

INTERNET SAFETY WORKSHOP

BY: Katina Feggos



In the month of May, Gentle Path Counselling Services presented a workshop for parents on how to safe guard their children from the potential risks of Internet predators and inappropriate materials that can be found on the Internet. The presenters were Celyn Robertson from Aliant and Fred Morton from the Saint John Police Department.

Are you wondering how safe your kids are when surfing the net? The Information Highway can be a great tool for all age groups when searching information on a wide range of topics. But we should also keep in mind that not all the information found on the Internet is useful and/or safe. There are people who use the Internet to exploit and harm others. Parents need to be aware that our children could be at risk of of meeting strangers (predators) online and could be subjected to pornography and/or physical danger. Research indicates that there is an increase in the number of cases reported to the FBI. In 1999 there were 1500 cases reported and in 2000 there were 2856 cases reported. What makes it hard for police to catch these predators? Unfortunately predators most times can not be seen. Predators communicate with their victims through online chats often times falsifying personal information such as their name, gender, or age. Predators have the time and patience to lour their prey by making irresistible offers to their victims. Often predators will make comments to boost children's self-esteem and confidence or make promises that entices them.

How do predators go about stalking their prey? They do so by building rapport with their victims. Once predators initiate on-line contact with a possible victim they befriend him/her by remaining empathetic to the needs and concerns of the young adult. Once a predator has gained the trust of his/her victim he/she may then involve the child in an illegal and/or shameful act. Engaging children in such acts enables the predator to have the upper hand. He/she then has the power to threaten the child by saying, "I'll tell your parents if you don't!".

Should parents be alarmed? Statistics reveal that 18% of children intend to meet an online friend in person. This can be a frightening percentage for many parents, especially when parents do not know who their child will be meeting? You may wonder what can be done to help create a safe place for your kids when they are using the Internet? Throughout the presentation there were many helpful suggestions on what, we as adults, can do to create a safe and secure environment for our kids and ourselves. Most of the suggestions that were mentioned throughout the workshop involve communication among parents and their children. Listed below are some of the suggestions discussed.

What we can do:

- ~ Establish clear guidelines for Internet use Parents need to sit down with their children and set clear guidelines for Internet use so that both the parent and child understand what is expected.
- ~ Surf the Internet together-most kids need to have supervision to navigate successfully to a web site

~ Know what your kids are using Try and be as actively involved as possible with your children while they are using the Internet.

~ Place the computer in a common area Place the computer in a room that is in clear sight. Placing the home computer in your child's bedroom is not recommended.

~ Encourage your children to approach you should they encounter any problem Encourage open communication with your children so they feel at ease coming to you when needed.

~ Don't share your password with anyone

Update your virus software weekly Download the updated version of your virus software. You can find the updated version on the Internet.

~ Don't open files or e-mails from someone you don't know

~ Be suspicious of people online asking too many personal questions

~ Never give out personal information. This could be used to identify potential victims

~ Never respond to e-mail, chat, or newsgroup messages that are inappropriate or hostile. This could encourage the predator

~ Never allow your kids to arrange a face-face meeting unaccompanied by an adult. Make sure the meeting is in a public place

~ Be leery of the people you talk to, they may not be whom or what they say they are

~ Don't believe everything you read on line

~ Don't use the computer like a babysitter Take time out and spend it with your children rather than allowing all their time to be spent in front of the computer.

~ When purchasing products online check out the specifics on the seller, such as where are they located? www.bbb.org Better Business Bureau.

~ When using a credit card to make a purchase, make sure the site is secure Check for an icon that resembles a padlock on the toolbar at the bottom of the computer screen. This icon helps the user to ensure that the site he/she is currently on is a secure one. Do not rely on the site alone claiming that it is secure.

Call today for more information or a confidential appointment:

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