Pay attention to when a friend might be at risk. If someone is manipulating your friend, it may be easier for you to recognize this than your friend. Talk with your friend about your concerns. Point out to them how this person appears to be manipulating them and what the possible risks are. If your friend does not listen to you, tell a responsible adult.