

Children...

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you are giving them more freedom, make sure they understand important safety rules and what constitutes a threatening situation for their age.

* If a child is victimized in your community and your child asks you about it, speak frankly, but with reassurance about what they can do to minimize this happening to them. If you speak freely with your child about these incidents, they will be more likely to speak up, should something questionable happen to them.

Internet Danger

Be aware that the Internet is a place where pedophiles search for victims. Their approach is to become friends with the child through repeated, routine contact. Child molesters are willing to invest the time online needed to become known and trusted, before attempting to contact your child in person. It is estimated that 93 percent of U.S. teens ages 12-17 currently use the Internet and that 61 percent of teens go on line every day.

So where are the bad guys? They use services which allow them to casually

communicate with children: chat rooms (AOL, Yahoo, MSN), social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Xanga) and Peer 2 Peer networks (file sharing networks, like Napster). Many times predators will conceal their real age and identity in the hopes of gaining a child's trust.

Warning signs that your children might be at-risk online:

- They spend a large amount of time online, especially late at night, when you are asleep;
- They attempt to hide what they are viewing when you enter the room (switch to another program, or turn the monitor off);
- You find pornography or other sexual material on their computer;
- They use an online account in another name;
- They become withdrawn;
- They receive phone calls from an adult you don't know; or
- They make long distance calls to numbers you don't recognize.

You can minimize the chances of your child being victimized by an online ex-

ploiter if you discuss Internet dangers. Instruct your child never to arrange a meeting with someone they meet online unless they have discussed it with you; never post or upload pictures of themselves to people they do not personally know; never download pictures from an unknown source and never give out identifying information. Teach your child to only post photos or information they would feel comfortable seeing published on the front page of a newspaper. Tell them that once you post something, you can't take it back and it can be sent on to others.

Also take steps to monitor you child's online activity. Keep the computer in a common room in the house; use parental controls and blocking software; maintain access to your child's online account and randomly check their e-mail.

Use the available FDLE Web sites to stay informed of the identity and proximity of predators/sex offenders; however, keep these services in perspective. Don't rely on them to identify every dangerous person. Not all sex offenders are registered, and

not all who register comply with the requirement to update their addresses. Access the FDLE website on a regular basis, such as before school starts and ends, or quarterly.

In 1997, Florida became one of the first states to make sexual predator/offender registration information available on the Internet. As of April 1, 2010, 8,044 predators and 45,447 offenders were listed with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). Information on each registered individual, including a photograph and address, is available to the public on the Florida Sexual Offenders and Predators

site at www.flsexoffender.net.

The Florida Offender Alert System (FOAS) celebrated its second anniversary in March 2010. The FOAS sends an e-mail alert to subscribers when a registered sex offender/predator moves into a neighborhood or near any other location designated by the user, such as a school, workplace, daycare, or home. The FOAS also enables citizens to receive alerts when a specific predator or offender reports an address change. Registration for this valuable awareness tool is also at www.flsexoffender.net.

Be vigilant. Be aware. Be safe.

P.O.P.S.

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