



COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

March/April 2004

Volume 8 Issue 2



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Internet Safety for Your Kids – *The Danger*

The growth of the internet has been a boon for adults and kids. Email has improved communications. Students research topics directly from government agencies, volunteer groups, or educational institutions. Anyone can keep up with the news whether it is international, national or local. You can keep up with hobbies and interests through the web, chat rooms (where users can discuss the topic of the chat room in real time) or on newsgroups (where users post messages like on a giant public bulletin board).

The benefits of the internet are sometimes outweighed by lurking, unseen risks.

The internet gives anonymity allowing stalkers, sex offenders, and scam artists, to come in contact with children more easily. In the last year, according to the Washington State Attorney Generals Office and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, children between the ages of 10 and 17 experienced the following:

- 1 in 5 received a sexual solicitation;
- 1 in 33 was aggressively solicited. In these cases a solicitor asked to meet them, called them, or sent mail or gifts;
- 1 in 4 had unwanted exposure to pictures of naked people or sexual activity; and

- 1 in 17 were threatened or harassed.

Exposure to Inappropriate Material- A child may be exposed to inappropriate material that is sexual, hateful, or violent in nature, or encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal. Sexual predators often use pornography to open the door in conditioning a child for a future sexual encounter.

Physical Molestation- While online, a child might provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk his or her safety or the safety of other family members. In a few cases, pedophiles have used E-mail, bulletin boards, and chat areas to gain a child's confidence and then arrange a face-to-face meeting.

Harassment- A child might encounter email or chat/bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning, or belligerent.

Legal and Financial- A child could do something that has negative legal or financial consequences such as giving out a parent's credit card number or doing something that violates another person's rights. Also, children should not give out personal or financial information to anyone they do not know over the internet.



Web Sites & Chat Rooms

Web Sites

Web sites provide much of the information that we use on the internet. Anyone can have a web site; businesses, governments, non-profit organizations, individuals all can have a web site.

Most sites make positive contributions. Some web sites may promote negative, demeaning subjects such as pornography, anti-Semitism, or racism.

Some sites might try to download unwanted software onto your computer to display advertising, pornography or monitor where you go on the web, gather information on your hard drive or make your computer vulnerable to "viruses" or "hacker attacks".

Chatrooms

Chatrooms provide a place to talk about subjects with others. Thousands of subjects are covered by thousands of chatrooms. Most are benign and beneficial but some discuss sex, pornography, racism etc. and can get into some pretty disgusting stuff.

In a chatroom, you never know who might be viewing the messaging without announcing their presence. Also, you cannot be absolutely sure that there is not someone reading your messages that you do not know about.

Internet Safety for Your Kids – Signs Your Child Might be a Victim

The FBI lists a few signs to look for that might show that your child might become a victim of a pedophile or sexual offender in it's publication *A Parents Guide to Internet Safety* (<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm>):

Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night-

Most children that fall victim to computer-sex offenders spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. They may go on-line after dinner and on the weekends. They go on-line to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit information. 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- Pornography is often used in the sexual victimization of children. 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." Be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't 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.

Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't 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.



Internet Safety for Your Kids – *Preventing*

Here are some things you can do to prevent your child from becoming a victim of an online sexual predator:

- Communicate, and talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential on-line danger.
- Spend time with your children on-line. Have them teach you about their favorite on-line destinations.
- Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in your child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a computer-sex offender to communicate with a child when the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.
- Utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software. While electronic chat can be a great place for children to make new friends and discuss various topics of interest, it is also prowled by computer-sex offenders. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored. While parents should utilize these mechanisms, they should not totally rely on them.
- Always maintain access to your child's on-line account and randomly check his/her e-mail. Be aware that your child could be contacted through the U.S. Mail. Be up front with your child about your access and reasons why.
- Teach your child the responsible use of the resources on-line. There is

much more to the on-line experience than chat rooms.

- Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places, outside your normal supervision, where your child could encounter an on-line predator.
- 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. The offender always bears the complete responsibility for his or her actions.
- Instruct your children:
 - ⇒ to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line;
 - ⇒ to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet or on-line service to people they do not personally know;
 - ⇒ to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number;
 - ⇒ to never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images;
 - ⇒ to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing;
 - ⇒ that whatever they are told on-line may or may not be true.

If You Suspect Your Child is in Danger

- *Talk with your child about your suspicions. Talk about the dangers of computer-sex offenders. Don't be judgmental or accusatory. Listen to what they have to say.*
- *Review what is on your child's computer. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.*

If

- 1. Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography;*
 - 2. Your child has been sexually solicited by someone who knows that your child is under 18 years of age;*
 - 3. Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone that knows your child is under the age of 18.*
- via the Internet or on-line service, you should immediately contact your local or state law enforcement agency, the [FBI](#), and the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#).*

Keep the computer turned off to preserve any evidence for future law enforcement use. Unless directed to do so by the law enforcement agency, do not attempt to copy any of the images and/or text found on the computer.



COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

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Internet Safety for Your Kids – Resources

We have only given you the most important information about safety on the internet. Two excellent online publications are:

From the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:
Teen Safety on the Information Highway:

http://www.ncmec.org/missingkids/servlet/ResourceServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=817

And from the FBI:

A Parents Guide to Internet Safety:
<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm>

Other resources include:

From the Washington State Attorney General's Office:

<http://www.atg.wa.gov/safetynet/kids.shtml>

Also from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

<http://www.ncmec.org/missingkids/>

The Internet and Your Child is a local group that gives hands on training to parents:

<http://www.theinternetandyourchild.org/>