

The second Edina PCN forum of the 2006-2007 season, “Parenting the Internet User”, was a sobering look at what can happen when there is little parental oversight and unlimited access to technology. Jeff Gottstein, a St. Paul police officer and technology expert, gave numerous examples of how child molesters and child pornographers get their victims via the internet. He showed a disturbing video which showed how the internet has offered the pornography industry easy access to pictures and distribution instantaneously. Mr. Gottstein offered that it is difficult to prosecute crimes on the internet. It is far easier to keep your children safe by using the internet smarter.

The following family guidelines were suggested by Officer Gottstein:

1. No computers in bedrooms, common areas only.
2. Children must supply all passwords and ID’s to parents at all times. Only parents can add a friend to your myspace friend list.
3. No clicking off a website when a parent enters the room.
4. Let children know that you are checking website history (and do it.) {Note: to check website history log on under your child’s ID and click on the history icon. It will list all websites that your child has visited in the last month. For more oversight you can purchase spectorsoft or tattletale which will show you all websites, email and instant messages.}
5. Let children know that when they click on a website—it is never anonymous. Web Pages often put spy ware on your computer which can bring a virus back or at the least will track all the other websites that you enter. {Note: all computers should have anti-viral and anti-spy ware protection such as Norton Security}.

Children have difficulty understanding that “people” may not be who they appear to be on the internet. They may assume a preteen or teenager identity and use age appropriate language. Children should be taught to not give any personal information such as: name, address, phone numbers, school, church, work place, and malls near their home, height, weight, photos or any other private information. Never put anything on the web that you would not let the whole world know. If a child receives a message that makes him or her uncomfortable, they should know that it is not their fault and they should show it to their parent.

Parents who are concerned about their child’s use of the internet should look for the following possible red flags:

Are your child’s grades falling?

Are they on the computer for increasing amounts of time?

Do they refer to friends that you have never met?

Did they receive a web cam or digital camera from a friend?

These may be signs that they have an inappropriate relationship with someone on the internet. If you suspect there is a problem, you may contact your local police department. There is usually an officer who is familiar with the internet. Other web sites you may access for more information:

www.MICAC@ci.stpaul.com

www.NCMEC.org

www.NetSafeKids.org