Internet Safety

Tips for Keeping Your Kids Safe Online

Dear Friend,

The Internet is a valuable tool for kids, whether they're doing homework, staying in touch with friends, or keeping themselves entertained with games and videos. However, there are dangers that go along with being online. According to studies, each year approximately 1 in 5 children is sexually solicited online. Because the Internet allows people to remain anonymous if they choose, online sexual predators can lie about their age, their gender, and their intentions. They may pretend to be someone they are not in order to gain your child's trust. To your child this person may seem merely friendly or generous, but when a predator starts asking for private information, requesting photos, offering gifts, making sexually explicit references, or expressing a desire to talk on the phone or meet in person – your child and you should see these danger signs for what they are.
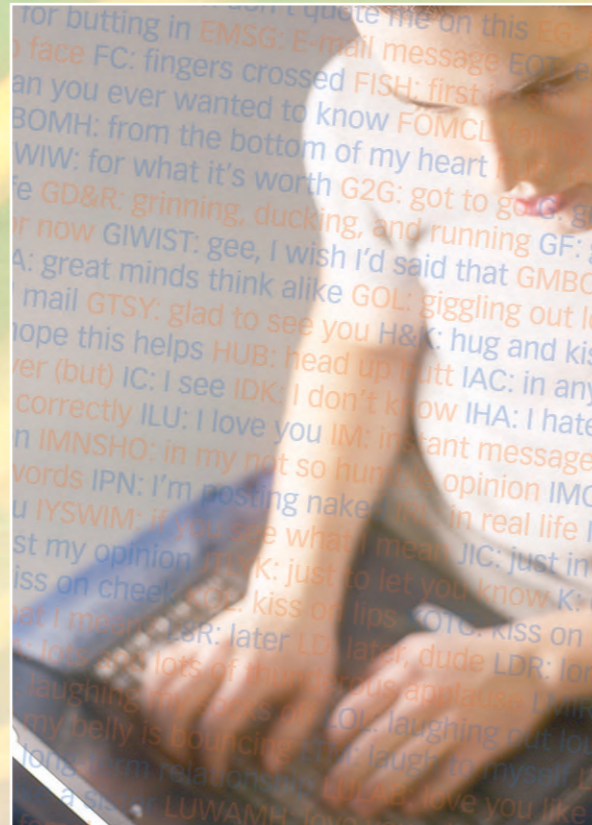
Sexual predators don't just stalk playgrounds anymore for potential molestation victims. Because of today's technology, they can virtually sneak into your home by hiding behind the computer screen. They lurk wherever kids hang out on the Web – chat rooms, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, AOL, Yahoo groups, personal blogs, etc. They also use email and instant messages (IMs) like most everyone on the Internet, so it's important for children to distinguish between what's appropriate for someone to say or send and what is not. It's crucial for kids to recognize any communication from strangers that may in fact be dangerous … and possibly even deadly.

Don't let your child be the target of an online predator. Included in this brochure are some tips on how to help youngsters avoid the darker side of the Internet. Please read them and talk to your kids about them. Learn together how to recognize the warning signs. Discuss them, use them to establish rules, and post them near your computer if you'd like. Let them serve as a reminder every time your child signs on and enters cyberspace.

Just as you would warn your child about talking to strangers on the street, you should also warn him or her about talking to strangers online. You just never know who could be hiding behind your computer screen.

Background You Should Know

- Each year, approximately 1 in 5 children is sexually solicited online.

- Online sexual solicitation includes unprovoked, uninvited or unwanted requests to engage in sexual activities whether online or in person. This includes engaging in sexually explicit conversations or giving personal sexual information.

- Blogs, chat rooms, instant messaging (IM) services and free social networking sites (Facebook and MySpace, for example) are common hangouts for sexual predators.

- 85 percent of children with computers use IMs.

- 65 percent of all sexual predator incidents occur in chat rooms.

- About half of all blogs are authored by teenagers. Most don't tell their parents they have one.

- Many children do not comprehend that what they post online is available to anyone with Internet access, including those who may intend harm.

- Many kids list their name, age, location, contact information and school name online.

- Kids often feel free to be more outrageous or sexually provocative online.

- Kids sometimes post pictures online that make them look older, more sophisticated, and more sexually aware.

The Danger Signs

When a stranger …

- Asks for your child's name, address, phone number or other private information.
- Asks for your child's email address.
- Requests a photo.
- Wants to speak to your child on the phone.
- Suggests they meet in person.
- Offers gifts.
- Asks questions of a sexual nature.
- Engages in sexually suggestive or explicit conversation.
- Sends pornographic images to your child.

How to Keep Your Child Safe Online

- Talk to your children openly and honestly about the potential dangers.

- Educate your kids about how to protect themselves online.

- Establish guidelines and rules for using the Internet in your home or elsewhere.

- Know who communicates with your children.

- Familiarize yourself with the computer programs your children use.

- Consider using Internet filters or blocks.

- Place your computer in a common room where supervision and guidelines are met.

- Explain to your children that IMs are only for chatting with school and family friends they know and are approved by you.

- Tell them not to say something in a chat room or on social networking sites that they wouldn't say in public.

- Stress that people are not always who they say they are online.

- Stress the danger of giving out personal information to strangers.

- Warn your children how dangerous it is to meet in person someone they first "met" online.

If There's a Problem…

Report disturbing incidents to your Internet service provider and local law enforcement. Give them the screen name, email address and any other information you have about the predator.

For More Information…

Visit the "Operation Safe Surf" program offered by the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office at **www.attorneygeneral.gov**.

Disclaimer:
It is important to note that this information may have changed since this piece was printed.