

Child Abuse – Back To Basics:

“STRANGER DANGER” ON LINE

While the computer age has opened a whole new world for our children to explore and learn from, the “information highway” also has a dark side which we all need to be aware of. Just as they prey on land, pedophiles lurk on the Internet waiting to lure children into their webs of deviance.

Modern technology in the form of the Internet has made interaction between pedophiles easier than in the past. The computer in fact, has turned out to be the greatest single advancement in the history of pedophilia. (*Time, May 1999*). By use of the computer, the pedophile can quickly organise his material, communicate instantly with others who share his “interests” and surf the net for potential victims.

The Internet provides a preferential child molester with unique opportunities. For example, he cannot lurk around a school for too long without arousing suspicion, but he can remain in teen and pre-teen chat rooms indefinitely. Through the Internet, the pedophile has something he could previously only dream about – unlimited and unrestricted access to children.

They know how to relate to children and find it easy to communicate on their level. They present themselves in sites, which children frequently visit and often pose as children themselves. They get to know the child they are communicating with and pass themselves off as friends. They will often use “tools” such as smoking; drugs and sex talk as an incitement to lure the child to meet them without anyone knowing.

The trap is then laid. The predator will lure the child out to meet with them. Thinking it’s another child (and a friend), they set off to meet them. What happens next depends on the plan of the predator. For some this is sufficient, but for others the total violation of the innocent child is the major priority.

The key to all of this is that child predators are con artists. Their goals are as varied as their egos. The limits for one may be just the starting point for another. There is no way to predict how any given predator will react. Their personalities differ. Their needs are not the same. There is only one thing they have completely in common and that is the fact that they find their “thrills” in luring children into their webs of deviance.

If you own a computer, please educate your children by following a few simple rules – these could reduce your child’s risks of exploitation:

- ; Become more aware of what your children are accessing on-line. Who they are chatting to, what websites are being frequented.

- ; Your computer should be clearly visible and not out of sight in your child's bedroom.
- ; Teach your children never to give out personal information such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, what schools they attend or the shopping centers which they use regularly.
- ; Teach your children never to send anyone a photograph or any other item via the Internet to strangers without first obtaining your permission.
- ; Teach them never to respond to any messages that make them feel uncomfortable.
- ; Teach them that if this occurs, to let you know immediately so that you can react appropriately with measures which may lead to apprehension.
- ; Teach them never to agree to meet with anyone they have met on-line. If someone asks them for a meeting, they should tell you so that you have an opportunity to discuss the situation, and its potential dangers, with them.

Websites such as www.enough.org, www.neotracepro.com, www.cybersentinal.com and www.cyberangles.com have joined in the struggle against pedophilia and ongoing pornography. Software companies have devised filtering and blocking programs like CYBERPATROL, NETNANNY, NEOTRACE PRO, CYBER SENTINAL and SURFWATCH, which can be installed on your computer. This software will automatically screen websites for objectionable content and access.

Remember: The more informed you are as parents, the more you can teach your children. There are so many advantages in being fortunate enough to have access to the Internet – let your children be able to use it safely!

Your commitment may save a child's life – your complacency could cause unimaginable harm.

**Wo+men Against Child Abuse - "Fighting for their Rights"
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