

## Internet Awareness

On Monday, February 12, I spent the day in Des Moines attending a conference addressing school law, technology issues, and cell phones. The speeches talked about the hazards waiting for our children while they are on-line and text-messaging. The following pieces of information are hints to help you protect your child.

First I would like to present the following statistics. The statistics come from the Cedar Falls police department and all are based on student's surveys from the Cedar Valley area.

- 2/3 of Iowa homes have computers and 50% have internet access. (All of Iowa)
- 85% of the students polled have chatted on-line.
- 25% of the students had an unwanted exposure to pornographic material.
- 20% of the students were solicited.
- 1 in 25 students received a follow-up phone call after communicating on-line.
- 1 in 33 students have been mailed items from predators.
- 76% of the students stated there are no controls on the internet at home.

The statistics are alarming and it is extremely scary to think our children can be contacted so easily. Therefore it is important to protect our children as much as we can. We can do this by sharing information with our children and monitoring computer access. The following ideas are hints to help protect your children from online predators:

1. Keep your computer in an open area. Do not allow the computer to be in a child's room.
2. Talk to your students early about the types of problems from on-line chats. This should begin at around age 10-12 at the latest.
3. Establish rules for the computer. (Time limits – web sites)
4. If you allow chat rooms – monitor buddy lists on MSN, facebook, and myspace.
5. If you allow chat rooms – monitor screen names. A lot can be learned from a username.
  - jjmbiawr145 - ( A typical student username)
    - jj – initials
    - mb – Montezuma Braves
    - ia - Iowa
    - wr – Wrestling
    - 145 – weight
  - With that information a predator could find a picture of your son or daughter and come to an athletic event. This would lead to a contact.
  - Make sure usernames are general and if you join a chat room also make sure your profiles are general.
6. Monitor cell phone bills. This allows you to identify verbal and text messaging contacts students are having.
7. Monitor packages students are receiving. There are predators sending bus tickets and more to students they meet on-line.

These tips are important because it does not take long for predators to find our children. In fact in one situation, a man went to meet a 14-year old girl based on one conversation with in 24 hours.

I hope the information is useful to you and your family. It is hard to believe this is something we need to think about, but unfortunately we do. Please start conversations addressing the hazards of technology if used incorrectly.

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