



**Chapter 3:  
Healthy  
Relationships**

# INTERNET SAFETY

## Think Before You Click!

### RESOURCES:

If someone is bothering you online, report it to CyberTipLine:  
[www.cybertipline.ca](http://www.cybertipline.ca)

ChildNet International  
[www.childnet-int.org/](http://www.childnet-int.org/)

SOLOS: Safe Online Outreach Society  
[www.safeonlineoutreach.com](http://www.safeonlineoutreach.com)

(Click "For Youth" to check out funny and educational videos, quizzes, games and more!)

Media Awareness:  
[www.media-awareness.ca/](http://www.media-awareness.ca/)

CyberSafety:  
A website dedicated to keeping kids safe in a wired world.  
<http://www.cyber-safety.com>

Internet Safety Heroes:  
Uses Marvel Super Comic Heroes to deliver safety messages.  
[www.internetsuperheroes.org](http://www.internetsuperheroes.org)

Don't Believe the Type:  
<http://tcs.cybertipline.com/>

StaySafe.Org  
[www.staysafe.org](http://www.staysafe.org)

Commonsense Media:  
[www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)



Jessica threw her binder onto her locker shelf and started rummaging through her makeup bag. She quickly swiped on a coat of lip-gloss and ran a brush through her hair. "Making yourself pretty for Kevin?" a friendly voice teased. Jessica glanced up and smiled to see her friend Megan spinning the combination on the next locker over. "Yup, today's the big day!" she said nervously. "His dad is going to drive us to the mall. He suggested a movie, but I'd feel more comfortable hanging out with him for the first time with more people around." Megan nodded. "That sounds smart. How will you know it's him? And what if he's not cute?" Jessica laughed. "He emailed me a photo, he's gorgeous. Besides, I sent him one too so he'll recognize me. Him and his dad are picking me up in a red pickup truck out front at 2:30." She threw her backpack over her shoulder and slammed her locker. "I'll call you tonight and let you know how it went!" Jessica hurried down the hallway and out the front door of her middle school. She grinned when she saw the red truck waiting at the curb. "Right on time" she thought happily. She threw her hair over her shoulder and walked confidently to the passenger side of the truck. The door swung out toward her, but there was only one occupant inside – a pleasant looking man about her father's age. "I'm Kevin's dad", the man said smiling. "Kevin had to stay after school and talk to his football coach for a few minutes. Hop in and we'll go pick him up..."

**It can happen that easily.** The Internet is a great tool to do research and keep in touch with friends, but it is also a virtual playground for online predators. Consider this...a sex offender released from prison isn't allowed to visit parks, elementary schools, shopping malls or any other places where children might gather, but there is nothing to keep him from logging onto a children's chat room from his own personal computer. The Internet gives predators access to thousands of children, so they can surf for their next target as easily as ordering a pizza from the comfort of their own home. There are also lots of other dangers associated with internet use besides predators, including cyber bullying, identity theft and fraud, as well as safety issues around popular social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook.



### "MYSPACE" SAFETY TIPS

As you've probably heard from your friends, MySpace is a super popular social networking tool that lets you create an interactive profile, keep in touch with friends and meet new people. While MySpace can be a lot of fun, it's important to follow some basic safety tips:

- Only add people as your friends if you know them offline**, and know them well. I know it's tempting to accept random friend requests, but when your pizza delivery guy starts asking how the party was that you attended last night, you know you've gotten a little trigger happy with your "Add" button.
- Be careful about the info you post online.** This site is to keep in contact with your friends, remember? If your real-life friends don't already know your phone number and the school you attend, they probably aren't that close of friends anyway.
- Remember that allowing strangers access to your profile doesn't just endanger yourself**—you are also giving them access to everyone on your contact list including your siblings and friends.
- Make your profile viewable to friends only**, rather than the public, by going to *Account Settings* then *Privacy Settings*. Keep in mind that MySpace recently deleted the profiles of 29,000 registered sex offenders. That doesn't include offenders who haven't been caught yet, or ones who were pardoned for their crimes. Don't be a target.

