


Much like the real world, the World Wide Web can be an inviting but dangerous place for children. Young people with unmonitored access to the Internet are exposed to a wide variety of risks, some of them life-threatening. Responsible parents naturally exercise caution and oversight when it comes to where and with whom our kids are allowed to play, what they watch on TV, and how they interact with strangers. Parents should be just as vigilant in safeguarding children's Internet activities.

As with adults, the World Wide Web offers many benefits to children, including valuable educational resources and communication tools that make it easier for them to keep in touch with people who are important to them. But the Internet also offers kids easy access to a variety of objectionable and even dangerous material – pornography, hate propaganda, and both sexual and violent images.

Children can and regularly do receive unsolicited e-mail communications from Internet predators who seek to harm kids they meet online. Pedophiles, for example, can operate with complete anonymity on the Internet, which provides them an endless supply of potential victims – our children. But parents and police are not powerless to stop Internet predators. We must work together to protect our children by educating them about dangers posed by the Internet and by monitoring and restricting our kids' online activities.

The Solano County District Attorney's Office is committed to protecting our children from becoming victims of online crime or engaging in illegal Internet activities themselves. The goals of the Protecting Our Kids initiative are simple. We want to reduce the number of kids exploited or abducted by Internet predators; we hope to increase the reporting of such criminal activity; and we strive to provide parents, guardians, and educators with resources to make our kids' online experiences safe, educational, and fun.

To learn more about how you can safeguard your children's Internet activities, please visit the Solano County District Attorney's Web site at www.solanocounty.com/da and look for the area entitled "Protecting Our Kids."



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You Need to Know What Your Child Does on the Internet

Online child pornography/child sex exploitation is the most significant crime problem confronting the FBI that involves children. And, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 40 percent of all abducted children ages 15-17 were abducted as a direct result of their Internet activity.

How Vulnerable Are Our Children?

The statistics speak for themselves. Nationally, over 45 million children age 10-17 use the Internet. Of these:

- One in four has encountered unwanted pornography.
- One in five has been sexually solicited.
- One in 17 was threatened or harassed in the past year.
- One in 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation (were asked to meet someone in person, called on the phone, and/or sent correspondence or gifts) in the past year.
- Nearly 60 percent have received an e-mail or Instant Message from a stranger, and half responded to the stranger's message.

Why Are Kids Such Easy Victims?

Most children know more about the Internet than their parents do. This knowledge gap keeps parents in the dark and means children's Internet activities often are unsupervised. Only 52 percent of parents moderately supervise their children's Internet use, and more than 60 percent of teens report their parents know little or nothing about their Web activities. Internet predators take advantage of the lack of responsible adult supervision of children on the World Wide Web.

Is My Child in Contact With an Internet Predator?

Your child may be in contact with an Internet predator if he or she displays any of the following warning signs:

- Downloads photos of strangers.
- Downloads pornographic images.
- Quickly turns off the computer or changes software applications when someone enters the room.
- Spends unsupervised time in chat rooms.
- Waits until other family members are asleep or out of the home before going online.
- Has received unusual phone calls or gifts or letters in the mail.
- Is very secretive about online activities and the people he or she talks to.
- Visits Web sites dealing with death, destruction, or other morbid topics.
- Uses online accounts that you do not recognize or uses multiple e-mail addresses.
- Spends countless hours on the computer, and his or her grades have dropped.

What Should I Do if My Child Appears in Danger or Has Disappeared?

If your child engages in any of the behaviors described above, talk to him or her about it.

If you believe your child is in danger, do the following:

- Immediately report anything you suspect may be a crime involving your child to your local police.
- Leave the computer untouched. Do not try to be a detective.
- Notify your local police department or the county Sheriff.
- Notify the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Cybertip hotline by calling toll-free 1-800-THE-LOST.
- Visit www.missingkids.com for more information and educational resources.

Juvenile Crime Online

The same anonymity that shields the online predator from detection can also shield juveniles who choose to engage in criminal activity. Parents of children prosecuted by the District Attorney's Office often are amazed to learn their honor student has engaged in criminal activities online. Much like the kids who fall prey to Internet predators, juveniles who commit crime via the Internet spend too much unsupervised time online.

Parental Liability for Kids' Online Crime: "What I Don't Know Won't Hurt Me, Right?"

