

# UK police campaign targets hackers as young as 12

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Britain's National Crime Agency on Tuesday launched a campaign to discourage youngsters from becoming hackers after it found the average age of suspects had plummeted to 17.

The NCA's #CyberChoices campaign targets parents of boys aged 12-15 who may be involved in cyber-crime without their knowledge.

The advertisement features a teenage boy, his mother and his father sitting on the family sofa, with the parents boasting about how intelligent their son is and his IT expertise.

It is only when they mention that he joked about robbing a bank that the parents realise their son is actually a hacker, and the advertisement ends with all three being quizzed by officers from the NCA, Britain's main agency fighting organised crime, trafficking and cyber-crime.

"Over the past few years the NCA has seen the people engaging in cyber crime becoming younger and younger," said Richard Jones, head of the National Cyber Crime Unit's Prevent team.

The average age of suspected cyber criminals featured in investigations involving the NCA this year was 17, compared to 24 last year, said the agency.

"We know that simply criminalising young people cannot be the solution to this and so the campaign seeks to help motivate children to use their skills more positively," said Jones.

"These individuals are really bright and have real potential to go on to exciting and fulfilling jobs. But by choosing the criminal path they can move from low level 'pranking' to higher level cyber crime quite quickly," he added.

The campaign aims to educate parents on common forms of cyber-crime such as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks that can knock out websites by flooding them with data.

Younger hackers have also increasingly used software called Remote Access Trojans (RATs) that allow people to remotely monitor and take full control of another computer.

The youngest purchaser of such software was just 12 years old, the NCA revealed.

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