

## What Teens Can Do

Your home is generally considered a safe place to be. When you interact with strangers online, you invite the street corners of society into your own home. Don't let your guard down just because you are under your own roof.

Set your personal profiles to "private" and limit the number of people who can access them. Limit the number of photos you post, and choose them carefully, knowing anyone can use them anytime in the future. Keep an eye on your friends' postings; don't let them compromise your personal information after you've worked hard to protect it.

If you are interested in meeting someone in person whom you've met online, bring a parent and meet in a public place during the day. Never, never go alone.

## What Parents Can Do

Parents, please talk to your adolescents and teens about what information is not okay to share online. Inappropriate personal information may include photos, full names and addresses, phone numbers and school name. It may also include less obvious things, such as the name of their school team or the name of the mall near their house. Help your kids think about the implications of forgoing privacy and broadcasting their innermost thoughts.

Some parents' knee-jerk reaction to concerns about Internet safety is to take away access to the home computer. However, there are many other computers available to your teen. Consider keeping the computer at home and staying engaged with your teen there.

Familiarize yourself with the programs your child is using so that you can visit their MySpace page or other profiles. You can learn a lot about your child, their safety practices, and their social circles by viewing their online activity. Stay involved with your teens and ask them to show you what Web sites they're using, and how.

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The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has many more useful Internet safety tips on its Web site at [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

## Statistics from NetSmartz.org

A 2006 study by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children found:

- Teens have established significant presence on social networking web pages: 61% of 13- to 17-year-olds have a personal profile on a site such as MySpace.
- However, many have also been exposed to the Internet's accompanying potential risks.
- 71% reported receiving messages online from someone they don't know.
- 45% have been asked for personal information by someone they don't know.
- 30% have considered meeting someone that they've only talked to online
- 14% have actually met a person face-to-face they they've only spoken to over the Internet (9% of 13-15s; 22% of 16-17s).
- When teens receive messages online from someone they don't know, 40% reported that they'll usually reply and chat with that person.
- Only 18% said they'll tell an adult.

## CRIME PREVENTION

# Internet Safety



*For teens and parents*

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# Internet Safety

Children of all ages have discovered the wonders of the Internet. Online you can chat with people who share your interests. You can play games against real people all over the world. You can post your personal profile, music, photos, and messages for your friends to read. You can even get help with your homework.

These are some of the joys of the Internet. However, there are also serious risks to consider. Today teens are often more computer-savvy than their parents. But while they may be skilled online, they are often in the dark about Internet safety.

This brochure provides guidance for adolescents, teens and their parents about the dangers of life online, and how to keep from being victimized.

## A Place for Friends, and Who Else?

MySpace.com, billed as "a place for friends," is an online network that allows users to express themselves using text, sound and images -- for all the world to see. MySpace has amassed more than 100 million users since its inception in January 2004.

A series of questions help members create a profile including name, birthday, birthplace, height, and "best physical feature." Profiles often include full names, complete birth dates, current location, appearance, class schedules, parents' names and teens' cell phone numbers. Most profiles include a photo. MySpace is very popular, but is just one example of an online community. AOL, Friendster, Facebook, Hoverspot and Tagged are other online sites that allow users to easily create profiles and chat with friends and strangers.

Users of these sites can "browse" for members using criteria that includes gender, age, marital status, photos, body type, education level and zip code. (A recent "browse" of MySpace by Jefferson County Sheriff's Office investigators for "18-year-olds interested in dating/relationships in zip code 80401" turned up 139 members and their profiles.) Users can then read a member's personal blog (Web log) or send a message directly to another member.

## No Fear of the Unknown

One of the dangers in socializing online lies in some teens' willingness to post information that becomes accessible to people they don't know. When children are very young, we teach them not to talk to strangers. When they get older, many children don't realize that by posting personal information or blogging, they are talking to millions of strangers.

Some profiles contain just enough personal information that a resourceful user can contact the teen in person. Think about it: simply posting your first name, school mascot and sports team can give another user enough information to physically find you after school.

## Meeting People You Don't Know

Posting personal information can be dangerous in itself. But engaging in conversation online with people you don't already know can create new dangers. The anonymity of online communications allows would-be predators to alter their own personas. Teens who believe they are talking to other young people may be disappointed, at best, to find that their "friends" are actually middle-aged men.

In 2007, Jeffco District Attorney's Office investigators posing online as a teenage girl received a series of messages from a "17-year-old boy" who said he attended a high school in Jefferson County. His language and the topics he discussed were convincing. When he set up a meeting with the "girl," investigators confirmed their suspicions: the "boy" was a 60-year-old convicted sex offender.

## Posting is Forever

It's important for teens to realize that anything they post online, while editable, can be saved while it's live. Any user can save, keep or distribute photos or text from a Web page. This means that sexually suggestive photos, photos depicting drug use, gang signs, threats against others or language indicating



criminal behavior are all potentially permanent collector's items for their classmates, friends, enemies, parents and total strangers.

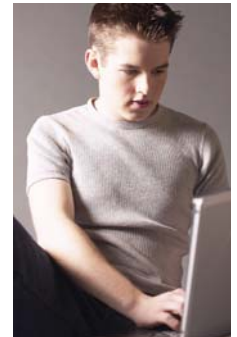
## MySpace or Anyplace

MySpace isn't the problem. Predators are constantly searching for personal information online, and there are many different sites where they can find it.

## Other Dangers of Life Online

### Bullying/Threats

The Sheriff's Office has investigated multiple cases involving threats made in online community sites. In one case, a local teenage boy posted photos of himself with his parents' gun collection. Classmates reported that he had made threats about his school. Investigators who viewed the Web page arrested the teen and charged him with unlawful possession of a handgun by a juvenile. Police take these threats seriously.



### Identity Theft

Sharing too much personal information online, such as full name and birthdate, may also allow a criminal to steal a user's identity. He could represent himself as you or apply for credit using your name.

### Access to Pornography

There is a massive amount of free pornography online. Teens, especially teenage boys, with access to porn sites may develop an unhealthy concept of sex. Extremes in sexual behavior depicted online, or the sheer volume of the imagery, can consume a teen until reality becomes a distant memory. Porn addiction, sexual aggression and violent tendencies toward women can develop from unrestricted access to porn.

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