Internet Safety: Information and Prevention

Millions of children under the age of 18 use the internet daily in the United States. Children use the internet for research, e-mail, and entertainment. While the internet can be useful for information, there are also risks to using it. Children can be exposed to inappropriate content, child pornography, and harassment while on-line. Material on the internet can be sexual, violent, or hateful. This information can be transmitted to children through the use of chat rooms, e-mails, or Instant Messaging. Child predators can use the internet to chat with children, gain their trust, and then arrange meetings with them. Children can also be bullied on-line. They may be the subject of a demeaning and mean web site or web log. They may also receive threatening or harassing e-mails.

Internet Statistics
•41% of students do not share where they go or what they do on the internet with their parents. *(2005-06 i-SAFE pre-assessment survey of 12,650 students in grades 5-12)*
•55% of students report having given out personal information (name, age, gender, home address, etc) to someone they have met on-line. *(2005-06 i-SAFE survey of 12,000 students in grades 5-12)*
•19% of middle school students (grades 5-8) have met face to face with someone they met on-line. *(2005-06 i-SAFE pre-assessment survey of 13,600 students in grades 5-12)*

Internet Safety Awareness Tips for Parents
•Do your research. Learn all that you can about internet safety. Sites such as www.netsmartz.org, www.safeteens.com, and www.playitcybersafe.com are great resources for children and parents.
•Contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to know what filtering and blocking systems are available on your computer. These systems will block out what you don't want your child to see on-line. However, filtering systems are not a substitute for good judgment. It's important for parents to communicate with their children about internet house rules.
•Consider allowing your child to use a computer only in plain sight (living room, family room, etc).
•Discourage your child from posting their full name, address, age and grade, name of their school or photos on-line. This information could be used by an on-line predator to locate your child.
•Discuss internet safety with your child. Teach your children about the danger of meeting someone they have chatted with on-line. Adults may pose as children on-line to lure a child into meeting them. Teach your children that some people are not who they appear to be on-line.
•A blog, or web log, is an on-line web site that contains journal and diary entries, photos, and other images. Blogs are very popular with teens. Ask your child if they have created a blog. Some popular blog web sites include Xanga, MySpace, Facebook, Friendster and others. Ask your child to show you their blog.
•Instant Messaging, or IM, is real time communication exchanged between two people (or more) on-line using typed words as the form of communicating. Ask your child if they are instant messaging and who they IM or chat with on-line. Learn what your children are saying on-line. "Chat lingo" has become the new way to communicate. For example, "P911" means parents are coming. "LMIRL" means let's meet in real life. "PA" means parent alert.
•Know that your child can be bullied and threatened on-line through the use of e-mail, Instant Messaging, blogs, web pages or on-line journals.
•Know where to report on-line bullying, on-line threats, on-line solicitation, and lewd content. All of these offenses can be reported to your Internet Service Provider (ISP) and your local law enforcement agency. Report child pornography, incidents of children being solicited on-line and obscene material sent to children through e-mail or other on-line means to the CyberTipline. This national hotline is operated 24-hours a day, 7 days per week online at www.cybertipline.com or by calling 1-800-843-5678.

Internet Safety Tips for Children

•Never post your full name, age, address, name of your school, or any other identifying information on-line. Do not give out personal information to people you are "chatting" with on-line if you don't know them in real life. Do not post your friends' names, ages, addresses, or other identifying information. Posting their information puts them at risk.

•Know that who you are talking to on-line may not be the age they say they are. 40 year old men have said on-line that they are 12 years old in order to lure kids to meet them.

•Never meet anyone face to face that you have chatted with on-line.

•Do not give out passwords to anyone but your parents or guardian.

•Do not allow other internet users to read your blog or web site if you do not know them.

•Do not add people to your Instant Messaging list unless you know them in "real life."

•Do not respond to inappropriate and lewd comments. Report anything you see or receive on-line that makes you feel uncomfortable to your parent, guardian, or other trusted adult. Your parents can then contact your local Internet Service Provider, local law enforcement, or the Cyber Tipline (1-800-843-5678).

For more information, visit these additional web sites:
www.netsmartz.org; www.safeteens.com; www.playitcybersafe.com; www.i-safe.org; www.cyberbully.org