

ATTENTION PARENTS - BE AWARE OF THE RISKS ONLINE

Communication has changed over the years. Children today have access to cell phones and computers for their instant communication needs. But computers, and specifically the internet, can be a threat to your child. Internet safety is quickly becoming one of the most serious issues facing parents. With computers and internet access readily available, more and more children are placing themselves in compromising situations through the use of chat rooms and personal web pages on websites such as *Myspace.com* or *Xanga.com*. Kids often make the mistake of posting personal information in a chat room or web log (blog) that would make it easy for someone to contact or locate them. Does your child visit these websites? Do you know enough about these sites? Below is information that every parent needs to know on how to keep your child safe on the internet.

WHAT ARE THESE SITES?

Myspace.com and *Xanga.com* are online communities that provide social networking opportunities for teens and adults. Some estimates put the number of social networking sites at more than 200; among the most popular are MySpace, Xanga, Facebook and Friendster. There are approximately 46.7 million users on Myspace alone with a reported 160,000 new people registering everyday. These sites let users post a profile about their interests and post photos. Some allow users to maintain address books, post blogs, and send e-mail or instant messages. These web communities tend to have young users and the sites are generally not monitored.

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

It is very dangerous for people all over the world to know where you are and who you are. Many young computer users are very trusting and share personal information online. For this reason it is important for parents to be involved and monitor their children's internet use. The first thing a parent needs to know is their child's password to these sites and their child's screen name for Instant Messaging, which is often linked to the sites. Parents can monitor what their child says online by checking the logs of their instant message communication. Parents can do this by going to preferences while in AIM and clicking on the child's Log. This will bring up all of the communication that the child has had with other online friends. Below are some other helpful hints for helping children be safe online from the Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Chat rooms

Your child may be asked to get together with someone they meet in a chat room, but remember -- people are not always who they seem to be. Advise them to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone.

Stay away from chat rooms that get into subjects associated with sex or cults or groups that do potentially dangerous things. Be particularly suspicious of anyone who tries to turn you against your parents, guardians, teachers or friends.

Choose a name that doesn't let people know if you're a girl or guy. Just make sure the name doesn't let anyone know anything about you or mean something that may encourage others to bother you.

Instant Messaging

* Be sure you know who is receiving the IMs you send. Even if you do know the recipients, anything you type can be forwarded to other people. There is no way to "take back" something once you send it.

* Be careful about using video or digital cameras and sending images of yourself during an IM session.

* You don't have to respond to any messages especially if they are rude, annoying, or make you feel uncomfortable.

E-Mail

* Be careful about replying to e-mail from people you don't know. Remember, the sender may not be who he or she seems to be.

* By replying you are verifying a valid e-mail address to the sender, and that information can be used to encourage a person who may send inappropriate messages or put you on even more e-mail lists.

* Never send a photograph of yourself or any personal information to someone you don't know.

* E-mail easily can be copied and forwarded to others. So if you do send personal information to friends, be sure they will respect your privacy.

Bulletin Boards and Forums (or Personal Sites like myspace.com)

* Whenever you post, in most cases, your words are available for anyone to see, even if you are responding to a particular individual's posting. Remember the basic rules, and never reveal identifying information about yourself.

Additional Resources

There are many additional resources online that can help parents educate themselves and their children about internet safety. Below is a partial list.

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/>

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/checklist.html>

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/createfamilypledge.html>

http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents__guide/blocking_and_filtering/

<http://www.childrenspartnership.org//AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>

<http://www.safekids.com/kidsrules.htm>

<http://www.safeteens.com/safeteens.htm>

http://www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2005/258_dec7/blog.html
<http://weblogs.about.com/od/weblogsbasics/a/Top10FAQs.htm>

Quiz for Parents

Parents do you know any of this Internet lingo? Test yourself and see if you can keep up with the latest lingo:

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------------|
| 1. BRB | 1. Be right back |
| 2. DQMOT | 2. Don't quote me on this |
| 3. KWIM | 3. Know what I mean? |
| 4. LMIRL | 4. Lets meet in real life |
| 5. A/S/L? | 5. Age/Sex/Location? |
| 6. P911 | 6. My parents are coming |
| 7. POAHF | 7. Put on a happy face |
| 8. SOTMG | 8. Short of time, must go |
| 9. TAFN | 9. That's all for now |
| 10. WTGP | 10. Want to go private? |
| 11. G2G | 11. Got to go |

SAFE INTERNET PRACTICES ARE VITAL

It is important that we teach and remind our children of critical safety practices and provide them with safe ways to navigate the web. Get Net Wise, an online Internet safety organization, experts at www.filterguide.com and educators at www.cybersmart.org offer the following online security tips for families:

- Use the Internet with your kids. Learn about their favorite websites, educate yourself while spending time with your kids and don't let your child's superior knowledge of technology intimidate you.
- Establish clear ground rules about Internet usage.
- Teach kids to never give personal information to people they meet online, especially in chat rooms and on bulletin boards. This information includes: Name, pictures, school name, address, phone number, friends' names, passwords or any other piece of information that could identify their location to a stranger. Teach your kids to be leery of anyone who wants to know too much!
- Instruct kids to never plan a face-to-face meeting with any online acquaintance, even in a public place such as a mall.
- Instruct kids to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent or harassing.
- Encourage your kids to notify you if a stranger does approach them online or says something that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Use hard-to-guess passwords and keep them private. Tell your family that combinations of letters, numbers and symbols are harder to "crack" than just words.
- Tell your kids to not respond at all to offensive or dangerous email, chat requests or other communications, and to leave if they see a website that makes them uncomfortable. Make sure your kids know they can show you anything that

- makes them uncomfortable. Assure them you will not be angry with or blame them; keep lines of communication open.
- If you become worried that your kids or their friends are in danger, don't hesitate to call the authorities.
 - Disconnect from the Internet when not in use. Don't leave your access open to those who may want to do you and your computer harm!
 - Get to know and use "Parental Controls" available through your Internet Service Provider or available for purchase.

The Pickerington Local School District takes steps to protect your children while they are at school. We use internet filtering software that blocks websites containing inappropriate content. We also have an Acceptable Use Policy that is sent home with students each year that spells out what is and is not appropriate use of technology in our district. A copy of this policy can be found on our website at

www.pickerington.k12.oh.us/ldrship/BOE/Policy/EDE-STUDENT.htm

We recommend that you take a look at this policy, as well as the online resources listed above, and talk to your children about internet safety. Take steps to protect your child by monitoring their computer use. The best defenses against the inherent dangers of the internet are awareness and vigilance on the part of parents, and the communication of necessary safeguards to children.