

Title:

The Dangers of Online Interaction

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429

Summary:

The proliferation of computer technology and emergence of the Internet has enhanced the lives of children and adults. Increasing productivity and efficiency, the Internet is a powerful educational tool, and it provide youths a vast amount of information. That said, it is important to remember that the Internet can also be very dangerous. Criminals are using modern technology to prey on innocent victims.

Keywords:

safety, web, internet, online, internet safety, children, myspace, social networks, chat, predator, pedophile, protect, protection,

Article Body:

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The proliferation of computer technology and emergence of the Internet has enhanced the lives of children and adults. Increasing productivity and efficiency, the Internet is a powerful educational tool, and it provide youths a vast amount of information. That said, it is important to remember that the Internet can also be very dangerous. Criminals are using modern technology to prey on innocent victims.

According to research, one in five youths, ages 10-17, were approached online sexually or were sexually solicited. The tool for the solicitation was the Internet. In fact, 89% of those solicitations occurred via chat rooms or with predators using instant messaging. Additionally, nine out of ten children online, ages 8-16, have viewed pornography online. In most cases the children unintentionally encountered pornography while searching for an alternate item, but the statistic is very telling.

In many ways, the Internet has made the predators job easier, as the predators can hide behind pseudonyms and screen names. The danger of the Internet is persistent and very real because the Internet provides predators anonymity. Online victimization differs little from traditional victimization that happens in person, the process is essentially the same. The perpetrator uses information

to target a child. Often solicitation begins in the form of friendship, sharing hobbies and interests. The predator then adapts the persona of who their young victim wants them to be. Online predators will often spend considerable time befriending a child. The predator builds a level of trust with the victim.

No family is immune to the possibility that their child will become an online victim. Older children are at an increased risk, because they are often online unsupervised. Teens or adolescents, who are particularly rebellious or searching for their identity, are often more susceptible to Internet predators.

Sadly, in almost all cases the interaction begins as a harmless camaraderie and it evolves into inappropriate sexually explicit conduct. Online crimes often transcend jurisdictional boundaries, making it difficult to prosecute or even track. And while cross-agency support has been growing, its growth can not keep up with the abundance of online crime. The Internet has no boundaries, and there is not a centralized legal body regulating crime on the Internet.

Remember, physical contact between a child and perpetrator does not necessarily need to occur for a crime to have been committed. In many cases, digitally explicit material is emailed back and forth. Educating our children is critical to keeping them safe.

If you are aware of an incident that involves child exploitation via the Internet, contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 800.843.5678.