

Protecting Children Online

With our newest communication technology has come the potential for a new type of assault against children and that is – online predation and cyberbullying. The latest research reveals the following:



- 99% of teens use the Internet (Polly Klaas Foundation, 2006)
- 1 in 5 children (ages 10 to 17) receives a sexual solicitation or approach via the Internet in a one-year period. (The Kaiser Family Foundation: *Teens Online*, 2002)
- 84% rise in formal complaints from 2004-05 that predators enticed minors online or *traveled* to meet them in person (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005)
- 54% frequently have private conversations with online strangers through instant messaging (Polly Klass Foundation, 2006).
- 27% said they have talked with an online stranger about sex (Polly Klass Foundation, 2006.)
- 1 in 6 six – eleven year-olds have been cyberbullied and 10% of teens and 4% of preteens said they'd been threatened with violence online. (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2007)

Some Solutions...

Monitor children's usage.

- One of the simplest ways to protect your children is to keep the computer in a common area of the home where your children are used to your presence and involvement. A family room, study, the kitchen are places where you can be watch what is on your computer and even enhance your children's use by sitting with them and sharing the experience. A computer should not be placed in a child's bedroom!
- Too much computer time is as undesirable as too much television. The amount of time for chatting or surfing should be determined by supervising adults. Many children who have had problems online spend many hours regularly in front of a computer neglecting other activities and friends.
- Parents can limit which "chat rooms" children enter to those which are carefully monitored It is also possible to block out chatting or sending personal messages (IM's) entirely.

Teach children to stay safe with information and strategies.

- Children need to know that there may be unsafe people on the internet. Tell your children that if anyone or anything makes them uncomfortable, whether it is a case of cyberbullying or predation, they have the right to say "No" to requests by the other person and end the conversation and then to tell you or another trusted adult. Children should never agree to meet people they meet online without your permission and your presence.
- Teach your children not to give any personal information about themselves or their family. This includes pictures or other "clues". It is also best not to give false information. Children sometimes think they can trick the person, but often are tricked themselves. Just as with strangers, it is best not to talk at all with someone you don't know who makes you feel uncomfortable.

- Your children need to know that if someone does contact them and sends inappropriate or frightening stuff, it is **not their fault** and you will help them to deal with it. Many children are fearful about telling parents because they went in a "chat room" or told something they were not supposed to tell. Ask your children to print and save a copy of any disturbing email, blog, text message, etc. or to come and get you.
- If you have any question about inappropriate internet contact with your children, immediately contact your local police. If you need additional assistance, the NJ State Police have a unit which specializes in computer crime. It is important to notify law enforcement both to protect your children and other children in our communities. Your internet service provider (ISP) can offer parental controls as well as help with handling any problems children encounter. Always report suspicious or inappropriate contacts with your children to your ISP.

Resources...

- **The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)** runs a CyberTipline www.missingkids.com/cybertip for anyone with information regarding sexual exploitation of children online. They also have a 24-hour Pornography Tipline at 1-800-843-5678.
- **Netsmartz**, (NCMEC) site is for Children and Teens <http://www.netsmartz.org> .
- **iSAFE** is a great resource for parents, educators and students. www.iSAFE.org
- **Safe Kids Online** devoted to information on safe sites and internet safety strategies for parents of younger children and teens www.safekids.com/index.html .
- **GetNetWise** is a site on safety for children brought to you by Internet industry corporations and public interest organizations www.getnetwise.org .
- **iKeep Safe Coalition** – provides internet safety brochures for parents and teachers at www.iKeepSafe.org .
- **Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use** – a website for the whole family to help prevent and deal with Cyberbullying www.cyberbullying.org
- **Connect Safely** – is a forum where parents, teens, educators, and experts discuss and learn about safe blogging and social networking www.ConnectSafely.org .
- **The Children's Partnership** has a guide which is free online called, "The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway", at www.childrenspartnership.org or by sending \$5 to 1351 3rd Street Promenade . Suite 206, Santa Monica, CA 90401 (310) 260-1220