### CHAT ROOMS—A PLAYGROUND FOR PREDATORS?

Teens and kids love chat rooms. They are a great tool to make new friends from around the world with similar points of view. It takes mere seconds to connect with hundreds of people that share your specific interests, from horror movies to Zac Efron. While chats are a fun way to spend a boring night at home, especially if you're feeling lonely, the scary truth is that some people in chat rooms are not who they claim to be. Even if someone claiming to be a teenage boy sends you a photo of himself, you have no way of knowing if it is actually him. Consider the possibility that every teenager who contacts you might potentially be a 50 year old man, and don't say anything you wouldn't want that man to know.

It's not just sex offenders who can be dangerous. Even online friends your own age might hurt you or talk you into doing something you wouldn't ordinarily do. Identity theft is another concern, so make sure you never give out any personal information like your birthday or credit card number to anyone online.

**THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK!** Even though it doesn't feel real, and you may pretend to be a different person, real life consequences can occur from a mistake you make online. What you post online stays there forever, even after you delete it, and might influence potential employers, scholarship committees and college recruiters. Online flubs have led to beauty queens losing their crowns and American Idol contestants getting booted from the show. It's like getting a tattoo—what you post is with you for life, so think before you click.

### INSTANT MESSAGING:

Instant messaging is a form of real-time communication through the exchange of typed messages via the Internet.

Teens love being connected to all of their friends at once; communicating instantly, sharing files, playing games, or having web cam conversations. So many teens log on to sites like MSN Messenger, those who don't may risk being excluded from social events and feeling out of the loop. Some college professors have even started using MSN Messenger as an alternative to holding office hours. A few of the most popular IM programs include MSN (MicroSoft Network) AKA Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, AOL, ICQ and Skype.

Instant Messaging with a stranger is **more dangerous** than communicating in a chatroom, because you are having a totally private conversation. If you add him to your buddy list he will know whenever you are online, and might have access to your personal profile and photos. **It's a good idea to keep your IM Program (eg. MSN) for your friends and family only**—if you meet a stranger in a chatroom you decide to stay in touch with, choose a time to meet him in that chatroom again rather than exchanging personal info. If you do add a stranger to MSN and lose touch with him, block that contact before you delete him or else you will remain visible on his contact list.

### IM Safety:

- ◆ Never fill out your personal profile with your real contact information. Why not write that you are a 77-year-old woman named Fluffy from Jamaica? Your friends will think its funny and strangers won't know your address or phone number.
- ◆ Don't put your cell number in your 'Away' message. If you're expecting a call from a friend, email her your #. Its tempting to do when you have no evening plans, but why advertise your boring night to the world?
- ◆ Be wary opening files, even if sent by a friend you trust. Viruses are easily spread over MSN, and your friend might not even know he or she has one.



### WHAT IS...

**A PEDOPHILE?** A person who is sexually attracted to children instead of adults.

**A SEX OFFENDER?** A person who has been charged with committing a sexual offense (such as a rape or sexual harassment). Some sex offenders target adults while others target children and teens.

**GROOMING?** When a person tries to 'set up' another person to be the victim of sexual abuse. This might occur through offering gifts, sharing secrets, gaining trust, showing inappropriate images or videos, blackmailing, guilt trips, etc.

One reason teens confide in online "strangers" is because it can be nice to share your problems and get advice from someone who doesn't really know you or your friends. Others enjoy the thrill of taking on a different persona, and perhaps having more grown-up conversations than they would otherwise. While it might seem normal to talk to that older person online, can you imagine actually sitting down with a 40 year old stranger in real life to share your deepest secrets? You have no clue if you are speaking to your best friend's dad or your high school janitor. That's creepy. Don't open any photos or files a chat buddy sends you, as they may be pornographic or viruses. Same goes for web cam conversations. Do you really think a man who sits at home every night web-camming with fourteen year old girls is cool enough for you? Long term relationships with online strangers aren't smart, as its easy to forget what information you gave them a month ago. One day you might mention soccer practice, another day you might mention an upcoming competition. Its easy for them to eventually accumulate enough info to find you in real life.

### SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

*are websites that allow you to post a profile and photos of yourself, and to connect with the profiles of friends, building up a whole network of connected individuals.*

### Did you Know...

**30% of teens have seriously considered meeting an online friend in real life, and 14% went through with it?**

These sites have made cyber bullying a common occurrence, as its easy to post nasty information on a fellow student or collect damaging facts on them from their profile. There are real world consequences (like suspension or expulsion) to cyber bullying—its not worth getting involved. If you are the victim of cyber bullying you need to talk to a teacher, parent or **Big Brother/Big Sister** who can help make sure the bullying stops. Predators also frequent social networking sites. "Grooming" does not usually happen on the sites themselves, but through emails, instant messaging sites or chat rooms where teens are then lured. This can lead to obsession, stalking, and even sexual abuse. Parry Aftab, a worldwide expert on cyber crime, recommends following the three P's: Never post anything on a social-networking site you wouldn't want your PARENTS, PRINCIPAL, or a PREDATOR to see.

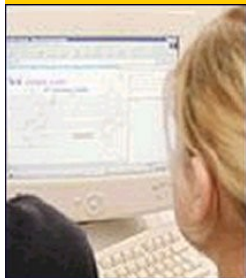
**NEXOPIA** is one of the most popular sites for kids and teens, & also one of the most dangerous. Its impossible to set your profile to private so you have absolutely no control over who is viewing your information. You also can't control who adds you to their friends list, so a sex offender could link your profile with his, making you visible to all his friends.

**XANGA** allows you to password-protect most of your info, so make sure you read up carefully to make your postings private.

**MYSFACE** is a bit safer as the profiles of 14/15 year olds are automatically set to private. Users over 18 can't add younger users unless they know their full name or email. It's still important not to accept any friend requests from users you don't know, and not to post any photos or info you wouldn't post in the hallways at school. It might be smart to blur your photos a bit so a cyber bully can't abuse them, and be cautious of how much personal info you share in those "surveys" we've ALL filled out and posted. Never post personal info in a Blog—anyone can read them and use the info to harm or embarrass you. Slimy people have started bringing cameras and video cameras to parties (especially where there might be drinking) to take advantage of you when you are most vulnerable—so BEHAVE at the next party you go to—anything you do will likely be posted by the next morning and accessible to your entire network.



**FIVE TRUTHS ABOUT ONLINE SAFETY:**



**1. MONITORED CHAT ROOMS ARE NOT AS SAFE AS YOU ARE LED TO THINK**

Some chat rooms use monitoring software that filters out bad language, while others have real life monitors keeping an eye on the public chat. While this isn't a bad idea, don't let the word 'monitored' lull you into a false sense of security. These observers are not able to determine between child and adult users, and they are not usually able to supervise private chats or instant messages. Most

inappropriate conversations will occur through private messages rather than on public space. Younger tweens might be satisfied using a child-safe chat room where they can only choose from pre-selected messages (rather than freely typing) that doesn't allow for any exchange of personal information. (One example is [www.kidscom.com](http://www.kidscom.com)) For older kids, try to limit chat room conversations to monitored public forums rather than private messages.

**2. CHILDREN WILL NOT STAY SAFE JUST BY STICKING TO CHAT ROOMS SPECIFIED FOR THEIR AGE GROUP** – If you were an internet predator looking to connect with ten year old girls, would you have better luck in a room labeled "For Adults Only" or a room called "8-13 year old Girls Hang-Out"? Trust me, if you've figured it out, they did a long time ago. Follow the same precautions no matter what the room's intended purpose or use.

**3. KEEPING THE COMPUTER IN A COMMON AREA OF THE HOUSE DOES NOT GUARANTEE SAFETY** – While this is definitely preferable to keeping the computer in a child's bedroom, teens can still get into trouble when you are in the other room (or in the same room but not looking over their shoulder) or out of the house. Remember, just because you have software that keeps a chat history of conversations, or clues you in to which sites your child visits, doesn't mean your child doesn't know how to change the settings or delete the history behind your back. Security programs like Net-Nanny or Cybersitter are not totally secure and can be tampered with. The program's filters also make it difficult for teens to research relevant issues like safe sex or sexual preference.

