

Crime Prevention Tip – Internet Safety

The Internet is an area that can pose a very real threat to children. The anonymity of the 'Net offers adults the chance to pose as children, then try to set up a face-to-face meeting. Young teens may also be lured into virtual relationships with older adults that may result in actual encounters. Here's what parents can do:

- Never give out identifying information -- home address, school name, or telephone number -- in a public message such as chat or bulletin boards, and be sure you're dealing with someone that both you and your child know and trust before giving it out via e-mail.
- Think carefully before revealing any personal information such as age, marital status, or financial information. Consider using a pseudonym or unlisting your child's name if your service allows it.
- Get to know the services your child uses. If you don't know how to log on, get your child to show you.
- Find out what types of information it offers and whether there are ways for parents to block out objectionable material.
- Never allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission.
- If a meeting is arranged, make the first one in a public spot, and be sure to accompany your child.
- Never respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable.
- Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages.
- If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to your service provider and ask for their assistance.
- Should you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while on-line, immediately report this to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children by calling (800) 843-5678. You should also notify your on-line service.
- Remember that people on-line may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person, it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him or herself.

- Remember that everything you read on-line may not be true. Any offer that's "too good to be true" probably is. Be very careful about any offers that involve your coming to a meeting or having someone visit your house.
- Set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer use by your children. Discuss these rules and post them near the computer as a reminder.
- Remember to monitor their compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time your children spend on the computer. A child or teenager's excessive use of on-line services or bulletin boards, especially late at night, may be a clue that there is a potential problem.
- Remember that personal computers and on-line services should not be used as electronic baby-sitters.
- Be sure to make this a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom. Get to know their "on-line friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends.

Here's what children can do:

- Ask your child to observe the following rules:
- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" on-line without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the on-line service.
- I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going on-line. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be on-line, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

Source: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children