



Getting A Grip On the Internet



Ricki Lee Brooks

Moms, Dads and Caretakers look at this list of names:

- Robert Carlos Alarcia, 29, of Los Angeles, a pharmaceutical technician;
- Deep Arora, 19, of Placentia;
- Shih-Hung Chuang, a 31-year-old importer from Hacienda Heights;
- Nery Roberto Folgar, a 29 year old salesman from Altadena;
- Ryan Arnell Mount, 29, of North Hollywood;
- David Phuong Pham, 30, of Los Angeles;
- Jonathan Augustine Reese, 40, of Westchester, a Starbucks supervisor;
- Norindra Say, a 33-year-old engineer from Tustin;
- Jimmy Miguel Varela, 32, of Norwalk;
- Benjamin Paul McAlister, a 21-year-old student from Loomis;
- Benjamin Alan Taul, a 27-year-old bartender from Placentia;
- John Inkyoo Yi, a 43-year-old laborer from Anaheim; and
- former California Highway Patrol Lt., Stephen Robert Deck from Carlsbad.

Now let me ask you a question. What do you suppose they all have in common? According to a February 22nd article in the San Diego Union-Tribune, all thirteen of them face charges stemming from an Internet sting targeting sexual predators seeking sex with underage girls. Every one of them was caught on video as they were being arrested after what they thought was going to be a clandestine meeting with an underage girl.

Unfortunately, this sordid report is no longer very unusual. One must wonder what judgment may be in store for people living with such twisted sin...

In fact, the Apostle Matthew recorded these words of our Lord Jesus...

...whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Man, those are some strong words from the One many people refer to as meek and mild. Why do you suppose Jesus stated this principle so adamantly? It's simple. Children have been and continue to be at the mercy of a fallen world. Protecting them, therefore, is one of God's ultimatums. This is why in both the culture of Israel (Old Testament) and the culture of the Church (New Testament) parents are instructed to teach, train, guide, and lead their children.

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, the leader of Israel, Moses, was moved by God to write...

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

In the New Testament book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul was moved by God to write...

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Why is this instruction concerning God so important? It's important, because the best wisdom, the best worldview, and the best chance for fulfillment in life are found in him. One's ultimate needs cannot be met in anyone or anything else.

However, there are a thousand counterfeit "*need-meeters*" running loose in the world.

Consider just a few:

- False religion
- Atheism
- Materialism
- Activity addiction
- Substance addiction
- Self-help philosophy...

...and our children face them every day. As parents and caretakers, we cannot allow ourselves to let others snatch our children – physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, or spiritually. How seriously sad it would be if by simply being unaware and uninvolved we allowed ourselves to become the recipients of the consequences in Jesus' warning. Here it is again just so we do not forget...

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

So, we have two goals: to lead our children into a great relationship with God and to protect our children from anything that may distract from goal number one – notice I did not say isolate our children. Young people need to be protected, but not, necessarily, isolated. While at younger ages isolation will be required for many things, eventually members of the next generation need to know how to protect themselves even when confronted with the cold, hard realities of a sin filled world. Protecting them, then, from anything that will distract them from a great relationship with God will include many different tactics.

One of those tactics must deal with how to protect the next generation from a problem that stares both parents and kids right in the face. Yeah, if you were a child of the sixties, seventies, and eighties it would be the television, but today is today and now we must place the Internet right next to the television as a possible – even probable – influence that will distract us and our children from a great relationship with God...and, beyond that, the Internet is an influence with far greater potential for harm than television has ever been.

Consider the follow dialogue between Rita Cosby (MSNBC) and Rob Stafford (Dateline NBC):

Rob Stafford of "DATELINE NBC," who has taken a look at the dangers posed by these social networking sites, former FBI profiler Clint Van Zandt and also Del Harvey of the group Perverted Justice joined Rita Cosby on 'Live and Direct' to talk about the dangers of the WEB.

RITA COSBY, HOST, 'LIVE AND DIRECT': One of the biggest dangers is Myspace.com.

ROB STAFFORD, "DATELINE NBC" CORRESPONDENT: Rita, Myspace is big and getting bigger, five million new members expected this month, 25 percent of the members are under the age of 18.

So the big question is, Do teenagers really understand the potential danger of posting personal information on line? It's free, easy to join and easy to message its members. Kids chat about everything from school to sports to fundraisers for Katrina victims. It all seems like innocent fun, and it can be. But many parents and teens are unaware there are hidden dangers. It's a cyber secret teenagers keep from tech-challenged parents not as savvy as Margaret, a world where the kids next door play any role they want, but may not realize everyone with Internet access, including sexual predators, can see the pictures and personal information they post.

When "Dateline" surfed MySpace, we found scenes of binge drinking, apparent drug use, teens posing in underwear, and other members simulating sex and, in some cases, even having it. We also found less provocative pages like Shannon's was, but potentially even more dangerous... teens listing not only their names and addresses, but even cell phone numbers and their after-school schedules.

Internet lawyer Parry Aftab started the Web site WiredSafety.org and her safety tips appear on MySpace.com.

Aftab says even kids who don't list their name and address can provide enough personal information, such as the kinds of bands and boys they love, for pedophiles to use to con their way into their lives.

Then, Aftab says, look at their site. Are the pictures provocative, their profiles too detailed? Who are they talking to? And perhaps most important, have they kept their profiles private, protected by a password to keep strangers out?

MySpace declined to talk on camera, but did say via e-mail that it prohibits posting personal information and has a team that searches for and removes both underage users and offensive material. MySpace also said it does not prescreen the material posted by its more than 50 million members but urges everyone to be cautious.

Bottom line, Rita, every expert will tell you parents should not count on anyone other than themselves to monitor what their kids are doing online.