**4. EVEN IF KIDS DON'T AGREE TO A REAL-LIFE MEETING, THEY CAN STILL BE ABUSED**– Even without arranging a formal meeting, kids can inadvertently leak information about their school, friends, or extra-curricular activities that may lead to an unexpected encounter. An unsafe encounter does not have to involve a meeting - teens can still be exposed to pornography and explicit conversations over the computer, or might even be talked into taking and sending an online friend suggestive images of themselves— which can easily end up in the wrong hands.

**5. ONLINE PREDATORS DON'T ALWAYS TRICK KIDS OR TAKE THEM AGAINST THEIR WILL** – While events that involve online trickery often make international headlines, the majority of teens know exactly what they are getting themselves into regarding their online friend's age and intentions. Many log onto chat rooms to escape bad home situations such as abuse or overwhelming pressure to succeed. They might fall in love with an online stranger who listens to their problems and offers a real life escape. Role models like **Big Brothers & Big Sisters** need to talk frankly with teens about their desire for romance and adventure, and discuss the safety risks of pursuing these online.

**DID YOU KNOW...**

- ◆ At least 1 in 4 youth are unwittingly exposed to sexually explicit photographs over the Internet?
- ◆ 14% of teenagers have met someone in person that they met online?
- ◆ 48% of teenagers say their parents know "very little" or "nothing" about their online activities?



**THE GOOD  
THE BAD  
& THE UGLY**

If you haven't heard about the Facebook craze that is sweeping the nation, you must be living in a box. The popular social-networking site started between students at Harvard University, but quickly expanded to include other colleges and high-schools. Now, even grandparents and babies have their own Facebook profiles, and spin-off sites for pets like "Dogbook" and "Catbook" have even emerged. The site's membership currently stands at around 75 million, with 250,000 new members each day. Here's what you need to know to stay safe.

**THE GOOD:**

Facebook has several great security features that should serve as an example to some of the other social-networking sites.

- It is easy to not only set your profile to private but to **control exactly who you want to have access to your profile** and which features you want each of those individuals to see. This lets you add Uncle Jim as a friend, but allows you to change your settings so he can't see your photo albums or the messages your friends post on your wall. As soon as you accept a new friend request, a pop-up asks whether you wish to share all your information with that person, or grant them limited profile access. How cool is that?
- If your privacy settings are turned on, the only way a person can view your profile is **if you give them permission**. This can be done by accepting a friend request or replying to a message. It is easy to ignore or block users who wish to add you as a friend.

**THE BAD:**

- If someone adds you as a friend but you can't quite put your finger on how you know them, sending them a message to find out who they are means **automatically granting them access** to your profile.
- If you decide to add third party applications or games like "SuperWall" or "Zombies", you are forced to check the box **allowing that company access to your profile** and personal information.
- **You can get in real-life trouble** if your family comes across photos of you doing things you shouldn't be, like smoking, drinking, or hanging out with people aren't allowed to be with.
- Students have gotten suspended for **creating inappropriate or obscene groups** about teachers or fellow students. Don't join in!

**THE UGLY:**

- Features that allow you to post your workplace and school schedule make Facebook a **haven for potential stalkers**. Incidents have occurred where stalkers got information on their victim's whereabouts from viewing their Facebook profile. Along the same lines, the new "Minifeed" feature allows other users to see who you have been talking to and exactly what you have been up to on Facebook.
- Even if your profile is set to private, other users can still view your profile photo and friends list. Also, anyone can tag a photo of you without your permission, **making it easy for strangers to know what you look like and connect to your profile**.
- At present time, by posting content (like photos) to the site, you grant Facebook a worldwide license to use that content for any purpose. In other words, **Facebook owns your photos!**



### ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND MENTORS:

Explore the sites your child/mentee is frequenting to develop an understanding of how they work. Teach your **Little** how to set their profile and photos to private and block strangers who make her feel uncomfortable.



