



Child porn plea draws 25 years in prison

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He "groomed" his three young victims, eroding their revulsion by showing them pornographic videos and Hustler magazines and giving them Xbox video games to play. He "groomed" their parents, too, a prosecutor said, because Scott James Whitcomb, a DEA investigator with a long career in law enforcement, was someone who could be trusted.

But for years, Whitcomb abused that trust by sexually abusing the boys and video recording it. On Thursday, Whitcomb, 49, was sentenced to 25 years in federal prison for production of child pornography. The plea deal was approved by the victims' families to spare their children possible identification, Assistant U.S. Attorney David Steinkamp said.

Whitcomb, of Zimmerman, Minn., admitted in April that between 2007 and 2010, he produced videos containing the images of three boys -- two of whom were between the ages of 12 and 16 and one of whom was younger.

The images were discovered in August 2010 by a Minneapolis police officer during an undercover online operation.

The Sherburne County Sheriff's Office searched Whitcomb's home, seizing computers and finding the images of the boys. He was arrested in December 2010 and charged in state court. Before he posted bail, he was taken into federal custody.

Earning trust

According to state and federal court documents, the boys said that Whitcomb would invite them to his home to play video games. Eventually, the activities turned sexual and Whitcomb recorded them. Sometimes, the boys said, he would become violent if they rejected his advances.

This is how pedophiles often work, Supervisory Special Agent Craig Sworum of the FBI's local cyber-crimes squad said. They do it carefully, and over time.

"They can buy all this stuff, share it with them," Sworum said. "They start by being friendly, trusted. Then they start laying out the pornography, then maybe encourage a couple of other bad things, building this armor of trust."

Whitcomb has been in custody since his arrest. On Thursday, he appeared at his sentencing wearing orange jail overalls. The courtroom was empty, except for an FBI agent who worked on the case. Neither the victims' families nor Whitcomb's was there.

"I am deeply and truly sorry for what I have done," Whitcomb said to U.S. District Judge Susan Richard Nelson, adding that he hopes his victims and their families can find closure. "I also hope that maybe, someday, they'll be able to forgive me."

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