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## Promoting Internet Safety for Middle School Students

### What Can Parents Do to Protect their Children?

Parents need to be concerned about the online activities of their children. There are many pre-teens engaging in increasingly risky behaviors and are often not supervised by adults while they are online. Many children and teens have already learned the hard way about the cruel consequences that can occur when they post personal information on the Web, assuming it will be kept confidential.

It is our hope that this newsletter will clarify some issues and generate meaningful discussions among parents and their children.

Pat Minikel & Joan Kearon

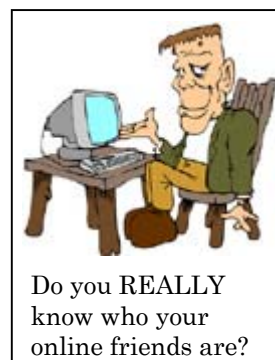
## So What's All the Fuss about MySpace.com?

MySpace and Facebook have recently become the hottest spots on the Internet with billions of viewers each month. Yet many parents have only a vague understanding of these free services that are the rage with teens and pre-teens.

MySpace is a combination of a cyber yearbook, a diary, and a social club. Users (who are *supposed* to be at least 14 years old) build their own Web pages, beginning with a profile that often includes personal information and a photo.

Although the "Terms of Agreement" for using MySpace warns about the dangers of revealing personal information on the Web and specifically disallows the use of last names, phone numbers, and street addresses, users are given the opportunity to complete "the survey." This survey prompts students to reveal their real name, school, and year of graduation, and continues with a long series of provocative questions such as: "Do you drink? Smoke? Have you ever gone skinny dipping?" While the user doesn't have to answer these questions, many do — sometimes leading to a dangerously revealing profile that predators could find enticing.

(Continued on p. 2)



MySpace.com—continued



An online CBS News Video titled “The Dangers of MySpace,” warns that students as young as 10 to 12 years of age are building profiles on MySpace. They can lie to gain access to the site, and then add fictitious information to

make themselves sound cool. Teens who are not popular in school see MySpace as an opportunity to be popular with their peers. Often they are not careful with the information they post, carelessly exposing daily routines or vacation destinations that would make it easy for a stranger to find them.

**Kids must be careful about what they post online. Correspondent Tracy Smith from CBS News’ The Early Show reported on May 12, 2006 that MySpace and Facebook are searched by many prospective employers and college recruiters in order to narrow down their candidates. Police, FBI, pornographers, advertisers, and the media also search these sites. Many schools are using images from Facebook and MySpace as grounds for discipline and expulsion.**

Additionally, there are “companies” out there that archive Web pages. This means that even if the kids delete their MySpace page, their pictures and journal articles can remain on the Internet for anyone to search and find years from now. Parents need to discuss this with their kids so they don’t do anything on the Web that might jeopardize their future.

Beyond these extreme examples, there is the fact that middle school students are too young to be interacting with the high school and college students who are legitimately using the site. These older users frequently post sexually provocative photos, or ones showing them drinking or doing drugs. Chats often center on topics that are inappropriate for middle school students. Creating your own profile can be a bit time consuming, however it is an eye-opening experience that I would recommend to parents of middle or high school students.

Finally, some good news: In April, MySpace.com announced that it hired Hemanshu Nigam to be its first chief security officer. Nigam’s function will be to help “educate the public and protect members’ safety and privacy.” Additionally, MySpace will soon be running Internet safety public service announcements on MySpace, other Web sites, and television shows aired on network owned stations. Hopefully these efforts will reach your children.

## Cyber Predators

Parents must be aware that popular online activities can expose teens to the dark side of society. Chat rooms and social networks such as MySpace and FaceBook provide sexual predators with incredible access to teens. These criminals use false profiles to meet unsuspecting adolescents who are looking to make friends. Typically the predators encourage potential victims to exchange email addresses or IM names in order to pursue their victims in a more private setting. They work to build trust, then gradually and subtly entice their victims into participating in illicit activities.

