

Do you know where your children are in cyberspace?

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"Kacie Woody was 7 when her mom was killed in a car accident," said Diann Kelley, pointing to a picture of Woody on an overhead screen. Kelley, a computer forensic examiner with the Louisiana Attorney General's Office, talked to a group of parents about Internet safety at the Siegfried Youth Center June 5.

At age 13, Woody went online to a christian chat room to find empathy for the death of her mother and found 18-year-old David Fuller from California. The picture Kelley showed was of a young boy in a football uniform. Woody and Fuller chatted for a year, establishing a rapport. "This is who she was really talking to," said Kelley, showing a picture of 47-year-old David Fuller of San Diego, Calif. Fuller drove from California to Arkansas and kidnapped Woody in December of 2002. Police found the bodies of Woody and Fuller the day after the kidnapping in a rented storage unit. Woody was in the rear of Fuller's rented silver mini van, her wrists and ankles chained to the four corners of the van's floor. Woody had been raped and shot in the head. The police found Fuller's body near the van. He killed himself as police arrived to the storage unit.

"When kids reach a certain age, they start feeling out of place and may argue with their parents," said Kelley. "Chatting online is a good way to vent, meet people and make friends. Predators know this and frequent chat rooms posing as someone else. Currently, one of the most popular places for predators to catch young kids is Nickelodeon's chat room. Predators are smart and keep up with the latest music, lingo, games and famous people that kids idolize. It is a young person's nature to believe that the person chatting with them is telling the truth."

After Hurricane Katrina, the Baton Rouge River Center was used as a shelter, according to Kelley. The media publicized that young boys and girls at the shelter were having trouble finding their parents. "Knowing the release of this information would entice sexual predators, we posed online as 13- and 14-year-olds looking for our parents. We had men driving up to the doors of the Department of Justice to pick up these kids. Within two days, we arrested 28 men," she said.

"I spend most of my day looking at things that I hope you will never see and I hope you will stop your kids from ever seeing," she continued. "Ninety-five percent of my job is looking for child porn." Kelley's position is funded by the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. The task force was created to help state and local law enforcement agencies enhance their investigative response to offenders who use the Internet, online communication systems or other computer technology to sexually exploit children. The program is currently composed of 46 regional task force agencies and is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. "We are slowly setting up task forces throughout Louisiana," said Kelley. "We have one in Bossier, Shreveport, outside of Lafayette and are building one in Hammond. The task force runs sting operations to catch predators. After the operation is over, we secure a search warrant and I assist in

collecting and dissecting evidence on computers and anything a person can connect to a computer -- cell phone, fax machine, printer, X-box ... anything."

The World Wide Web, used for research, shopping or playing, is a useful tool. But there are dangers attached to this link to the world. "The internet is not just about predators wanting to take your children and harm them," said Kelley. "It's also about what they could be showing your children and getting them accustomed to."

Kelley spoke of a U.S. Attorney in Lake Charles with a 7-year-old daughter. After checking her e-mail, the 7-year-old walks away from the family's computer leaving the image she had opened for all to see ... including her mom. "Our office investigated the case and I have never seen child porn this graphic," said Kelley. The e-mail had been sent to the 7-year-old by one of her classmates. The girl claimed it was "no big deal" and that "everybody at school gets the images."

"The more they see it, the more they think it is no big deal," Kelley continued. "Child pornographers will entice children by bombarding them with porn and claiming that it's 'ok' and that 'everyone is doing it.'"

"If a child takes an inappropriate picture of themselves and places it online, it's there forever. The demand for child porn is huge. There is a child porn series, graphically showing a 9- or 10-year-old girl, that is very popular. It is an 8mm movie that was digitized, so it was probably shot in the 1960s. That little girl is now a woman and I wonder how she feels knowing this sexual video is out there. Unfortunately, it is a prized series to obtain."

Internet predators will escalate from wanting pictures to asking to meet, according to Kelley. They also seduce kids with gifts. Getting secretive gifts by mail is easy for kids who get home from school before parents. Gifts start off as money or a CD, then transition to undergarments they want to see the child wearing.

Another problem kids face online is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is using anything that is digital to spread rumors, post pictures, steal passwords or send harassing or threatening language. More than 63 percent of kids have been cyberbullied and 85 percent of it took place on computers at home, according to Kelley. "When I talk with groups of kids, I ask them to look at the person next to them and think, would you share your toothbrush with them? Those that say no shouldn't give that kid their Internet password either." Cyberbullying is against the law and kids have gone to jail for sending stalking or threatening e-mail. The youngest adolescent arrested in Louisiana was 14, according to Kelley. Myspace, Yahoo 360, Xanga and other profile sites are where the majority of cyberbullying and sexual solicitation takes place.

"If your child has a profile site, you need to get one too because that is the only way you will fully understand what one is," said Kelly. These sites have a running diary called blogs. Blogs can be updated and receive incoming messages at any time, even through a cell phone.

"After surveying children, I can guess that if a child has told you they have a profile account and shown it to you, they have another one that only their friends see," said Kelly. Profile sites hold photos, movie files, voice messages, personal journals and links to other blog accounts and group memberships. Kelly offered a few safety tips about photos and profile sites. Make sure your child isn't storing photos somewhere other than where you can see them, said Kelly. "If your child minimizes the screen on their computer when you come into the room, you might want to see what they are looking at. Place the computer in a non-private area of the home. Placing a computer in a child's bedroom is the same as placing a door in their room that leads outside and leaving it wide open."

If your child has a profile site, make sure their profile is set to private. Monitor friends your child has added to their profile site and their friend's friends. Anyone added as a "friend" by your child has access to everything on their profile site. If you see something on your child's blog that makes you uncomfortable or could be illegal, report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at www.missingkids.com, Louisiana Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at www.myspace.com/icacla or local law enforcement.

Anyone can have a profile site. Kelly showed a Myspace profile of a man, his likes and dislikes and his invitation for people to join his "friends" list. The man is on the National Sex Offender Registry list. A listing of State Sex Offender Registry web sites can be viewed at: www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/states.htm "Fifty-eight percent of kids post information about where they live on profile sites," said Kelly. "Don't provide any personal information such as name, address, phone number or school information. There is nothing wrong with posting a picture, but make sure there is nothing in the picture, like a street address, house number or school name on clothing that shows where you live.

"You talk to your kids about not smoking, doing drugs, having sex ... add the dangers of cyberspace. Tell them 'we need to establish ground rules for the Internet and here is why.' Let your child help establish those ground rules so they feel they have a say, otherwise they will 'log on' some place else. Parents also need to get monitoring software in order to see what their kids are doing online."

Kids have a whole new language on the Internet called "net lingo." They use numbers and symbols to mean letters like LMIRL, which means "let's meet in real life."

Learn the latest lingo at www.netsmartz.org and netlingo.com. Other web sites that provide safety tips and information are cybertipline.com, safekids.com and getnetwise.org.