

Child abusers at bay

As time progresses, the world is becoming more digitalised. In the early days of the Internet it was young adults who came and conquered. As it became more mainstream various types of people began flooding the Internet. In the early 2000s, we were unaware of the potential it held so the good and the bad ran rampant. You could download child pornography as easily as you could a song. Predators didn't have to hide.

Nowadays it has become safer, although

Internet as well. Some might think sexual predators only exist in chat rooms and shady forums, but that is not true.

Facebook is a very popular destination for younger people. And predators always follow their prey. Social networking sites and chat rooms may be a two way deal but parents often underestimate the power of coercion these predators can possess. These aren't your average "can we make friendship" people. They are manipulative human

A very interesting case of justice popped up in the news a few years back. It presented a very innovative idea that was enormously successful in identifying paedophiles. Terre des Hommes is a child rights group based in the Netherlands and they created a computer generated highly realistic ten year old named Sweetie. A team of researchers logged into chat rooms under the guise of Sweetie and engaged in chat sessions with child abusers. The researchers then began to identify the people using the personal information given during the chat. Once identified, the dossiers are handed over to the authorities. In the first few months of the operation, the organisation compiled the dossiers of over 1000 predators from over 71 countries including four from Bangladesh.

According to the UN and FBI, there are 750,000 predators online at any time of the day. Studies have shown that paedophiles usually look for children in developing countries, paying them with untraceable credit cards or wire transfers in return for online sex shows.

"These children are usually forced to do this by adults or by extreme poverty," Hans Guyt, director at Terre des Hommes Netherlands, said in a statement. "Sometimes they have to testify against their own family, which is almost an impossible thing to do for a child."

So what can you, as a parent, do to protect your children? Let's not pretend that you can completely cut off your child from the Internet. You need to take into account that even 12 year olds need the net for their

homework. Parental supervision is necessary for children younger than 12. Once they turn 13 you can give them perhaps an hour on the Internet. Once they are more mature and turn 16 they can get more leeway. You should know the computer better than your child. Put up child locks and filters. Chat rooms and explicit sites can easily be locked.

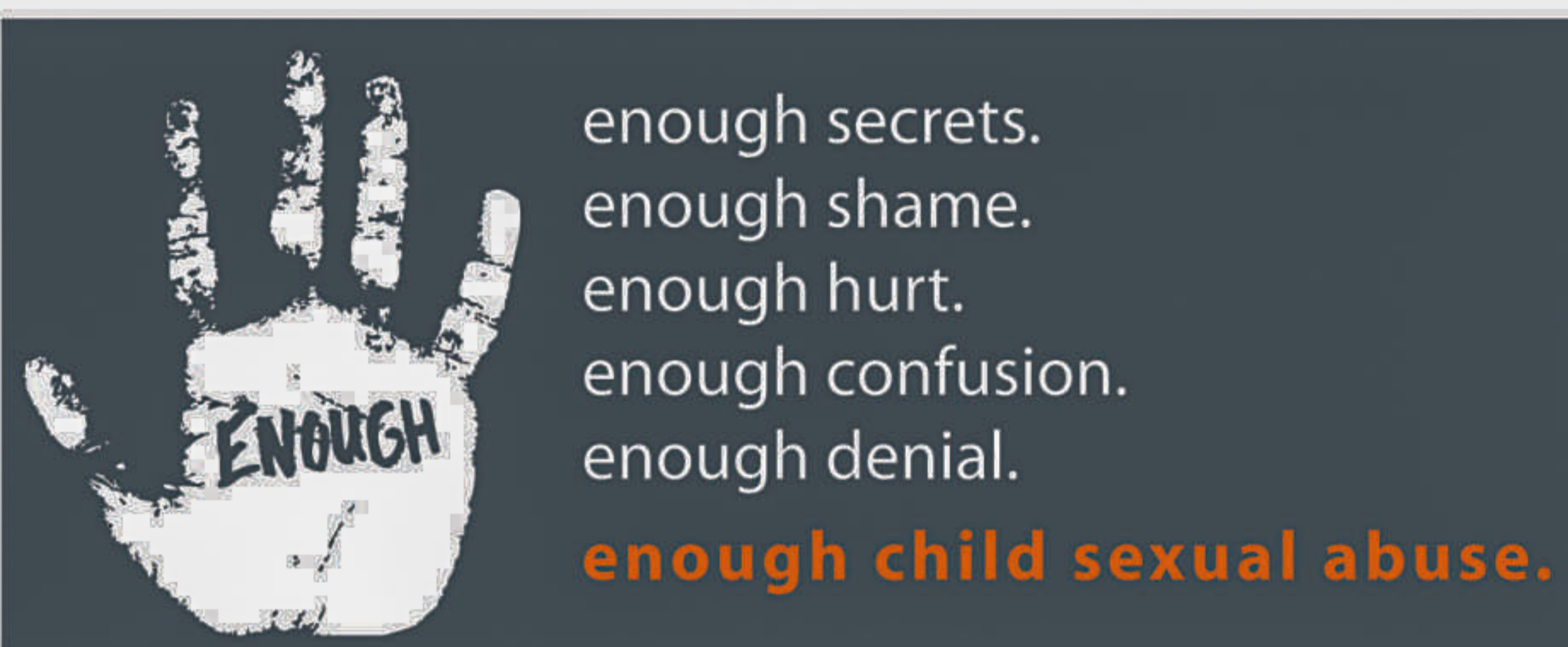
Then there is the "talk." Remember that you can find basically anything on the Internet. Give them a rough idea of sexual predators. But don't just tell them not to talk to anyone that might end up having the opposite effect. There are friends to be made on the Internet, one just needs to be careful of those who are not what they appear to be.

