



The Internet is an incredible resource for adults and children alike. However, it is not without its dangers. The Internet is composed of a cross-section of people from our society: many are well meaning, helpful and

friendly - and some are not. Frequent the Internet often enough and you will come into contact with unbalanced individuals, con artists and even child predators. For this reason it is important that children learn how to use the Internet responsibly and safely. It is equally incumbent upon parents to become familiar with computers and the Internet and keep a watchful eye on their children's time online. The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office is providing this brochure to help parents and children learn more about online safety.

Popular Web logs or "Blogs"



A free social networking site where subscribers have the ability to create a profile a.k.a. "web log" or "blog", where they can describe themselves, their hobbies and interests, share photos and videos, instant message and create a community of "friends" (fellow subscribers). Although MySpace attempts to limit its subscribers to those over the age of 14, they do not verify the information provided at registration.

Xanga, LiveJournal, Facebook, Friendster, and MyYearbook

These social networking sites are similar to MySpace.com.

What can parents do?

Get involved – Talk to your kids about the dangers of the Internet.

Keep computers out of bedrooms – Children should not be permitted to have computers connected to the Internet located in their bedrooms. Parents say they are more vigilant about where their teens go online if the computer is in a public area of the household.

Monitor your child's online activities – Check your child's blog, learn who is on their buddy list, and let them know you will be checking up on what they do online. Also, consider using a monitoring program that records activity on your child's computer.

Restrict who can contact your child online – Most instant messaging services can be configured to reject messages from unknown screen names i.e. screen names not appearing on a pre-approved list.

Check cell phone records – If your child has a cell phone, be sure to review the monthly billing statement for unfamiliar phone numbers or an increase in text messaging.

Block unsafe content – Turn off explicit lyrics in iTunes (under Preferences), turn on Google Safe Search and use parental controls on game systems (such as PlayStation, Xbox, and PSP). There are also a host of programs available which will block access to age-inappropriate sites.

Choose a generic user or profile name – Screen or profile names reveal a lot about the users behind them. Children should create generic screen or profile names that do not reference their age, sex or location.

Create safer profiles – Most social networking sites allow profiles and blog posts to be restricted so that fewer unknown people can view them.

Ego surf – Look up your name and address, and children's names, on Google, Technorati and other search engines regularly.

Learn the language – Teens speak an entirely different language on the Internet. Parents need to learn the commonly used phrases, such as BRB (Be Right Back), A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location), and POS/P911 (Parent Over Shoulder / Parent Alert). A list of chat abbreviations can be found online by entering "chat acronyms" into Google.

When things get out of hand – Contact your local police department or the Computer Crimes Unit of the Prosecutor's Office if someone on the Internet threatens a violent act, solicits your child to engage in illegal activity or attempts to meet your child in person. Should this happen, save the message or email in question for later police investigation.

What can kids do?

Be skeptical – Not everything that glitters is gold, especially on the Internet, and not everyone online who claims to be a teenager, is.

Don't meet Internet "friends" in person – Children should not meet someone in person that they met on the Internet.

Don't post personal information – Children should not post or send their personal identifying information, including their picture, to others.

Tell a trusted adult – Children need to tell parents, or a trusted adult, if someone they are talking to on the Internet has asked them for personal information, has made them feel uncomfortable, has attempted to meet them in person or has threatened to commit a violent act against themselves or others.

Treat others the way that you would want to be treated – Before sending out an embarrassing or hurtful message consider that there is a real person on the other end of the computer who may be hurt by your actions. Also, threatening messages, intended as a joke or not, may result in the filing of criminal charges.

Think before you click – Once it's gone, it's gone forever. Think before hitting the send button.



According to the PEW Internet & American Life Project, 87% of teenagers between 12 – 17 use the Internet. This equates to approximately 21 million teens. The study found that most of the teens surveyed are accessing the Internet on a computer located in a public area of their home and that most parents are checking up on their kids' activities. However, the study also found that teens nonetheless are engaging in risky behavior online. Importantly, 81% of parents and 79% of teens surveyed think that teens are not being careful enough about the information that they post online.

Statistics

(Taken from PEW Internet & American Life Project www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Filters_Report.pdf).

- ▶ 51% of teenage users go online daily;
- ▶ 62% of parents check-up on their child's Internet usage, but only 33% of teens think their parents do so;
- ▶ 65% of parents and 64% of teens believe that teens are doing things online that they would not want their parents to know about;
- ▶ 75% of teens use Instant Messaging; and
- ▶ 48% do so on a daily basis.
- ▶ 39% of teens have played a trick on someone online by pretending to be someone else on IM.
- ▶ 31% of teens have written something over IM that they wouldn't say to someone in person, either positive or negative in nature.
- ▶ 25% of teens who go online daily have had information meant to be private be forwarded on by the recipient.
- ▶ 6 in 10 kids online have gotten an email or IM from a perfect stranger – **more than 1 in 2 have written back!**
- ▶ 1 in 33 kids has been aggressively solicited to meet their "cyber friend" in person.
- ▶ 1 in 4 kids ages 10 – 17 has been exposed to unwanted sexual material online.



Where can I find more information?

For more information about staying safe online, please visit the home page of the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office at:

www.prosecutor.co.monmouth.nj.us

and follow the links to Internet Safety.

How do I schedule an Internet Safety Lecture?

The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office offers Internet Safety Lectures for parents and school-aged children from 5th grade and up. These lectures deal with issues including:

- ◆ AOL/AIM
- ◆ MySpace.com
- ◆ Internet Fraud
- ◆ Identity Theft
- ◆ Cyberbullying

For more information or to schedule a lecture, please contact the Computer Crimes Unit at
(732) 577- 6729



INTERNET SAFETY



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