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Meeting Focuses On Internet Safety

GREENSBURG, Apr 21, 2011 (Greensburg Daily News - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) -- The latest Parenting Meeting at Greensburg Elementary School focused on a number of topics, including Internet safety. Bruce Copple, School Safety Director of the Decatur County Sheriff's Department, gave parents a presentation on safety in technology and Internet use.

He discussed the ways in which the Internet, while it has value in terms of school work and research, can also be harmful if parents don't monitor their children's use. He showed parents a video about Ryan Patrick Halligan, a 7th-grader from Vermont who was bullied over the Internet by his classmates, which prompted him to hang himself in the bathroom.

One of the reasons, the video explained, that online bullying (or cyber-bullying) is particularly harmful is because kids can bully another student without seeing the direct effects of their words. Other risks Copple discussed include online predators. As a way to protect kids against these risks, Copple suggested parents take a number of different precautions.

For example, if a child wants to have a Facebook account (or an account from any other social networking site), the parent should have a Facebook account as well and make sure to "friend" the child in order to keep an eye on his or her activity. Copple said parents should also make sure that parents set clear rules for Internet use in the house, such as who they are allowed to talk to, what sites they can and can't visit, and how long they're allowed to be online.

Copple said parents should also keep the computer in a common room so children aren't unmonitored. "You should also make sure your child knows the importance of telling you or a trusted adult if something made him or her feel scared or uncomfortable," Copple said.

He also explained the importance of parents having an open discussion with their kids about Internet use. "For their safety, check their e-mail," Copple said. "Check the Internet history. If it's cleared, find out why." Copple also gave parents a quick quiz on Internet chat lingo. For example, if a child types "code 9" to a friend that means "parent watching." Copple also provided parents with a list of things they can do on the computer to make sure their children are safe online, from looking for unusual programs in the "Start" menu to checking the "Favorite" lists.

While a majority of the presentation was about Internet safety, Copple also talked about the importance of monitoring a child's cell phone use. Copple explained that students can sometimes be involved in "sexting," the practice of sending or receiving nude pictures over the phone.

"Who owns that phone? You do!" Copple said. "Sometimes people don't realize that a phone doesn't have to have texting on it at all. If they break the rules, take the phone away." Rules for cell phones, Copple explained, should also be strict. "Do not let kids take the phone to bed," Copple said. Kids may lose sleep if they do so, and monitoring their phone usage becomes more difficult. Copple also reminded parents that they are not permitted to text their children at school, and that he has found too many cases of it in the past.

For more information on chat lingo go to netlingo.com.

For additional information on Internet safety or child's safety visit www.missingkids.org or commensencemedia.org To see more of the Greensburg Daily News or to subscribe to the newspaper, go to http://www.greensburgdailynews.com/. Copyright (c) 2011, Greensburg Daily News, Ind. Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services. For more information about the content services offered by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services (MCT), visit www.mctinfoservices.com.