Studies have shown that pre-teens and teens assume that the people they meet on MySpace are their age. They usually don’t consider the fact that an adult predator can easily create a false profile to contact unsuspecting victims.



The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children maintains a Web site that warns: “Some of these individuals may attempt to lower the child’s inhibitions by gradually introducing sexual content into their online conversations and even send pornographic images to the child. When children are shown images of peers engaged in sexual activities, they are led to believe that this behavior is acceptable. This lowers their inhibitions and makes it easier for the molester to take advantage of the child sexually.”

The best way for parents to protect their children is to educate them about risky online behaviors and to monitor them when they are online.



For more information, log on to the Web site for the  
National Center for

MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

<http://www.missingkids.com/>

# Blog, Blog, Blog!

## What in the World Is a Blog?

The word *blog* is short for Weblog, an informal online diary or journal that is frequently updated and intended for others to view. Some blogs are exclusively authored by the blog's creator, while others include responses by viewers. Blog entries appear in chronological order, with the most recent entry at the top of the page. Someone who authors a blog is called a *blogger*, and the act of updating a blog is called *blogging*.

Blogs have been around for years, but the user friendly blogging software that is available today has made blogging more popular. Blogs can contain text, images, and links to other blogs or Web pages. There are blogs available for all sorts of hobbies, interests, and businesses. Blogs allow people to express their opinions and publish their thoughts. Some blogs are monitored for appropriate content and some are password protected, but the majority of blogs are open for the Internet community to read.

Careless blogging can be dangerous. Teens need to be careful about disclosing personal information in a public blog since it resides on the Internet and is available for all (including cyber-predators) to see. Unprofessional online behavior such as inappropriate comments on a blog can ruin a student's chance for college admission or future employment.



Unfortunately, blogs are also a perfect venue for cyber-bullying. Using the untraceable identity of a screen name, bloggers have the opportunity to write things they wouldn't normally have the nerve to say in person. People need to think before they say negative things about someone else online because the effects cyber-bullying can be devastating.

**WiredSafety.org**

**recommends that you**

**Google™**

**Yourself!**

**Conduct frequent searches for your own information online.**

# Newsgroups



Newsgroups are places where Internet users can share information or discuss various topics. **Usenet** was the first system that handled newsgroups beginning in 1979. Individual newsgroups are usually devoted to the discussion of a specific topic.

Participants in newsgroups post messages on a given topic. The messages appear in chronological order, similar to blogs. Unlike chat room conversations and instant messaging, the communication in newsgroups is not instantaneous. For this reason, newsgroup messages *can* be monitored, but often are not.

Usually, the prefix for a newsgroup provides a key to its topic. Newsgroups beginning with "rec." are for discussions about recreation and entertainment (i.e. rec.music). Those beginning with "talk." discuss controversial topics (i.e. talk.politics). Some newsgroups discuss sexual, violent, or offensive topics. Be sure to check out the name and exercise caution before allowing your child to participate in any newsgroup.

Any computer network can host a newsgroup. For instance, Microsoft Corp. hosts newsgroups in many different languages on a huge variety of topics relating to the use of their products.

Newsgroup postings are NOT private. In fact, they are searchable on the Internet and often remain accessible for years. Therefore, users should be very careful about the comments they post on newsgroups, and should never post private information.



# Chat Rooms

Chat rooms are places on the Internet where your child can have a live written conversation with a group of people.

Everyone in the chat room can see what everyone else is typing. Some of the new chat rooms have the technology which enables live audio and video to be shared, as well as text.

The first chat rooms were established through a system called Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Special software enables users to connect to an enormous worldwide network of IRC computers that host chat rooms. There are IRC chat rooms available on every imaginable subject from careers and hobbies, to terrorism tactics and deviant sexual practices.

Chat room participants are identified by “nicks” or screen names. Users can “lurk” in a chat room by just observing and not participating in the conversation. While it is actually considered good “netiquette” to lurk for a while after entering a chat room to get the feel of the conversation, it is also a technique used by predators to gather information about potential victims.

