



WARNING FAMILIES ABOUT ONLINE PREDATORS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

CHILD PREDATORS USING THE INTERNET to target young victims are a national crisis. One in five children will be solicited for sex online. As parents and concerned Texans, we must do everything we can to prevent our children from being victimized by this new breed of child predator.

My Cyber Crimes Unit investigators have been working undercover since 2003, patrolling chat rooms frequented by children and presenting themselves as underage girls and boys. Within minutes after entering a chat room, investigators are approached by adult predators on the prowl, using the Internet to set up what they think will be a sexual rendezvous with a young teen.

Although we have arrested 80 of these offenders, many more remain at large. That is why my office has launched a new effort to educate parents and children about the kind of criminal activity that goes on in connection with Internet diaries, chat rooms, and wildly popular social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook and Xanga.

For the past few months, my top Cyber Crimes investigators and I have been holding a unique series of town hall meetings for parents and students to teach them about Internet safety. We

have been met with overflow crowds and urgent questions from parents and students alike. In Plano, for example, a standing-room only crowd of over 700 parents and children filled the high school auditorium to participate in our interactive presentation about the risks of online child predators and the steps parents can take to protect their children online.

We have visited several Texas cities and talked to hundreds of concerned Texans about the danger of posting personal information in chat rooms, on networking sites and on blogs. Parents should be aware that within 20 minutes, an online predator can find out a teen's first name, last name, phone number, family member names, e-mail and home address, age, interests, school name, location, and directions to the teen's house, all from a screen name that contained the teen's first name.

Through videos, slideshows and a behind-the-scenes look at our Cyber Crimes lab, our town hall meetings are driving home the fact that people online are not always who they say they are. CHILDREN SHOULD NOT TRUST INDIVIDUALS THEY MEET ONLINE.

Cyber Crimes investigators advise teens that what happens online CAN

hurt them and urge them to talk to a parent or guardian if they are approached by a stranger online. We also remind teens that they should never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online.

The most important safety tip our investigators offer to parents is to keep the computer in a common room in the house. Parents are also encouraged to speak openly with their family about online safety issues. Children will be more likely to come to an adult that they feel is calm and comfortable discussing the subject matter.

Parents should get involved with their children's Internet habits and ask their children to show them the sites they like to visit. Parents should have passwords readily accessible in order to access a child's account regularly and should limit their child's use of Web cameras.

Our town hall meetings help arm parents with the tools they need to keep their children safe online. Computers and the Internet have revolutionized the way we live. But along with this great progress comes new dangers and responsibilities. I thank Texas parents for their commitment to the safety of their children and the future of Texas.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



INTERNET SAFETY

FOR TEENS:

- **Never reveal personal information** about yourself online, including where you go to school, your address or your telephone number.
- **Report unwanted solicitations** to your parents or a trusted adult.
- **Don't believe everything you read** in chatrooms. Remember, a person who says he is a 14-year-old from Texas may really be a 55-year-old man from your hometown.

FOR PARENTS:

- **Keep the computer in a common room.**
- **Have open discussions about online safety.** Establish rules restricting children from displaying personal information, including their name, address, phone number and pictures online.
- **Get involved.** Keep passwords handy and monitor your child's account regularly. If you become aware of the sharing, use or viewing of child pornography online, immediately report this to the *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children* at 1-800-843-5678 or online at **www.cybertipline.com**
- Visit the *Attorney General's Kids Page* at **www.oag.state.tx.us/kids**

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's website at **www.oag.state.tx.us**



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