

Advice on Taming Unruly Computers Keeping Your Kids Safe on the Net

The news has been filled with stories about the Rupert Murdoch's teen website MySpace.com. California Web entrepreneurs Tom Anderson and Chris De Wolfe founded MySpace.com envisioning Net users having personal websites where they could upload photos and sound files easily and could disclose as much personal information about themselves as they wanted. About 55 million people have "space" on the site including many, many teenagers who use the pages of MySpace.com to communicate their thoughts from school issues to music to sex.

Recent stories state that law enforcement officials believe that teens are disclosing too much information for their own good. Young people have been posting their cell-phone numbers, names of their schools and uploading sexy pictures of themselves. When young people do this they endanger themselves and this site along with other "social websites" are linked to many crimes such as rape, molestation and murder.

This is important, so you may want to read this twice. Services like MSN, ICQ, AIM and any of the interactive information sharing websites have the potential to be good. The Internet is a "tree of good and evil" and it takes knowledge, common sense and wisdom to use it rightly. When websites are misused and unmonitored they can lead our children astray and into harm's way. It isn't the website that is the problem, it is their misuse and parents neglecting their responsibility to manage and train their children.

Nearby in Middletown police suspect that in the past two months, seven girls under 16 years of age have been sexually assaulted by men they met on MySpace.com according to an article in USA Today. In most of the cases the men lured the girls by claiming to be much younger than they really were.

It is obvious that our kids are not connecting what they are doing online using the computer with real life.

The real problem is that parents are often clueless about these kinds of dangers to their kids. When parents find out, they are amazed and shocked with obscene language being used in communication at these websites.

The companies who own and operate these websites such as MySpace.com aren't looking out for your children. For example, the owner of MySpace.com Murdoch told BBC News that young people "don't want to rely on a *God-like figure from above* to tell them what's important and to carry the religion analogy a bit further, they don't want news presented as gospel. Instead, they want their news on demand, when it works for them. They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it. They want to question, to probe, to offer a different angle."

Murdock made these statements last year when he purchased MySpace.com.

Murdock won't look out for you or your kids. Although Bill O'Reilly of Fox News another company owned by Murdock claims to be looking out for us, he really can't.

Who has to be looking out for your children? Yes, YOU! You must take the time to investigate what your children are doing online surfing the Internet. I believe that you should put the family computer in an area of the house where everyone can see what is going on. Don't let your children have a computer in their bedroom unless you are absolutely sure that they know "right from wrong." The only way they will know "right from wrong" is with your instructions, example and involvement.

Every parent must monitor their children's use of the Internet and have conversations with them on a regular basis to ensure they are using the resources of the World Wide Web effectively as well as safely.

If you don't know what websites your children are visiting, now is the time to have "the conversation" with them and also begin monitoring their activities. Safe computing goes beyond protecting your computer from viruses and spyware, it also is protecting your family from predators. Protecting your family from all sources of danger including the Internet must start with your involvement first and then getting help from the law enforcement agencies.

Be sober about the Internet and be alert to what your children are doing!

Take this warning seriously there are dangers on the Net for your children and others who aren't careful. Parents must understand that anytime they let their children go online alone it's as if they allowed a stranger into their room and the stranger closes and locks the door.

Allen is one of JASAsolutions' Computer Tamers heard every Wednesday after the 5 o'clock news on WILI AM 14 and you can learn more about getting your unruly computer under control by visiting www.TheComputerTamers.com and explore the free information compiled there for you. Be sure to visit the Computer Tamers flagship store at 197 Trumbull Hwy. Lebanon or the new Bridge Street Willimantic store to learn more about getting your computer repaired or buying a new computer.