

# Internet Safety

On December 3<sup>rd</sup> through December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the U.S. Department of Justice held its inaugural Project Safe Childhood National Conference in Washington D.C. The conference was comprised of federal law enforcement agencies as well as hundreds of state and local police agencies from around the country. The City of Madison Heights was fortunate enough to have a representative at the conference who brought back a wealth of knowledge that we hope will be beneficial to residents of Madison Heights.

Project Safe Childhood has one goal: protecting our children from abuse or exploitation. What most people fail to realize is that these heinous crimes are often committed through the aid of the Internet. As powerful and helpful as the Internet has become in the last ten years, it has also become a "port hole" for our children to be preyed upon by sexual predators. The Internet is used by these predators not only to entice our children while on-line but it is also being used to send child pornography from one pedophile to the next.

According to the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center: One out of every five youths who use the Internet have been approached by an on-line predator. In 15% of those cases, the predator attempted to meet the child in person. Only 25% of those who encountered some type of sexual exploitation told a parent, teacher, or other adult. When asked, more than 29% of Internet-using children freely give out information such as their home address, e-mail address, and other personal information.

The Madison Heights Police Department is committed to doing everything that we can to protect the children of our community; however, we cannot do it alone. We need the help from you as parents. With our conjunctive efforts, we can gain knowledge and strive to make the Internet safer for our children. As it stands, many parents have limited knowledge of the Internet and its capabilities. For instance, here are several acronyms that are frequently used in Internet chat rooms:

BRB:    \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_  
TAW:    \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_  
POS:    \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_  
143:    \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_  
LMIRL: \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_

Could you name them all? If you could, congratulations, if you couldn't, it might be time to start educating yourself more about the Internet and its capabilities. The answers are: **Be Right Back**, **Teachers Are Watching**, **Parent Over Shoulder**, **I love you (143)**, and **Lets Meet In Real Life**.

One of the instructors at the conference teaches Internet safety to parents. He stated that the first thing he does in one of his classes is have the parents right down all their

personal information on a sheet of paper. The instructor then tells the parents to go to a public place like a mall or a grocery store and post the sheet of paper on the wall. The parents of course are appalled at the idea of doing such a thing. Then the instructor tells them; your kids are doing it everyday on the Internet. It only takes several short conversations with a predator on the Internet to find out everything he needs to know about your family.

You are not going to become an expert on the Internet after reading this article but we're going to provide a foundation for you to build on. Here are some helpful tips to practice as well as some websites you can visit for more information.

Ten tips for parents:

1. If you have a computer in your house, make sure it is in a common room that the whole family shares.
2. Don't hesitate to establish a set of rules for your children while they're using the Internet.
3. There are plenty of blocking software or filtering programs designed for home computers. Make sure you have one installed. Within our city, there are plenty of computer stores with sales representatives that can assist you with what you need.
4. Law enforcement has found that these predators are often using chat rooms on the Internet to contact children. Inform your children of this.
5. Check your Internet history to see what websites your children are spending the most time on.
6. If your child has an e-mail account, check it periodically and let them know why you are doing it.
7. Spend time with your children online. Ask what their favorite sites are.
8. If you feel that your child may be a victim of Internet Exploitation, contact the Madison Heights Police Department at (248)585-2100.
9. Tell your children not to give out personal information. Remember the instructor scenario. You would never give out that information so make sure you talk with your children about it.
10. Also, stress to your children that it's alright to tell a parent, teacher, or another adult if they've seen something on the Internet that disturbs them. Remember, when they do come to you, do not scold them for the incident.

These are ten useful tips that you can begin using immediately. Remember though, this is only a starting point. Predators are constantly coming up with new ways all the time to try and contact our children. That means we need to be constantly educating ourselves. Here are a few websites that you can visit for more information on Internet safety. They are:

**[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)**- NetSmartz

**[www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org)**- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

**[www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com)**- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

**[www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)**- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

**[www.icra.org](http://www.icra.org)**- Internet Content Rating Association

**[www.icactraining.org](http://www.icactraining.org)**- Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force

**[www.comcast.com](http://www.comcast.com)**- Comcast Cable