



A Warning to Parents About Internet Social Networking Sites From the Minnesota Attorney General's Office

**You know your kids' friends
from school.**

**But do you know who your
kids are talking to online?**



A St. Paul mother recently discovered that her 15-year-old daughter was having sex with a 29-year-old convicted sex offender she met online at MySpace.com. Both the offender and the girl had pages on the website. The offender admitted to police that he and the girl had had sex 15 times. (Star Tribune, Feb. 16, 2006).

Protecting your kids from sexual predators just got harder.

Parents around the country are finding that keeping kids safe involves more than just keeping them home. The Internet has changed how sexual predators gain access to kids and teens.

Social networking websites like MySpace.com are a type of meeting place. They allow users to create profile pages that list their interests, hobbies, and other personal details, including photos, personal information and even cell phone numbers. Anyone can go to the site and create a personal web page at no cost. The site allows total strangers to surf the profiles and contact each other based on the age, sex, individual interests or geographical information contained in each individual profile.

Fifty percent of teens ages 13-18 frequently communicate online with someone they've never met in person, according to an October 2005 survey by the Polly Klaas Foundation.

Not everyone is honest about his or her background.

From the comfort of their own homes, sexual predators can cultivate relationships with your children by posing as teens themselves. Young teens think they are exchanging emails with kids their own age. The predators manipulate the teens into believing that they have a romantic relationship. The data show that predators may be of any age or sex.

How to keep your kids safe

Talk to your kids about not sharing personal information online. This includes:

- Photos
- Names
- Addresses
- Schools they attend
- Names of their school teams
- Cell and home phone numbers
- Ethnic background
- Names of malls near your home
- Where your child works
- Any very private information (e.g. any discussion of sex)

Establish rules about what your kids do on the Internet.

Keep the computer in a public place in your home with the screen facing out.

Look at the screen while your kids are online to see what they are doing.

Establish clearly that if a child is going to meet a person he or she has only met on the Internet, it must be with your permission, in a very public place, and that you or another trusted adult must be present.

**Learn how your computer works.
Go behind the scenes.**

Ask a computer-savvy adult friend to show you how to check your computer to see where your children have been online. Check files and diskettes, too. Monitoring software is also available.



Resources for Parents

General Internet Safety:

www.NetSafeKids.org
www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm

Internet Filtering Software:

<http://kids.GetNetWise.org/tools/>

Internet Safety Training:

www.NetSmartz.org
www.I-Safe.org