



How Harmful Online Groups Target Kids

Understanding manipulation, secrecy, and coercive behavior online

Why This Matters

Most parents understand basic online safety risks.

What is less understood is how **some online groups actively target children** using secrecy, peer pressure, and psychological manipulation.

This resource is meant to help parents recognize **how these groups operate**, why kids get pulled in, and what makes them especially dangerous.

Some sections discuss self-harm and exploitation. Please read when you have emotional space.

A New Kind of Online Risk

Not all online harm comes from a single predator.

In recent years, law enforcement and youth safety organizations have identified **small online groups** that:

- Target minors
- Operate in private digital spaces
- Use group pressure instead of force
- Escalate behavior over time

These groups often appear harmless at first and rely on secrecy to avoid detection.

Where the Term “764” Comes In

You may have heard the term “**764**” mentioned in news stories or online discussions.

Originally, “764” referred to a specific online group that drew attention due to its extreme and harmful behavior toward minors. Over time, similar groups have appeared under **many different names**, across multiple platforms.

Today, the term is often used to describe a **pattern of behavior**, rather than one organization.

What matters most is **how these groups operate**, not what they call themselves.

How These Groups Find and Engage Kids

Harmful online groups typically begin by meeting kids in places that feel normal and social, such as:

- Gaming platforms
- Group chats
- Social media comment sections
- Private servers or invite-only spaces

Children are often approached by someone posing as:

- Another kid
- An older teen
- A mentor or supportive friend

Early interactions are usually friendly, validating, or humorous — not threatening.

The Role of Secrecy

Secrecy is central to how these groups function.

Kids may be told:

- “This is just between us.”
- “Parents wouldn’t understand.”
- “If adults find out, the group will be shut down.”

Over time, secrecy is framed as **trust or loyalty**, making it harder for a child to reach out for help.

How Escalation Happens

Escalation is gradual. Each step feels only slightly more intense than the last.

Common progression:

- Jokes → dares
- Dares → “trust tests”
- Trust tests → demands

Because escalation is slow, kids often don’t recognize when something has crossed into danger until they feel trapped.

Self-Harm and Coercive Challenges

Some groups pressure children into self-harm or dangerous behavior as a way to:

- Prove loyalty
- Gain status within the group

- Strengthen emotional bonds

This may include:

- Being encouraged to cut or injure themselves
- Being watched or recorded
- Being threatened with exposure if they refuse

Children may be told:

“Everyone else did it.”

“Don’t be weak.”

What starts as a “challenge” can result in serious physical and emotional harm.

Humiliation as Control

Humiliation is another common tactic.

Kids may be pressured to:

- Cut their hair
- Destroy something meaningful
- Eat or drink non-food items
- Send degrading videos or images

These acts create shame, which:

- Silences children
- Increases dependence on the group
- Makes telling an adult feel unbearable

Sleep Deprivation and Psychological Pressure

Some groups encourage “stay awake” challenges lasting 24–72 hours.

Sleep deprivation:

- Impairs judgment
- Increases emotional instability
- Makes kids more suggestible

This is a known psychological control tactic and is especially dangerous for adolescents.

Sexual Exploitation Within Group Spaces

Predators may infiltrate these groups by posing as peers.

They may:

- Collect explicit images or videos
- Threaten to release them
- Demand additional content
- Use humiliation or fear to maintain control

This behavior is closely tied to **sextortion**, one of the fastest-growing crimes against minors, especially boys ages 8–17.

Why Group Dynamics Make Harm Worse

Group settings intensify harm because they:

- Normalize behavior that would feel alarming one-on-one

- Create pressure to conform
- Make leaving feel like betrayal
- Diffuse responsibility (“everyone else is doing it”)

Adolescents are especially vulnerable to these dynamics due to developmental needs for belonging and approval.

Why Kids Often Don't Tell Adults

Parents often ask why children stay silent.

Common reasons include:

- Fear of punishment or losing device access
- Shame or embarrassment
- Fear of disappointing parents
- Belief that adults won't understand
- Fear of retaliation or exposure

Silence is usually driven by fear — not by lack of trust in parents.

What Parents Should Watch For

Warning signs may include:

- Increased secrecy around devices
- Sudden emotional changes
- Strong reactions to losing phone access

- Staying up late online
- New online relationships that feel intense or hidden

One sign alone doesn't mean danger. **Patterns matter.**

When to Seek Help

If you suspect your child may be involved in a harmful online group:

- Stay calm and supportive
- Avoid blame or interrogation
- Preserve evidence if possible
- Report concerning behavior to the platform
- File a report with **NCMEC** if exploitation is suspected

NCMEC (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children)

The official U.S. agency for reporting online exploitation, grooming, and sextortion.

How Mercy Seat Supports Families

Mercy Seat provides education, prevention resources, and guidance for families navigating serious online safety concerns. Through workshops, trainings, and referrals, we work to support parents and protect young people.

A Final Note to Parents

Harmful online groups rely on secrecy and silence.

Awareness, connection, and calm intervention can disrupt that cycle.

You don't need to know every app or trend — you need to stay present and reachable.