

IRVINE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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CHILD SAFETY ON THE INTERNET

In the past, online services were oriented towards adults. Now the Internet has become a way of life for virtually every school child in one capacity or another. Schools are going online and in many homes children are logging on to commercial services, private bulletin boards, and the Internet in record numbers. As a parent, you need to understand the nature of these systems.

Online Services - are maintained by commercial, self-regulated businesses that may screen or provide editorial/user controls, when possible, of the material contained on their systems.

Computer Bulletin Boards (BBS systems) - can be operated by individuals, businesses, or organizations. The material included is usually theme oriented, offering information on hobbies and interests. Some feature "adult" oriented material, but most attempt to limit minors from accessing the information.

The Internet - a global "network of networks," is **NOT** regulated or controlled by anyone. This leaves no limits or checks on the kind of information that is maintained by and accessible to Internet Users.

BENEFITS OF THE INTERNET

- ✓ **Reference information** - news, weather, sports, stock quotes, movie reviews, encyclopedias, airline fares, etc.
- ✓ **Transactions** - trading stocks, travel reservations, banking, shopping online, etc.
- ✓ **Communication** - electronic mail is quickly replacing letters between family and friends, documents between businesses, etc.
- ✓ **Education and entertainment** - users can learn about virtually any topic, take a college course, play an endless number of computer games, etc.
- ✓ **Free and share-ware software** - user computing is enhanced by accessing these programs, applets, upgrade versions, and patches.

Children and teens can benefit from being online. Most have positive experiences, but also run the risk of becoming targets of crime and exploitation. Because they are trusting, curious, and anxious to explore, children need particular parental supervision when on the Net. The online world, like the rest of society, is made up of a variety of people. Most are decent, honest, and respectful, but some may be rude, obnoxious, insulting, exploitative, or even dangerous.

We are all aware of the highly publicized cases of Internet exploitation involving children and teens, although the reported cases are fairly infrequent. Unfortunately, like most crimes against children, many go unreported, especially if the child or teen is engaged in an activity that s/he does not want the parent to know about.

This is not a reason to avoid using on line services. Prohibiting a child from using these services would be like keeping them out of school because students are sometimes victimized on campus. It's better to teach children how to be "street smart" to safeguard themselves in potentially dangerous situations.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- ✓ **Teens are particularly at risk** because they often use the computer unsupervised, and are more likely to join in online chat room discussions regarding dating, companionship, relationships, and sexual activity.
- ✓ **Exposure to Inappropriate Material** - sexual, violent, obscene pictures, video, audio, and literature.

- ✓ **Physical Molestation** – a child might provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk his/her safety or the safety of other family members. Pedophiles have successfully used online services and bulletin boards to gain a child's confidence, and then arrange a face-to-face meeting with them.
- ✓ **Harassment** – Children may encounter E-mail or bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning, or belligerent.
- ✓ **Frauds & Scams** - With the advent of the parent approved child credit card, children can now shop on-line and can get "taken" by unethical or non-existent "companies."

HOW PARENTS CAN REDUCE RISKS

Most online services and Internet providers allow parents to limit their children's access to certain services and features such as adult oriented "chat" and bulletin boards. Check for these when you first subscribe. In addition, there are programs designed specifically to enable parents to prevent children from accessing inappropriate materials on the Internet. However, these are not foolproof, just a helpful tool. Parents need to stay in touch with their child/teen and spend time with him/her when the child is online. Set up the computer your child/teen will be using in the family room where you or another family member can monitor his/her activity.

MAKE IT A FAMILY RULE TO:

- ✓ **NEVER give out identifying information**, home address, school name, telephone number, age, social security number, marital status, or financial information over the Internet. Consider using a pseudonym or unlisting your child's name if your service allows it. **NEVER POST A PICTURE OR ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO POST HIS/HER PICTURE** on the Internet.
- ✓ **Get to know the service your child uses.** If you don't know how to log on, get your child to show you. Check to see if the service provider has a way to block objectionable material.
- ✓ **NEVER allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting** with someone they have met on the Internet.
- ✓ **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. Forward a copy of such messages to your service provider and ask for assistance.
- ✓ **NEVER allow your child to participate in video conference calls** where they can be seen by unknown people (persons other than family and close friends).
- ✓ **Review your child's selections prior to purchase** if you have approved a child's online credit card. Research shopping sites to confirm that the company/seller and the items for purchase are real. Investigate any contests or prize-oriented websites before allowing your child to participate.

ON-LINE CHILD PORNOGRAPHY, SUSPICIOUS SOLICITATIONS, OR SUSPICIOUS REQUESTS TO MEET SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY REPORTED TO:

THE IRVINE POLICE DEPARTMENT - (949) 724-7000

FBI - (SANTA ANA) - (714)-542-8825

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN - 1-800-843-5678

YOUR ON-LINE SERVICE PROVIDER

For additional information on child safety or other crime prevention programs, brochures, or presentations provided by the Irvine Police Department, call the Preventive Services Bureau at (949) 724-7149 or e-mail tatchley@ci.irvine.ca.us.

MY RULES FOR ONLINE SAFETY

(Provided by The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

1. I WILL NOT GIVE OUT PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name	Gender (Boy/Girl)
Address	Parents' work address/phone number
Phone Number	Parents' names(s)
Age	School name/location
Social Security Number	Whether I am alone

2. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
3. I will NEVER agree to get together with someone that I meet online.
4. I will NEVER send a person my picture or anything else, in the mail or online, without CHECKING FIRST with my parents.
5. 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 police department and the online service.
6. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, 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.

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