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INTERNET SAFETY FOR YOU & YOUR FAMILY

Computer technology has made giant leaps over the past few decades. Now that computers are affordable, many children and teenagers have access to them. Though wonderful and exciting learning tools, computers pose new and dangerous threats to our vulnerable youth. The internet, which includes the World Wide Web, e-mail, chat rooms, and newsgroups, has few controls and, once online, trouble comes easily.

Children can access information from the internet from their own homes, friends' homes, libraries, schools, and any number of other places. Therefore, it is important for parents to understand the internet, in order to be able to talk with their children about online safety! If you have limited knowledge about computers, take a course, ask the instructor at school to give you some private tutoring, or ask your children to teach you!

The following tips will give your family a road map to safely guide you down the information super-highway!

Internet Safety Tips

- Giving out personal information, such as name, address, date of birth, or name of school to someone on the internet is like being blind-folded and opening your front door to a stranger. Teach your children to never tell anyone on the internet any personal information that could identify your children without your permission.
- Anyone can hide their identity online. It is easy to falsify an email name and origin, so make sure your children really understand that the person they are talking to online may be lying about who they are.
- Newsgroups are used extensively by sexual predators. They have no controls and are easy places to trade child pornography. In fact, they are the largest repository for pornography. Sexual predators often look for children here. If you would like to look at an example of a "safe" newsgroup, go to clari.biz.top, which gives business news reports.
- Internet filters have many limitations. Filtering software does not prevent

pornography and other objectionable material from being available to your children. Just as quickly as this software is developed, pedophiles and child pornographers are finding ways to circumvent it. Remember that they may work in the computer field!

Parents – Questions to Ask Yourself

- How much time does my child spend online compared with time spent with family and friends?*
- How much time does my child spend online at night (when most pedophiles get online)?*
- Is my child using an internet account belonging to someone else (where the parental controls may not be set, where the child may be able to view objectionable material more easily)?*
- When I enter the room, does my child quickly change screens?*
- Is my child taking calls from people I do not know?*
- Is my child making secret telephone calls? (Offenders sometimes establish 800 numbers.)*
- Are there unknown long-distance telephone numbers on my telephone bill?*

More Tips for Parents of Computer Users

Watch for behavioral changes in your young computer user. Too much time alone, late night computer use, secret phone calls, problems at school, money and/or gifts from unknown sources...these could indicate crimes online.

Talk to your children about online “pen-pals.” Do not interrogate your children, but rather engage them in open conversation about the people they meet online. If you go online, talk with your children about some of your own correspondence. *Talk about internet safety with the whole family.* Keep the family computer in a public place in your home, such as the living room, which is easily monitored by you, as opposed to allowing your child to keep the computer in his/her bedroom. Keep the lines of communication between you and your child open so he/she feels comfortable coming to you in case they receive questionable material or are solicited online.

If you believe your children are corresponding online with someone who is sending them pornography or engaging them in sexually explicit conversation, soliciting them for sex, or enticing them to meet, contact your local law enforcement agency and The CyberTipline at 1-800-THE-LOST.

Hey Kids! You're a part of internet safety, too!

-Show your parents what you know! Your parents want to spend time with you, so why don't you surf the web together? Show your parents what you do when you're online...maybe you'll even teach them a thing or two about the internet they didn't know!

-Protect your family's privacy! Some websites will ask you information about yourself so you can enter a contest or go to the next page. Never enter any information about yourself, including your e-mail address without first getting your parents' permission.

-Protect your family's computer! Not only can you be corresponding with someone who is not who they claim to be, but you are risking your files. Computer viruses can come from e-mail or other information you download, DO NOT open e-mail or attachments from anyone you don't know!

-YOU are in control while you are online! You have the power to stop looking at something or stop corresponding with someone in a chat room. Do not respond to hurtful or nasty messages or requests and tell someone you trust (like your parents or teacher) right away! It is a crime to send certain photographs and message on the internet, so by telling an adult you trust, you could prevent someone (even yourself!) from getting hurt!

-Protect yourself! Agreeing to meet with someone you have been chatting with online is very dangerous. It is impossible for you to know who the person you're chatting with really is! Your new “friend” may sound very nice, but do not agree to meet the person—instead, tell your parents.

-Do not keep secrets! Remember, if anyone sends you photographs or e-mail that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell your parents! Telling a trusted adult in your family is ALWAYS the right thing to do!

**For more information about child safety,
visit the Vanished Children's Alliance website at
www.vca.org**