While it might be tempting to create a profile of your own to connect with your child's network of friends, remember—you are in their territory. Your teenager would be horrified and furious if they found out you were reading her diary or listening in on her phone calls. Respect that MSN and MySpace are important to your child, and explain your concerns. Brainstorm ways you can be more comfortable while she is still able to connect with her friends. Perhaps younger teens might be allowed to use social networking sites, but Mom & Dad hold the password to log them on and off, and to check the profile now and then to see what is being posted. If you don't understand the chat lingo, there are websites dedicated to translating "internet speak" for parents. Mentors may be added to their **Little's** list as they are often viewed as friends rather than authority figures. This is a good way to stay aware of your **Little's** life—casually ask who the people posting messages on her site is and how she knows them. Be aware of the material you are posting on your own profile, as your **Little** WILL be curious about your life.

Don't be afraid of the Internet—although it comes with its own unique dangers (just like everything else in life) it has the potential to benefit your teen's life by sharing valuable information for school projects, and offering links to great jobs, internships and international opportunities, as well as letting them delve into and explore a variety of different interests.

- **ACT ON HUNCHES:** If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. Ask more questions. Take an interest in your child's e-pals like you would the ones invited over to your house. Don't ridicule your child about online friends or give him the impression they aren't "real".
- **GOOGLE YOUR CHILD'S NAME** to see what comes up. Try to access his or her MySpace or Facebook profile to see if it is set to private. There is no faster way to ensure a private profile than letting your teen know you have access to it.

#### BE CONCERNED OF:

- Teens who spend excessive amounts of time online, especially at night, or teens who shut off the computer or quickly close websites when you walk by.
- Unknown Numbers (Incoming or Outgoing) on your phone bill, or lots of "wrong numbers" when you pick up the phone.
- Teens who are linked to older adults (particularly men) on social networking sites, especially if those adults are connected to several other young people.

#### THE MOST IMPORTANT TIP:

**DON'T OVERREACT** when your teen shares an alarming incident that happened to her online. If your teens know you will take away their computer or internet privileges when they come into contact with a potential predator, they won't tell you when it happens. Be pleased your teen is comfortable confiding in you, and help him or her report the event to the **Cyber Tipline** ([www.cybertipline.ca](http://www.cybertipline.ca)). Teens will eventually encounter something out of their experience and control—they need to see you as a valuable resource to go to for help, rather than feel they need to hide it from you and keep it a secret in fear of being punished.

## Resources

Available from the Fraser Valley Regional Library

### For LITTLES (6-12)

- *Staying Safe at Home and Online.* Cynthia MacGregor. New York: PowerKids Press, 1999.
- *Doug's Adventures Online* (VHS). Disney Educational Productions. Magic Lantern: 1999.
- *Safety on the Internet.* Lucia Raatma. Chanhassen, MN: Child's World, 2005.
- *Internet Safety* (DVD). Created by Julie Clark and John Walsh. Lone Tree, CO : The Safe Side Company, c2006

### For TEENS (13-17)

- *Katie.Com – My Story.* Katherine Tarbox. New York : Dutton, c2000.
- *Chat room.* Kristin Butcher. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 2006.

### For BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS & PARENTS

- *Internet Predators (DVD): Preventing the Attack Against our Kids.* USA: Varcom, 2005
- *Keep Your Kids Safe on the Internet.* Simon Johnson. New York: McGraw Hill Osborne, 2004
- *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Protecting your Child Online.* Preston Gralla and Sherry Kinkoph. Indianapolis: Que Corp., 2000
- *Internet Family Fun: The Parent's Guide to Safe Surfing.* Bonnie Bruno with Joel Comm. San Francisco: No Starch Press, 1997
- *Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn to use the Internet Safely and Responsibly* Nancy E. Willard. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007
- *Protect Your Child on the Internet: A Parent's Toolkit.* John Lenardon. Bellingham, Wash; Vancouver: International Self-Counsel Press, 2006
- *MySpace : VISUAL Quick Tips.* Paul McFedries and Sherry Willard Kinkoph. Hoboken, N.J. : Wiley Pub., 2006

### Thank you to the following members of our Panel for Reviewing this Article:

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◇ Safe Online Outreach Society (Merlyn Horton)