



Internet and Social Media Safety

The World Wide Web

Most of us have some kind of electronic technology that allows you to “connect” to a large audience, such as a laptop, cell phone, tablet, gaming system, or personal computer. The internet has allowed users access to a world of information, education, and different forms of communication. The internet has become a way of life and it offers many positive and valuable experiences.

Using the internet, you could be at risk of being exposed to illegal activity, such as sexually explicit material, sexual predators, bullying, fraud, hate and racist content, drugs, gangs, and violence, and any other topic that one would like to know about. Stealing personal information has been and continues to be a growing issue. Always check the web site to ensure it is a secure and reputable site before you enter your name, address, telephone number, social security number, or credit card number. If purchasing something from a web site, ensure they are a “secure site” indicated by an icon of a lock that will appear in the bottom strip of the Web browser page. The URL for the Webpage will change from “http” to “https” for the page at which you input the personal data. The “https” indicates the URL is a secure site.

A vast majority of the information from the internet is not appropriate for children. Unlike meeting and interacting with someone in a face to face setting, the internet offers the user the opportunity to portray someone who they are not.

There is a dark side of the internet that must be considered when parents have young, teen, or college aged children go missing. The dark side of technology and the internet must be considered by Sheriff’s Office personnel when responding to a missing person, as a possibility that they may have met someone they communicated with online.

Cell Phones:

Cell phones are designed and built to operate as an extension of an internet connected personal computer. They are more than just a telephone; they allow us to surf the web, send instant messages, receive emails, and connect to social media sites. The social media apps allows the user to connect with people and to send and receive information; texts messages allow the user to send and receive brief messages that would normally be done through a traditional phone, as well as receive and send images and other postings.

Internet and Social Media Guidelines:

Establish rules for use.

Know and become familiar with the apps your child are using on their phone, tablet, or computer. Many apps allow communication between the users that opens up the opportunity to meet.

Do not give out personal information, such as name, address, and other private information.

Do not send pictures of yourself, especially inappropriate or sexually explicit pictures.

Never agree to meet someone you met on line.

Never befriend someone on line that you are not familiar with.

Do not open emails or friend request from people you do not know.

Tips for Parents:

Talk to your children about the dangers of the internet and social media. Set aside some time to explore the internet and establish your boundaries and expectations for allowing them access to use the phone and computers.

Teach your child about exploitation, pornography, hate material, violence, cyber bullying and other issues that concern you, so that your child knows how to respond when they come across this material.

Discuss with your child the importance of telling you or a trusted adult if they come across material or apps that make them uncomfortable. Ensure they can confide in you or a trusted adult to share dangerous or frightening information.

Keep the computer and phone in a common area of the house and monitor what sites and apps they are using. Never allow a child to be left alone with a device.

Learn everything you can about the sites and apps they are using, including what parental controls and filtering options are available, what services your internet service provider offers, slang and lingo terms, how to check the history and what other internet access your child may access to. There are apps available now that appear to be innocent by the title until it is opened.

Maintain all user names, passwords, and screen names. This is very important if your child goes missing.

Know who your child talks to on line.

Routinely go through your child's devices to search their history, pictures, and what apps they have downloaded.

Report any incidents of child sexual exploration to the Sheriff's Office at 205-669-4181.

Safety Tips for Children:

Do not share, post, or give out personal information, such as name, address, phone numbers, age, school or college, passwords, etc.

Social networking can be fun and enjoyable and a way to stay connected with friends and family. However, some websites and apps allow users to hide their real identity and portray someone who they are not. It is highly possible that that you will come across someone who is trying to manipulate and

take advantage of you. You need to avoid those websites and apps that have the potential to cause you harm.

Never respond to unsolicited emails or messages that contain offensive language, sexual material, or threatening harm or intimidation.

Never send a picture of yourself to someone you do not know or trust.

Do not share your passwords with anyone except your parents, not even your siblings or friends.

Do not meet face to face with someone you met online.

Always remember that people may not be who they say they are. Everyone you personally do not know that you come into contact with on the online or apps should be treated as a stranger.

Inappropriate Behavior:

For law enforcement, some social media sites, apps, and other websites make it very hard or impossible to identify the actual users. The user can mask their identity by using false user names, stolen identities, and operate from other countries.

Cyber bullying – works very much the same way as a face to face encounter, but this is done through apps or online.

Cyber Stalking – being harassed on line or through apps. Oftentimes the apps mask the identity of the person sending the threatening behavior.

Identity theft – the more information you posts or send to people, the greater chance someone will assume your identity. Identity theft is hard to overcome and very time consuming and labor intensive to correct. Please see our Prevention Section and look under Identity Theft for more information.

Sexting – sending sexually inappropriate images or videos to another cell phone. Remember, you may send the images or videos to someone you trust, but what do they do with the images or videos? Please see our Prevention Section and look under Sexting for more information.

Phishing – the victim receives an email that looks legit from a reputable company or website and once the user opens the email or link the user's computer is attacked by malware that begins searching and extracting personal information, such as usernames, passwords, account information, banking information, etc. Essentially the user is being defrauded out of personal information without knowing it until a later time.

The above information was obtained from the websites of National Crime Prevention Council, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the Federal Bureau of Investigations.