



TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S CYBER CRIMES UNIT HELPS PARENTS KEEP KIDS SAFE ONLINE

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

TEXAS' GREATEST RESOURCE IS ITS children. From toddlers to teenagers, young Texans are truly the future of our great state. As concerned citizens, we must do everything in our power to protect children from sex predators. While law enforcement agencies across the state work together to arrest and prosecute criminals who prey on kids, parents and guardians must teach their children not to trust individuals they meet online.

Since 2003, the Office of the Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit has aggressively cracked down on sex predators who use the Internet to sexually solicit children. Cyber Crimes Unit investigators work undercover, posing as underage teenagers in Internet chat rooms and social networking Web sites. These highly skilled officers have one goal: to catch would-be sex predators before they harm a child. Within minutes of going online, undercover officers are sexually solicited by prowling adults seeking young children.

In less than four years, the Cyber Crimes Unit has arrested more than 90 predators that used the Internet to arrange a meeting where they planned to sexually assault a child. Another 63 offenders have been convicted for posting or trading online child pornography.

Many of these sex predators lurk on Web sites that are prominently used by children and teenagers. During a two-week operation in June, our law enforcement officers investigated and arrested several previously convicted sex offenders who had activated online profiles on the wildly popular social networking site, MySpace.com.

While our Cyber Crimes Unit will continue cracking down on online sex offenders, parents and guardians must help us keep their children safe.

The most important safety tip is simple: parents must be involved with their child's Internet habits. Parents should educate themselves about cyber safety and speak openly with family members about online activities. Children and teens are more likely to come to an adult that they feel is calm and comfortable discussing the subject matter. Parents can contact the Office of the Attorney General for a copy of our Cyber Safety Brochure, which offers valuable information on chat room "lingo" and provides online security tips for both children and adults.

Parents with teens who visit social networking sites should be especially cautious. Our investigators encourage parents to have the passwords necessary to regularly monitor their child's

account. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, teenagers are more likely than younger children to get into trouble online. Teens are more likely to explore and reach out to strangers. Sadly, sex predators often exploit the anxiety and confusion that comes with adolescence.

Parents should keep the computer in a common room and limit the use of Web cameras. Digital images are easily captured online and are difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve once they are circulated on the Internet.

Teens and children who are approached by a stranger online should immediately inform a parent, guardian or any other trusted adult. They must not reveal personal information, including photos, video, last names or telephone numbers to strangers. Teens should never, under any circumstance, arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online.

We must speak openly with our children about making good decisions in life, including safely using the Internet to interact with others. We thank all parents and guardians for their commitment to the safety of their children and the future of Texas.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



INTERNET SAFETY

FOR TEENS:

- Never post revealing information online, including personal photos, addresses, telephone numbers or school information, which would enable a stranger to locate you.
- Report unwanted solicitations, harassment or bullying to a parent or trusted adult.
- Do not trust a stranger you meet online. Remember, a person who says they're a 14-year-old girl from another state may really be a 55-year-old man from your hometown.

FOR PARENTS:

- Educate yourself and encourage open discussions about online safety.
- Keep the computer in a common room of the house and limit the use of Web cameras.
- Establish rules restricting children from displaying personal information, including their name, address, phone number and pictures online.
- Get involved. Keep passwords handy and regularly monitor your child's account.

To report online child pornography or unwanted sexual solicitations, contact the *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children* at (800) 843-5678 or online at www.cybertipline.com.

For more information on Attorney General Abbott's ongoing efforts to fight online sex predators, visit the agency's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us or call (800) 252-8011.



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