



KEEPING SAFE ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

# Internet Safety: A Parent's Guide

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## **Introduction**

**F**irst off, I would like to both congratulate you and say thank you for taking the time to empower yourself and your family. Why empower? Because the information age is upon us, an era filled with promise as well as problems. The best way to combat a problem is to learn as much as possible about it and then take an educated approach to forming a solution.

Regardless of whether we like it or not, young children today are, or will soon be, very technologically savvy. They will grow up without ever having known of life without the internet. It will become as much a natural part of their lives as eating or brushing their teeth (and for many it already has).

As parents, the main thing we need to be aware of is the fact that as great as the world can be, there are people in this world who exist solely to prey on others. The stark reality is, with the advent of the internet, the world has suddenly become a very small place. You no longer only have to worry about keeping your child safe from the person across the street; now you have to worry about the person across the country, or across the globe.

This amazing combination of instant access to information about virtually everything can be both a blessing and a curse. Millions of people who don't fully understand the various ways in which they can become targets and victims, creates a predator feeding ground. Having been a police officer and detective with many years of experience with computers and investigating

computer related crimes, I felt compelled to write this book to fully educate parents and make them aware of what's around them; and even more importantly what their children are likely to come in contact with at some point in time.

Picture this if you could for just a moment; something every parent fears. You come home from work one day or perhaps get up in the morning only to find that your son or daughter is not there. The fourteen year old who you have raised since birth, watched take their first steps, cheered as they learned how to use the potty and quietly hid your tears as they went off to their first day at school is suddenly nowhere to be found. You call the school and all their friends, but no one has seen them. You contact the police and are told you can file a missing person report and you are asked if you have a recent picture of your child.

The next day your child's best friend tells you that they didn't want to say anything but your child has been talking with someone they met online; and your child's friend thinks they remember your child talking about meeting with this person. You call the police and they take possession of your family computer; the one you bought your child to help them do their homework.

After the police search through the computer, you are informed they've discovered a number of pornographic pictures that you didn't even know where on the computer. Even worse, they discovered chat conversations leading them to believe your child left the state to meet with an adult, possibly for sex. Now completely numb you breakdown in tears and hope for the best but fear the worst.

Sadly, a week and a half later the police report that a body matching the description of your child has been found several states away. As you body goes numb the world begins to spin around you and you can't speak or walk as you begin to replay the nightmare of your child desperately calling for

you and you're not there. You later learn it has been confirmed that your child's body has been found a thousand miles away in a shallow grave; **murdered by a screen name** - someone they met online.

This type of scenario unfortunately plays out over and over again across the United States and throughout the world because parents and children aren't aware of the potential dangers awaiting them online. They simply do not understand that criminals use the internet like everyone else, and the criminals are often a much more skilled, and more determined, than you and I are.

Computers are an amazing invention, and have truly revolutionized the world as we know it. Information is capable of being shared across town or across the world at the speed of light. Young children often start using computers as young as three and four years of age and become proficient much more rapidly than their adult counterparts. Many parents have had very little or no exposure to computers and as a result often feel intimidated or overwhelmed.

The reason I have written this book is to address this issue and provide parents who wish to learn more about computers, the Internet and online safety with several valuable tools. This includes a basic understanding of computers including e-mail, chat rooms, instant messengers and the Internet.

More importantly, this book will provide parents with the tools and training necessary to protect their children and themselves from the dangers lurking on the internet. Just like in the "real world," the online community is made up of every type of person including the bad guys; predators, pedophiles, criminals and scam artists.

Being aware of this fact, along with the tools they use and the mindset they have will provide you with ways to minimize or eliminate their impact on you and your family.

I started working with computers at an early age myself, being introduced to an old relic called the TRS-80 when I was about eight years old. I developed a passion for them ever since and I am constantly finding new ways to implement computers into my daily life.

Before the Internet, people used to use a very slow version of today's modern modem to dial into electronic bulletin board systems to exchange information. Modems are still around, but they are being quickly replaced with high-speed connections to the internet via cable or DSL connections. The old BBS systems weren't networked in the same fashion computers are today, and information existed in text format only -- no fancy graphics, pictures or sound.

As a child, I used to run a BBS that would allow people to dial into my computer and share information, exchange messages with one another and play simple games. The world of computers has certainly come a long way since then and today the internet has all but replaced the BBS.

I began my career in law enforcement, following in my father's footsteps, with the ultimate intention of combining my passion for computers and technology with my love of law enforcement. Eventually this came to fruition and I became a detective assigned to investigating computer related crimes, specifically online predator/pedophile cases.

While working as a detective, I investigated crimes involving people from all occupations; from blue collar to white collar and everything in between. One thing I observed during this time was a common thread among the victims, and common mindset among the predators. I realized early on of the need to educate parents as to the potential dangers lurking on the

internet. I found that in a majority of cases, the children who were being exposed to predators, pedophiles, and pornography in general were the ones whose parents either didn't know much about computers, or used the computer as a babysitting device.

## **What to Expect from This Book**

**T**he purpose of this book, as I have stated, is to educate and empower parents. I have not assumed that you know anything about computers at this point, and as such, I start at the beginning. You will learn the basic components of a computer, how they work and interoperate with each other. You will also learn the basics of how the internet works, how e-mail works and how websites function.

My goal is to give you enough of an understanding about computers and the computer "culture" to talk intelligently with your children. The expectation is not that you'll become a systems administrator or web designer from reading this book. What you will become however, is an educated and informed parent who is well aware of the potential dangers online.

These dangers can come in the form of e-mail, websites, newsgroups, chat rooms, instant messengers, back-door Trojans and so forth. Other dangers come from newsgroups and websites that you or your child may never see; but exist to fuel the desires of predators and pedophiles just the same. If many of these terms sound unfamiliar to you at this point, don't panic! By the end of this book, you will be an old pro (maybe not so old!) who can intelligently discuss these topics with your children, along with ways to avoid the potential dangers.

You will also learn some basic ways to search you or your child's computer to discover if they have in fact have been receiving pornographic material,

conversing with pedophiles, or engaged in some illicit activity. My expectation is that you'll use this book over and over again as a reference, and as a guide to help you combat the dangers present on the World Wide Web.