Chat rooms can be dangerous because you never know who is participating in the conversations. Children and teens can be lured into befriending someone who is actually an Internet predator looking to gain their trust. Children and teens should NEVER give any personal information to anyone in a chat room. They should NEVER go into what is called “a private room” where no one else but the invited participants are privy to the conversation. We teach kids not to talk to strangers on the street and the same should apply to the Internet. In order to be safe, children should simply stay out of chat rooms.



## Cyber Tips for Parents:

- Parents need to educate themselves and talk to their kids about the dangers of the Internet and online safety.
- Parents and children should discuss guidelines for using the Internet at home, in school, and at the library.
- Parents should monitor what their children are doing online.
- Parents should put their computer(s) in a place that can be easily supervised.
- If their child experiences online bullying, parents should report it to their Internet Service Provider.
- Parents should save all offensive bullying messages on their computer's hard drive in case they later need evidence of the bullying.
- Parents may want to notify school administrators if their child is a victim of cyber-bullying so they are aware of the problem.
- If their child continues to be bullied or they feel their child is in danger, parents should notify the police.



## Safety Tips for Your Children:

- Kids should not put personal information about themselves online.
- Middle School kids do not belong in places like MySpace.com, Facebook.com, or Chat groups.
- Kids must not physically get together with anyone they meet on the Internet.
- Kids must understand that people might use a false identity on the Internet.
- Kids should never send pictures of themselves to anyone they don't know.
- Kids should tell a parent or trusted adult if anything they hear or read on the Internet makes them uncomfortable.
- Kids should not open files from anyone they don't know since they might contain pornography or viruses.
- IM buddy lists should be limited to people they know.
- Kids should tell a parent or trusted adult if they are being bullied online.
- Kids should not respond to bullying online. (This can cause it to escalate.)
- Kids should remove bullies from their buddy lists.
- Passwords should not be shared.
- Kids should use the back button if they accidentally open an inappropriate site.

# INSTANT MESSAGING

Instant Messaging (or IMing) refers to the ability of Internet users to see whether a friend is online, and then to exchange messages instantaneously. Users need an IM program on their computer that allows them to connect to an instant messaging service.



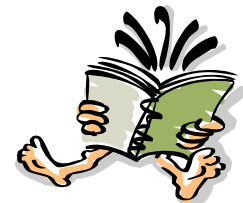
conversation online. Most messenger services also allow you to instant message (IM) a group of people at the same time.

Once connected, users must create list of contacts, sometimes called a "Buddy List." The IM program then allows them to see which of those people are currently online. The Buddies who are online can be contacted and have a choice whether to respond or not. If they choose to write back, the two people will have a written

Some popular public messaging applications include AOL's instant messenger (AIM), Yahoo Messenger, and Microsoft's NET Messenger. Anyone on the Internet can sign up, download the software, and begin messaging. There are also secure messaging services available for businesses. Some of the instant messaging services have now begun to offer video conferencing capabilities and Web conferencing services which offer both video conferencing and instant messaging.

