The Dangers of Internet Socializing

Internet crime is on the rise. The Internet can put your child at risk. Recent Internet crimes involve kids who meet on social networking or personal blog sites.

MySpace, Friendster, Xanga and Facebook are some popular sites. Blogs are personal Internet sites set up by kids. They can include personal facts, a journal, pictures and an Internet contact.

The site MySpace went from 4.9 million people in 2005 to 67 million people today. Children visit these sites to meet and talk with other kids who share their interests. They make new friends.

However, kids are not the only people who use these sites. Sexual predators use these sites to meet, interact and influence young people.

Blogs and social networking sites encourage the exchange of personal information and pictures. Many kids post online journals that share their interests and deepest thoughts. Online predators pose as teens. Because they do not meet face-to-face, teens do not know they are interacting with adult predators.

Predators are skillful responders. They make your child feel important and special. Lured into a false sense of security, he trusts his Internet buddy.

The Internet predator may encourage your teen to meet in person. Sexual predators form groups. They work together to arrange meetings between the predator and the victim.

One in five children online is sexually solicited. One in thirty is pursued. They ask to meet them, call them on the phone or send mail, money or gifts.

Blogs and social networking sites pose other dangers. Kids are exposed to improper words and pictures. One in four kids see pictures of naked people or people having sex. Last month, MySpace removed 200,000 offensive profiles from its site. The items removed included "hate speech" and sexual related material. Less than 25% of kids told their parents about exposure to sexual material or sexual solicitation.

Cyber-bullying is another problem. Kids post lies, hurtful language and sometimes threatening words against their school, friends and classmates. Teens think their messages go to just their Internet buddies. Instead, their words often reach many people who have access to the Internet.

A comment made in an angry or hurtful moment can find its way to government, school and law enforcement officials. Lies and bad comments also make their way to classmates and friends. They cause pain to others.

MySpace recently hired a person to help with safety issues. Christian organizations are setting up Christian social networking sites to help combat these problems. In reality, however, parents and kids must be responsible for their own online safety. Talk to your kids about Internet safety.

Brought to you by Parent Help Line and St. John's Children's Hospital