Newsletter

SAFEGUARDING ALL OF GOD'S FAMILY

Dear Friends,

Whether our children are in the home, the classroom, or at a friends house, it is important to maintain safe environments. One important area to maintain a safe environment is the Internet. Children and youth are vulnerable and Internet access to resources can be a great enhancement to their learning, it can also leave them open to exploitation and harm.

The US Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation has issued a Parent's Guide to Internet Safety. Using information from actual investigations involving child victims, including investigations where law enforcement officers posed as children, they have provided useful information regarding online safety.

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A complete copy of the Parents Guide to Internet Safety can be found at.: www.fbi.gov/publications.

What Are Signs That Your Child Might Be At Risk On-line?

Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.

Most children that fall victim to computer-sex offenders spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. They may go on-line after dinner and on the weekends. They may be latchkey kids whose parents have told them to stay at home after school. They go on-line to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit information. While much of the knowledge and experience gained may be valuable, parents should consider monitoring the amount of time spent on-line.

Children on-line are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are on-line around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings on-line trying to locate and lure children or seeking pornography.

You find pornography on your child's computer.

Pornography is often used in the sexual victimization of children. Sex offenders often supply their potential victims with pornography as a means of opening sexual discussions and for seduction. Child pornography may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal." Parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes from them. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.

A child looking at pornographic images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.

Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.

Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

What Should You Do If You Suspect Your Child Is Communicating With A Sexual Predator On-line?

• Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about the dangers of computer-sex offenders.
• Review what is on your child's computer. If you don't know how, ask a friend, coworker, relative, or other knowledgeable person. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.
• Monitor your child's access to all types of live electronic communications (i.e., chat rooms, instant messages, Internet Relay Chat, etc.), and monitor your child's e-mail. Computer-sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child on-line, they will continue to communicate electronically often via e-mail.

Should any of the following situations arise in your household, via the Internet or on-line service, you should immediately contact your local or state law enforcement agency, the [FBI](), and the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children]():

• Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography;
• Your child has been sexually solicited by someone who knows that your child is under 18 years of age;
• Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone that knows your child is under the age of 18.

If one of these scenarios occurs, keep the computer turned off in order to preserve any evidence for future law enforcement use. Unless directed to do so by the law enforcement agency, you should not attempt to copy any of the images and/or text found on the computer.

What Can You Do To Minimize The Chances Of An On-line Exploiter Victimizing Your Child?

• Communicate, and talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential on-line danger.
• Spend time with your children on-line. Have them teach you about their favorite on-line destinations.
• Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in your child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a computer-sex offender to communicate with a child when the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.
• Utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software. While electronic chat can be a great place for children to make new friends and discuss various topics of interest, it is also

prowled by computer-sex offenders. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored. While parents should utilize these mechanisms, they should not totally rely on them.

• Always maintain access to your child's on-line account and randomly check his/her e-mail. Be aware that your child could be contacted through the U.S. Mail. Be up front with your child about your access and reasons why.
• Teach your child the responsible use of the resources on-line. There is much more to the on-line experience than chat rooms.
• Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places, outside your normal supervision, where your child could encounter an on-line predator.
• Understand, even if your child was a willing participant in any form of sexual exploitation, that he/she is not at fault and is the victim. The offender always bears the complete responsibility for his or her actions.

Instruct your children:

• to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line;
• to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet or on-line service to people they do not personally know;
• to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number;
• to never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images;
• to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing;
• that whatever they are told on-line may or may not be true.

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A copy of this Newsletter can be found on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website www.archmil.org/safeguarding under the heading, Resources.