

Sheriff, school's director offer tips on teens' use of Internet

ONLINE DANGERS: What's a parent to do?

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From Staff Reports

In an effort to keep children and teens safe and secure from dangers that can be found on the Internet or through some types of Internet activity, Unicoi County Sheriff Kent Harris, Director of Schools Denise Brown and the Unicoi County Board of Education have provided the following tips:

Pornography and Online Sexuality

- Install filters or parental controls to limit availability of online sexual content
- Discuss issues of pornography and online sexual experiences with your child: Acknowledge the legitimacy of the desires (sexual pleasure, personal affirmation). And Warn of the dangers of online sexual exploration (sexual desensitization, vulnerable exposure)

Bypassing Web Filters

- Keep in mind that the best filter is a watchful and caring adult.
- Use web filtering software, but remember that it has limitations.
- Keep an eye on what your children do online. Keep computers in an open place where all can see. Check the Internet history to see where your family has gone online. To do this, login as the person you want to check on, open the web browser, then hold the [Ctrl] key and press [h].
- Recognize the signs of foul play. Empty Internet history in web browser. Empty screens ([Alt] [F4], [Win] [M], [Ctrl] [W])

Digital Stalkers

- Keep in mind the more information about you online, the easier it is for predators to stalk you. Warn kids about limiting the personal information they put online. Be careful about filling out online forms that request personal information. Limit access to personal websites, such as MySpace sites, to invited friends only. Remember that future employers, nosy relatives, and heartless

jerks could see your site.

- Check what your child has online. Do Web searches for information on your child (www.stalkerati.com, www.google.com). Check your child's online accounts at least once a week.
- Learn the abbreviations your kids are using for chat and instant messaging. See www.netlingo.com or www.transl8it.com or http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_language.

Gizmos and Gadgets

- Keep in mind that digital devices (cell phones, MP3 players, etc.) have a variety of interesting uses.
- Learn how to use and check your child's gadgets.
- Let your child know that his/her gadgets are subject to searches, and check them from time to time.

Cyber Bullying

- Keep in mind that kids will make fun of each other when talking online.
- Talk to your child about "teasing" people online, and about how to handle bullying. - Avoid publishing criticisms or put-downs, it could come back to hurt you. Don't respond to bullies online; just turn them off. If others are bullying you, talk to a trusted adult about what is happening.
- As a parent, tell the school principal or teacher if you become aware of cyber-bullying.

Resources for Protecting Children Online

- Sites that teach kids about online safety: www.netsmartz.org and www.ikeepsafe.org.
- Software to track computer use (online chats, web history, etc.): SafeEyes (www.safebrowse.com); ContentProtect (www.contentwatch.com); eBlaster (www.spectrosoft.com)
- Web content filtering Software: WE-Blocker (www.we-blocker.com) - Free Web-filtering software. Talk to your Internet service provider about available parent controls and filters.

Note: On all parental control software use a difficult to guess password that includes upper case letters, lower case letters, and numbers. If your child can guess the password, the software becomes useless.

Some Popular Web sites

- www.myspace.com, www.friendster.com, www.facebook.com, www.xanga.com - Personal diaries for all the world to see
- www.youtube.com, video.google.com - Homemade videos
- www.flickr.com, www.photobucket.com - Online photo albums
- www.wikipedia.com - Online encyclopedia about everything

Further Reading

- The Science Behind Pornography Addiction - Senate Testimony of Dr. Mary Anne Layden:
http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=1343&wit_id=3912
- "Not Tonight Darling, I'm Online," by Adrian Turpin in The Financial Times from March 31, 2006. Search for the article at www.ft.com