## LEARN THE LINGO

AFK	Away from keyboard	HAMRD	Hammered	PAL	Parents are listening
ANOYN	Annoying	IDKI	don't/didn't know	PANB	Parents are nearby
A/S/L?	Age, sex, location	ILU	I love you	PAW	Parents are watching
B4	Before	I12CU	I want to see you	PDA	Public display of affection
B4N	Bye for now	IOH	I'm out of here	PIC	Do you have a picture?
BBL	Be back later	458	I love you	PM	Private message
BF	Boyfriend	IRL	In real life	POS	Parents over shoulder
<BS>	Big smile	JK	Just kidding	RENTS	Parents
BTDT	Been there done that	K	Okay	RBTL	Read between the lines
BWL	Bursting with laughter	KOL	Kiss on lips	RL	Real life
<b>CS</b>	Can't say; <b>Cyber sex</b>	KWIM	Know what I mean?	ROTFL	Rolling on the floor laughing
CTN	Can't talk now	L@U	Laughing at you	RPG	Role playing games
CUL	See you later	L8r	Later	RUF2C	Are you free to chat?
CYO	See you online	LD	Later, dude	RUF2T	Are you free to talk?
DIKU	Do I know you?	LDR	Long distance relationship	RUOK	Are you OK?
D8	Date	LDM	Long distance relationship	SORG	Straight or gay?
F2F	Face to face	<b>LMIRL</b>	<b>Let's meet in real life</b>	<b>TA</b>	<b>Teacher alert</b>
FC	Fingers crossed	LMK	Let me know	TAFN	That's all for now
FETCH	Cool	M8Ts	Buddies	<b>TAW</b>	<b>Teachers are watching</b>
FOMCL	Falling off my chair laughing	LMSO	Laughing my socks off	TIGHT	Nice; cute; hot
GAL	Get a life	LOL	Laughing out loud	TLK2UL8R	Talk to you later
GF	Girlfriend	LTNS	Long term relationship	TMI	Too much information
GFI	Go for it	MUSM	Miss you so much	TOY	Thinking of you
GFN	Gone for now	NBD	No big deal	TWFW	Too weird for words
GOI	Get over it	NP	Nosy parents	TXTME	Text me
GOL	Giggling out loud	NRN	No reply necessary	<b>WTGP</b>	<b>Want to go private?</b>
GRR	Angry	OIC	Oh I see	WUF	Where are you from?
GTG	Got to go	OLL	Online love		
H&K	Hug & kiss	OM	Boyfriend		
		<b>P911</b>	<b>My parents are coming!</b>		
		<b>PA</b>	<b>Parent alert</b>		



# Online Bullying

## AKA Cyberbullying

Our Jericho Middle School has implemented the Bully Reduction Anti-Violence Education (B.R.A.V.E) program in our school and our students and staff are aware of the negative impacts of bullying.

Unfortunately, technology provides new ways for bullies to harass their victims using e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, bulletin boards, chatrooms, false profiles, Web sites, and text messaging.

With a quick click of a mouse, a cyberbully can send a nasty message about someone to many people at once. Rumors can be spread at a tremendous speed. A cyberbully can instantly publish very private information or pictures of a victim. A common tactic is to manipulate a photo to create the illusion that the victim was in a certain place or doing something that never really occurred.



Another tactic is to hack into another person's account and post malicious messages or register for pornographic material while posing as that person. Bullies have also been known to lock the

victim out of their own account.

According to WiredSafety.org up to 80 percent of kids between ten and fourteen-years-old have been involved in online bullying either directly or indirectly. Children should never respond to a bully online and should immediately report all incidents of online bullying to a trusted adult.

Looking for more information?

[www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org)

## Mind Your Manners!



## Live By the Golden Rule

**Netiquette:** the conventions of politeness recognized in electronic forums.

- Think before you post a message. You don't want to embarrass yourself or hurt someone's feelings.
- Be responsible. Don't spread rumors.
- Avoid using inappropriate or offensive language.
- Remember that online messages do not communicate facial expressions and may be misinterpreted. (i.e. Sarcasm may be misunderstood.)
- Emoticons like :- ) or :- ( or ;- ) can help show emotions.
- Respect the privacy of others. Do not read another person's email or share passwords or other private information.
- Avoid sending useless junk mail that can clog another person's mailbox.
- Avoid using all caps. It's considered SHOUTING!

**Cyber-Ethics:**

- Everyone should practice responsible social and legal behavior while on the Internet.
- No one should participate in any form of cyber-bullying.
- People should not say anything to anyone on the Internet that they would not say to them in person.
- Copying or downloading copyrighted programs, games, or music without getting permission or paying for them is illegal.
- In order to avoid plagiarism, it is important to give credit to any Internet sites used for research.
- Never hack into another person's computer, send e-mail from another person's account or read other people's mail.
- Never intentionally spread computer viruses.
- The Internet is not private and anything you do or say may come back to haunt you.

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