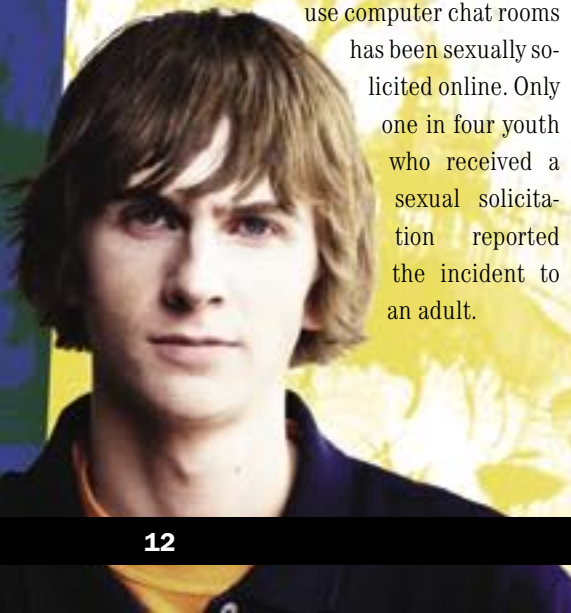




One in five children who use computer chat rooms has been sexually solicited online.

INTERNET SAFETY

(information provided by www.isafe.org)



The Internet is a fascinating place to explore. With virtually limitless amounts of information to absorb and unprecedented opportunities to make contact with people who share (or at least APPEAR to share) common interests, it's easy to see why it has become an integral part of everyday life.

With its numerous opportunities, however, come numerous threats. The Internet is a deceptive hiding place for sexual predators. It allows them to mask their true identities, pretend to be someone they are not, and strike up conversations and initiate meetings with unsuspecting young people. One in five children who use computer chat rooms has been sexually solicited online. Only one in four youth who received a sexual solicitation reported the incident to an adult.

Here are some things you and your teen can do to reduce the risks of online activity:

Keep user names and profiles generic and anonymous.

Discuss your child's online screen name, profile and activities. Many provide too much personal information. Ensure all screen names and profiles are nonspecific.

Do not post personal photos online.

An innocent picture can easily be altered into a degrading, humiliating or embarrassing image that can then be distributed not only throughout school and the community, but also literally across the world. Pictures confirm identities and create a visual target for predators. They also give predators one more tool to appear familiar or friendly to others when attempting to gain access to a victim.

Keep private information private.

With three key pieces of personal information, specialized Internet search engines can locate someone almost anywhere. Never disclose personal information or details during an Internet conversation.

Place the family computer in an open area.

Keeping the computer in sight for others to monitor is a must. Adults should be present and available when minors access the Internet to provide support and direction when confronted with an aggressive solicitation or inappropriate materials.

Remind children that online "friends" are still strangers.

Predators trick their victims into believing that they share similar interests and groom children to desire a more intimate relationship. The reality is that online

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- ➔ 87% of youth, or about 21 million teens, go online
- ➔ 87% of teens go online from home
- ➔ 78% of teens go online from school
- ➔ 74% of teens go online from a friend's house
- ➔ 54% of teens go online from a library
- ➔ 9% of teens go online from a community center
- ➔ 73% of teens who go online at home do so in an open family area
- ➔ 26% of teens who go online at home do so in a private place
- ➔ 45% of teens have a cell phone
- ➔ 57% of older teens (15-17) have a cell phone
- ➔ 32% of younger teens (12-14) have a cell phone
- ➔ Of the approximately 11 million teens who have a cell phone, 10% use it to connect to the Internet (this number is constantly growing)
- ➔ 75% of online teens use Instant Messaging
- ➔ 56% of IM-ing teens have posted a profile (including name and other identifying information) where others can see it
- ➔ 56% of teens have more than one e-mail address or screen name
- ➔ 61% of boys have more than one e-mail address—almost 25% have four or more
- ➔ 60% of online teens have gotten an e-mail or IM from a total stranger and 63% have responded to such contacts

Whether they want to admit it or not, kids need their parents actively involved to protect them from the dangers of the Internet. Don't make the mistake of underestimating the threats of the Internet.

friends are still strangers, and your child can never be sure that the person is whom he or she says. They should never agree to meet someone in person they met online, and if asked to do so, they should notify you immediately.

Become a part of your child's online experience.

Create open lines of trust while maintaining your need to protect your children. You have the right to know whom your child is talking with at any given time. Ask them to show you the places and people they interact with online. Ask them to show you the coolest and most popular places for teens online, and what they like to do there. Be open to the new things your child can teach you. Be sure you have reviewed and approved your child's social-networking page(s).

Learn about the Internet.

The more you know about how the Internet works, the better prepared you are to teach your children about how online predators operate and what you can do together to identify and elude them.

Set rules about social-networking sites.

Educate your child on the dangers of revealing personal information online. Ensure that your child knows not to post any personal information in his or her profile or in the content of his or her Web space that could allow a stranger to identify or contact them. Follow website age restrictions.

Most sites require users to be 13 and older. If your child is younger than the age limit, do not allow them to use the site. Activate security settings on the website. Have your children password-protect their web pages and set permissions to allow only persons they know to view and post to their bulletins.

Evaluate the websites they visit.

Read the website's privacy policy and code of conduct. Find out if the site monitors and removes inappropriate content posted on user pages.

