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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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YCDA Alert: Keep Your Children Safe Online During COVID-19

(Woodland, CA) - (May 1, 2020) – The current COVID-19 crisis is one we face together with care, collaboration, and creativity. The following information will help you protect your children against online criminal activity while they are online during the COVID-19 shelter-in-place and beyond.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis and suspension of school attendance children are at home and online more than ever. This can expose our children to criminals who exploit the anonymity of internet-based communication. Knowing the places and people your children “visit” online is just as important as knowing their friends and the places they go in the real world.

Every minute of the day, children are solicited and victimized online. According to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) (<https://www.missingkids.org/>) the number of reported child exploitation events during the COVID-19 crisis is up over 300 percent. Last week alone there were 1,127,513 events reported to the center.

The Yolo County District Attorneys Office is working with law enforcement, educators, and others to develop a program that teaches parents and community leaders how to protect children on the Internet. Our goal is to reduce online victimization, increase the reporting of criminal exploitation, and provide valuable resources for families to help guard against internet predators.

Online predatory behavior toward children most often involves one or more of the following goals: to obtain explicit photos of children (or to share photos of their own); to engage in sexual conversation and/or online role-play; or to meet in person for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity.

To avoid detection, predators will often engage with their victims on anonymous messaging apps, through text messaging, or on livestreaming sites/apps. Sexual predators have been known to engage victims through social media apps, online games, and chat rooms.

If your child is old enough to access the internet or have a smartphone, they are old enough to discuss online safety and the potential consequences of risky behavior. It is crucial that children are empowered to confide in a parent or other responsible adult if they find themselves in a dangerous situation. The most important and effective way to protect children online is to be involved with your children's online activity and speak openly with your children about online safety precautions. Know who is talking to your children on the Internet. Know what websites your children visit. To help protect children from online predators, be involved, monitor your child's online activity and consider internet monitoring software to help check on your child's online activity. For more information on The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's online safety software and resources for parents visit: <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz>.

Should your child become the target of an online predator make sure you do not delete the digital footprints before first contacting law enforcement for guidance. Block the offender and report the offender to the service provider used to contact your child and most importantly report this crime to the police.

To report suspected internet crimes against children, please call your local police department or the Yolo County District Attorney's Office High Tech Crimes Unit at 530-666-8180.

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