WRONG! Even if you have no knowledge of what your child is doing on the Web, you can be held responsible if he or she is convicted of an Internet-related crime.

California Civil Code Section 1714.1 states that parents are jointly and severally liable with the minor for the child's acts of willful misconduct resulting in death, personal injury, or property damage.

Is Your Child Engaging in Online Crime?

Be on the lookout for clues that your child is engaged in online crime. Warning signs that your child may be engaged in illegal online activity include:

- Your child uses the Internet excessively.
- Your child is secretive about his or her online activities.
- Your child turns off the computer or changes software applications when someone else enters the room.
- Your child waits until other family members are asleep or away from home before going online.
- Your child uses online accounts that you do not recognize or has multiple e-mail addresses.
- You find software on the computer you did not purchase.

- You find illegally obtained software on your computer.
- You find credit card numbers on the computer that are not your own.
- Your child has an eBay account when by law you must be 18 years of age to have one.
- Your child receives unusual phone calls or packages or letters in the mail.

You Can Protect Your Child From Internet Dangers

You don't have to be a computer whiz to safeguard your children's Internet activities. **The key is to monitor your children's Internet use.** Make sure you and your child know what to watch out for in cyberspace.

Remember, because of the anonymity offered by the Internet, people you meet online may not be who they claim to be. Encourage your children never to share personal information about themselves on the Internet.

Smart Web Parents can protect their kids by doing the following:

- Keep the computer in a family room so that you can monitor their Internet use.
- Talk to your children about the dangers of the Internet.
- Emphasize that dangerous pedophiles use the anonymity offered by the Web to lure child victims.
- Stress that the rules you set are to protect them, not to control them.
- Make sure your children understand they need to be careful online.
- Encourage your children to create screen names and e-mails that do not reveal their personal information (name, age, school, etc.). Children who understand the risks posed by the Internet are more likely to cooperate with their parents in safeguarding their Internet activities.
- Install an operating system that makes you the administrator; for example, Windows XP or Mac OS X.

- Create a password that will allow only you to control the computer's Internet settings, online content, and software that can be installed. This is an important step in monitoring online activities, even when you are away from home.
- Tell your children that you have the right to monitor their computer use and that if you suspect there is a problem, you will randomly monitor their Internet activities.
- Do not allow your child to have multiple e-mail accounts or create accounts without your knowledge. You may insist that your children give you their e-mail and chat room passwords. Internet accounts and primary screen names should be in your name.
- Tell your children to let you know immediately if a stranger tries to contact them on the Web, whether through an Instant Message, chat room, or even an e-mail.
- Go online with your kids and find out who they send Instant Messages to and/or chat with.
- Prohibit the use of private chat rooms as well as adult-oriented rooms.
- Make sure you know the identity of everyone on their contact and/or buddy lists.
- Make sure your child knows never to divulge personal information on the Internet, including his or her name, age, photos, gender, physical description, telephone number, address, etc. Internet predators look at personal profiles stored on the Internet to find their victims.
- The federal government has enacted the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) to protect your child's privacy when he/she registers with certain Web sites.
- Set rules as to what sites your children are allowed to visit and which ones they are not.
- Enforce these rules, and set time limits on their computer use.
- Do not allow your children to chat with friends by sending Instant Messages during homework-related computer time.
- Become familiar with the Web browser your children use and restrict the type of content (violence, sex, and language) that can be viewed.
- Consider purchasing reliable third-party filtering software such as *Cyberpatrol*® or *NetNanny*®. Most electronics stores carry filtering software.

Parental Internet Safety Monitoring Software

ComputerCOP® is an Internet safety monitoring CD that helps parents keep track of what their children are doing on the computer in order to assess their kids' exposure to objectionable or even dangerous material.



To obtain a ComputerCOP® CD or to learn more about keeping children safe on the Internet, please visit the Solano County District Attorney's Web site at www.solanocounty.com/da and look for the special area entitled "Protecting Our Kids."



For more tips on how you can safeguard your children's Internet activities and take control of the family computer, please be sure to visit the Solano County District Attorney's Web site at www.solanocounty.com/da and look for the area entitled "Protecting Our Kids."



This pamphlet can also be downloaded from the D.A.'s Web site and distributed to your PTA, school, or parent group.

The Solano County District Attorney's Office
"Protecting Our Kids"

Protecting Our Kids

Keeping Children Safe on the Internet



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