Finally you need to take a step back and realise if your actions are planting the seed for trouble later on. Giving early access to technology makes children dependant on it from a very young age. Informative games and educative websites are fine, but when you give them full access to a tab or the PC, then you're just asking for it.

Even if you take away the predators, being active on social networking sites from pre-teens make children prone to narcissism, low self confidence, obesity, health related problems, technology addiction according to multiple studies. Once you realise your mistakes act accordingly.

"Nothing is forgotten on the Internet" is a common saying and it is very true. Keep that in mind when raising a child in this crazy world.

By Daneesha Khan
Photo: Collected



authorities are tracking down culprits it's not as easy to get into trouble. The threat is not yet diminished. Truth is, no matter how many people you catch there will always be more.

Therefore, parents of this generation need to be fully aware of the lengths a predator will go.

As rosy as the digital world might seem at first, the wolves lurk in every corner.

Parents should regard it the same way they do in the real world. The teaching "don't take candy from strangers" rings true for the

beings who are very careful when it comes to picking victims.

Then there are blogs and picture sharing sites. These are even more dangerous for children. The pictures and personal information one puts up is there for all to see. For blogs there are barely any privacy settings and so anyone can search up your name and save some of your pictures. On blogs, your personal musings become public and anyone can contact you anonymously.

Fighting the bullies

You enter your 10 year old son's room and you find him sitting in a corner, with a faint light on; he is sad and you don't know why. Many parents these days suffer from such a situation. Some are lucky enough to hear the reason from their children, while others face the misery of seeing their children sink into depression when they cannot express what is killing their self-esteem. Bullying in school is a common phenomenon and must be something that demands discussions.

Cases:

Bullying can happen in various ways, the most innocent form being name-calling, or twisting of name and calling something similar to it. This can go from verbal to emotional to physical, with words turning into acts of physical torture.

WHO are the bullies?

It is often seen that children who see violence at home, especially among their parents, tend to vent out their frustrations when they come to school. Being abused at home also gives them the exposure that they have a right to assault others or to dominate others. Some have ego-centric issues, which are mainly derived from being an uncontrollably pampered child. Most experts agree that children who are prone to bullying have some unresolved low self-esteem issues.

When the apple of your eye comes under an educational institution where they have to share the attention with hundreds of

others, that is when they opt for bullying to sustain their dominant position. Video games and TV shows may also play a key role behind their aggressive behaviour.

Lasting effects:

Out of the numerous effects of bullying, the long-term ones include depression, anxiety, insecurity, suicidal tendency, loss of self-esteem and trust issues. Even the bullies face the risk of developing antisocial personality disorder.

Prevention:

A few steps need to be taken if one is being bullied. Firstly, always remember that prevention is the best method. Bullies need to be avoided and unless you are adept at quick retorts, comebacks should be avoided. A bully spends all his time thinking of ways to put others down and thus they are usually skilled and should not be challenged in their own game. Killing them with kindness is a better solution. Secondly, one must always try to walk away instead of getting physically involved and if fists are to be thrown, always do so in self defense and don't be the first one to start.

Class teachers have a vital role in the lives of children at school. Early in the morning, it is usually advised to spend 5-10 minutes in an orientation to guide the children, and show them how important it is to live in harmony and to be kind and gentle to your friends. A lesson on ethics and morality tend to teach the children the signifi-



cance of good behavior. Also the teacher must be accessible and discuss and deal with issues of bullying when they come up.

Upon identifying a bully of a victim, a counselor can be of much use and not only help the child, but also guide his family how to be supportive and to fix the shortcomings from their side. However, counselors

are still not seen widely. Finally, remember bullies thrive off the fear they generate so do what must be done but show no fear. Animal instincts mean they pounce on the weak so do not be weak.

By Sonya Soheli
Photo: Collected