

Internet Safety Tips for Parents or Caregivers of Teenagers

What can you do to minimize the dangers on-line?

- **Keep computer in the open, public area of the house.**
- **Set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer on-line use**, such as, the amount of time spent on-line and the types of sites they are allowed to visit. Agree on reasonable consequences if rules/guidelines are broken.
- **Educate your kids about responsible online behavior.** File-sharing and taking text, images or artwork from the Web may infringe on copyright laws. Also they should not be using the Internet to spread gossip, bully or threaten others.
- **Know what Internet services they are using**, chat, e-mail, web, etc, and make sure the sites don't contain personal photos and information or offensive content. Tell your teens not to respond to junk mail, and to use e-mail filters.
- **Utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software.** While electronic chat can be a great place for teens to make new friends and discuss various topics of interest, computer-sex offenders also prowl it. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored. While parents should utilize these mechanisms, they should not totally rely on them.
- **Teach your teens never to give out personal information**, name, address, telephone number, cell phone number, private email address, school name or location, and pictures of themselves online.
- **Have discussions with them about their online friends and activities** just as you would about their other activities. Make sure they understand that whatever they are told on-line may or may not be true.
- **Talk to your teens about their Internet Messaging list** and make sure they're not talking to strangers. Insist they stay in public chat room areas.
- **Insist that they tell you first if they want to meet an "online friend."** come with them on their first visit
- **Talk to your teenagers about online pornography and direct them to good sites about health and sexuality.** Explore with them the differences between normal, healthy sexual expression and the exploitive and deviant activity that is so prevalent online. Discuss sexual messages in all media. Help your kids understand the impact of exploitive and degrading images of men and women, as well as boys and girls.
- **Encourage your teen to come to you if they come across material or messages that make them feel uncomfortable or threatened.** If your teen receives sexually explicit images from someone online, or if she or he is solicited sexually, contact your local police or report incidents to <http://www.cybertip.ca>. Understand, even if your child was a willing participant in any form of sexual exploitation that he/she is not at fault and is the victim. If your child has received an e-mail advertising for a pornographic website generally advertising for an adult, pornographic website that is sent to an e-mail address does not violate federal law or the current laws of most provinces. It may be a violation of law if the sender knows the recipient is under the age of 18. Such advertising can be reported to your service provider and, if known, the service provider of the originator. **Make sure your teens check with you before making financial transactions online**, including ordering, buying or selling items.
- **Discuss gambling and its potential risks.** Remind your teens that it is illegal for them to gamble online.
- **Monitor where they are going on the Internet by looking at the history, cookie and cache files on your computer.** However, keep in mind that computer-savvy kids know how to erase their Internet tracks. Open, honest communication is always preferable to invading privacy.

What are signs that your child might be at risk on-line?

- **Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.** Again, parents should consider monitoring the amount of time spent on-line. Children on-line are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are on-line around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings on-line trying to locate and lure children or seeking pornography.
- **You find pornography on your child's computer.** Sex offenders often supply their potential victims with pornography as a means of opening sexual discussions and for seduction. Child pornography may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal." Parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes from them.
- **Your child receives phone calls from men you do not know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you do not recognize.** While talking to a child victim on-line is a thrill for a computer-sex offender, it can be very cumbersome. Most want to talk to the children on the telephone. They often engage in "phone sex" with the children and often seek to set up an actual meeting for real sex. While a child may be hesitant to give out his /her home phone number, the computer-sex offenders will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can readily find out the child's phone number. Some computer-sex offenders have even obtained toll-free 800 numbers, so that their potential victims can call them without their parents finding out. Others will tell the child to call collect. Both of these methods result in the computer-sex offender being able to find out the child's phone number.
- **Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you do not know.** As part of the seduction process, it is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and all manner of gifts to their potential victims. Computer-sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for the child to travel across the country to meet them.
- **Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.** A child looking at pornographic images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.
- **Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.** Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

What should you do if you suspect your child is communicating with a sexual predator on-line?

- **Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions.** Tell them about the dangers of computer-sex offenders.
- **Review what is on your child's computer.** If you do not know how, ask a friend, co-worker, relative, or other knowledgeable person. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.
- **Use the Caller ID service to determine who is calling your child.** Most telephone companies that offer Caller ID also offer a service that allows you to block your number from appearing on someone else's Caller ID. Telephone companies also offer an additional service feature that rejects incoming calls that you block. This rejection feature prevents computer-sex offenders or anyone else from calling your home anonymously.
- **Devices can be purchased that show telephone numbers that have been dialed from your home phone.** Additionally, the last number called from your home phone can be retrieved if the telephone is equipped with a redial feature. You will also need a telephone pager to complete this retrieval.

Related information on protecting your child on-line may be found at:

www.microsoft.com/athome/security/children/childrenonline.msp as well as,

<http://www.chatdanger.com> OR <http://www.bewebaware.ca>