

Beat: News

Two Predators Sentenced to Federal Prison for Sexually Exploiting Four Children

They met on Social Media Platforms

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USPA NEWS - Thomas James Israel, 46, of Ft. Wayne, and Max Schafer, 31, of Brownsburg, were each sentenced to federal prison for their role in exploiting four children between October 2019 and August 2020.

One of the victims was exploited by both Israel and Schafer during separate incidents. Israel previously pleaded guilty to sexual exploitation of a child and distribution of child sexual abuse material. On November 15, 2021, Chief Judge Tanya Walton Pratt sentenced Israel to twenty-five years in federal prison. Late yesterday, Schafer pleaded guilty to receipt of visual depictions of minors engaging in sexually explicit conduct and possession of child sexual abuse material. District Judge James R. Sweeney II sentenced Schafer to over fourteen years (175 months) in federal prison.

According to court documents, between April 2020 and June 2020, Israel met his first minor victim, who was 14, using online applications such as Omegle and Meetme. Using Snapchat and Kik, Israel persuaded this victim to meet with him in person, then forced the victim into sadomasochistic sexual abuse, including forceful oral sex and assault. Israel recorded the sexual abuse on his mobile phone and later sent the video to the victim.

Israel met a second minor victim using Snapchat and persuaded the victim to send him explicit videos and photos of herself. When this victim was between 14 and 16 years old, she sent her minor boyfriend sexually explicit images and videos of herself. Without her consent, the boyfriend disseminated the images and videos over the internet. Israel downloaded those images and videos onto his online storage account and viewed them for a sexual purpose.

Israel met his third minor victim, who was between 14 and 16 years' old, over Omegle. Knowing that the victim suffered from mental health issues, Israel induced her to produce child sex abuse material, and to sell the images and videos to others online. Israel took a percentage of the fees and paid the victim by sending her gift cards from Victoria's Secret.

According to court documents, Schafer also met Israel's first minor victim using Omegle. Knowing that the minor victim was only fourteen years old, Schafer met and engaged in sexually explicit conduct with the victim. Schafer also persuaded the victim to send him the video that Israel produced, depicting Israel's violent sexual abuse of the child.

Schafer also met his second minor victim, who was 16, using Omegle and Snapchat. Schafer persuaded this girl to send him sexually explicit images and videos of herself for his sexual purpose.

Zachary A. Myers, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana and Herbert J. Stapleton, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Indianapolis Field Office made the announcement.

The FBI Violent Crime Task Force investigated the case. The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department also provided valuable assistance. As part of Israel's sentence, Judge Pratt ordered that he be supervised by the U.S. Probation Office for life following his release from prison and pay \$16,000 in restitution to the victims. As part of Schafer's sentence, Judge Sweeney ordered that he be supervised by the U.S. Probation Office for 40 years following his release from prison and pay \$6,000 in restitution to the victims. Both Israel and Schafer must also register as sex offenders wherever they live, work, or go to school, as required by law.

U.S. Attorney Myers thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Tiffany J. Preston who prosecuted this case.

In fiscal year 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, the Southern District of Indiana was second out of the 94 federal districts in the country for the number of child sexual exploitation cases prosecuted.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute

individuals who exploit children via the internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.justice.gov/psc.

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