

## ONLINE SAFETY

Children are our nation's most valuable asset. They represent our country's bright future and the hope for an ever-improving nation. However, our children are also the most vulnerable members of our society.

Online computing opens a world of possibilities, expanding students' horizons through wonderful education sites. Unfortunately, exploring the information highway can also expose students to extreme danger. Countless individuals, across the world, attempt to exploit our young people through the use of online services and the Internet. The media frequently reports on tragic cases of exploitation via the Internet. Victimization can occur in many ways, including conversation (i.e. "chat"), invitations to meet in real life, and distribution of sexually explicit information and material.

It is imperative that parents monitor computer usage, inform their children of the dangers, and teach them how to protect themselves. The best way to help our children is to be actively involved with them.

- **Prepare** them for the online world just as you would for the real world. **Establish** guidelines and rules. **Know** who communicates with them.
- **Learn** about the Internet. **Familiarize** yourself with the programs they are using. **Use** Internet filters or blocks.
- **Place** the family's computer in a common room, where supervision and guidelines are more easily observed and met.
- **Talk** about the benefits of the Internet, as well as the dangers, and help them make smart decisions while online.
- **Limit** computer time.
- **Explain** that instant messaging (IM) is only for chatting with school and family friends they know by face and are approved by you. **Check** their "chat list." Make sure they are able to put a face to every screen name on the list.
- **Tell** them not to write anything, picture anything, or reveal anything online that they wouldn't want everyone in the world to see.
- **Remind** them that it is dangerous to give out personal information, such as their name, mailing address, e-mail address, home/school information, pictures, etc.
- **Reinforce** the fact that people are not always who they say they are when communicating online.
- **Stress** the fact that it is **never** safe to get together with someone they first "meet" online.
- **Know** their password and **check** their history.
- **Show** concern, listen compassionately, and remain calm if they share any distressing incidents encountered while online.

Parents should be aware of the following signs that their children may be at risk online.

- Spending large amounts of time online, especially at night.
- Finding pornography on the computer.
- Receiving telephone calls from people you do not know or making long distance calls to numbers you do not recognize.

- Receiving mail, gifts, or packages from someone you do not know.
- Turning off the computer monitor or quickly changing the screen on the monitor when you enter the room.
- Becoming withdrawn from the family.
- Using an online account that belongs to someone else.

Parents should contact local or state law enforcement agency should any of the following situations arise.

- Children or others in the household receive child pornography.
- Children are sexually solicited by someone who knows that they are under 18 years of age.
- Children receive sexually explicit images from someone who knows they are under 18 years of age.

### **Did you know?**

Many teens post real data (i.e., name, picture, age, home address, phone number, school name) online as public information where anyone can see.

A large number of sexual solicitors have utilized a teen's personal online information to make a contact or visit.

Teenage chat rooms can be used by child molesters to find victims.

Over half of unwanted solicitations are made teens are using computers at home.

Many teens use code words on a daily basis to hide their online conversations from their parents (e.g., "PIR" means "parent in room" and "LMIRL" means "let's meet in real life").

Some teens are molested, abducted, or leave home as a result of contacts made on the Internet.