Here then are some tactics for protecting your children while you allow them to explore the modern information age...

General Guidelines:

Keep the computer in a public area in your house. There is no need for a private computer until

a young person has both reached an appropriate age and has demonstrated appropriate maturity. Talk with your children about appropriate and inappropriate online activities. Let them know that you love them and intend to protect them regardless of whether or not they want to be protected. Let them know that you establish the guidelines and protocols for all computer and Internet activity.

Monitor your child's computer use. Look at the history. View the websites. Monitor email addresses and instant messenger "buddy lists." Once you know that an email address is from a reputable source (i.e. grandma, best friend, aunt, etc.) you can relax a little. However, it is your responsibility to know what is coming through from other sources (i.e. unknown senders, schools, coaches, community groups, etc.). You must also know the actual identity of every name on the instant messenger buddy list. Any that you do not know must be removed. Any added without your prior knowledge and approval must be removed and must result in some form of negative consequences.

If your children know more about computer technology than you do and, as a result, you find they "cover their tracks" by erasing history files, temporary internet files, etc. remove all access to the computer. If you are unsure about this potential problem get educated fast.

Some Specific Guidelines:

Do not allow the use of chat rooms. If they want to chat with a friend (one that you know about and approve of) they can use an instant messenger.

Do not allow your children to post, send or receive pictures, videos, or audio files online. Once again, if you do not know how to recognize file types (i.e. jpeg, gif, wav, mpeg, pps, mov, swf, avi, wmv, mp3, etc.) come up to speed quickly. Note: if you choose to allow your child to download songs do so through a reputable service and be sure to pay for songs that deserve a royalty. If you are interested in finding music that is free by virtue of being in the public domain visit the website of Kim Komando at www.komando.com. You will find a ton of great information at her site by looking through her pages and links.

Do not allow your children to post profiles.

Check their folders. See if anything has been downloaded.

Set a limit on the amount of time your child spends on the Internet

Choose what times of the day your child can use the Internet. Just as with TV, it is too easy for us to allow the Internet to become a substitute for relationships.

While protection software is not foolproof, several brands provide great protection. So you might think about buying and installing blocking software such as CYBERSitter, SurfWatch, Cyber Patrol, RatedPG or Net Nanny.

Application:

Consider the above guidelines. Ask around...you may discover some more that are just as important.

Determine what your own expectations are going to be.

Finally, you may find the Contract or the Statement of Expectations found on the next two pages to be helpful. If you think utilizing a contract with your child may be a good way of implementing your guidelines then look over Kim Komando's 10 Commandments for Kids Online. Make any adjustments you believe necessary and give it a go.

While I do not use contracts, I find the ten points of Kim Komando's contract to be very useful. Therefore, I have modified them so as to be both in keeping with the guidelines on the previous pages and useful for stating my expectations.

Look them both over. Use one of them. Or modify one of them to fit your own intentions. Your contract or statement of expectations will do two things: 1. it will establish a working agreement between you and your child; 2. it will provide talking points that will help you and your child to be better informed.

Kim Komando's
10 Commandments For Kids Online
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The Internet can be an unsafe place. I am making this agreement with my parents to help keep me, my family and my friends safe.

1. My parents and I will decide when I am allowed to use the computer and the Internet. I promise not to ask or fight for more computer time. I will only do things and visit places that they say I can.
2. I will never tell anyone online or post online that I am home alone. I won't give out my last name, my home address or telephone number, the name of my school or teachers, where my parents work or their telephone numbers without getting my parents' permission. I will never give out my friends' screen names, e-mail addresses, names, addresses and telephone numbers, and I will remind them to keep mine a secret.
3. If anyone online does anything that bothers me, I will tell my parents. I will never use bad language, say bad things about other people, or send mean messages in an e-mail, text or instant message, chat room, blog, or on a Web site. I will tell my parents if someone does that to me. If I use "secret" or "code" words online, I will tell my parents what they mean.
4. When I use instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms, or Web sites where people put information about themselves, I will never send or post a picture of my family or me. If I set up a blog or an online profile, I will tell my parents where it is and how they can read it.
5. I WILL NEVER, EVER MEET WITH ANYONE I'VE TALKED TO ONLINE WITHOUT FIRST TALKING WITH MY PARENTS.
6. If my parents ask me for my password, I will give it to them. I will NEVER give out my passwords or any of our family's passwords to anyone, not even my friends or other family members.
7. If I want to download any games, movies, music, or programs, I will ask for permission. I know I must pay for most of these things. If I take them, that is stealing.
8. I will not try to win free things or buy things on the Internet without my parents' permission. If I get a message that I won something, I will show it to my parents. If I get an e-mail asking for passwords or other secret stuff, I will ask my parents.
9. I will not open any of my parents' files. I will not change any settings or install any new software without my parents' permission.
10. I give my parents permission to look on the computer to see where I have gone on the Internet, the e-mail and text messages I have sent and received, or what I do in a chat room. If my parents installed programs that track what I do on the computer or limit where I go online, I promise not to turn those programs off.

Child's signature: I have read the above and agree to follow these rules. If I don't, my parents can take away the privilege of using the Internet. _____

Parent or Caregiver's signature: I agree to let my child use the Internet so long as these rules are followed. _____

Parents Computer and Internet Expectations

The Internet can be an unsafe place and I (we) have both the responsibility and privilege to protect my (our) family. So, here's the scoop on Internet activity...

1. I (we) will decide when you are allowed to use the computer and the Internet. You must agree that you will only do things and visit places that I (we) approve.
2. You will never tell anyone online or post online that you are home alone. You won't give out your name, any other person's name, our home address or telephone number, the name of your school or teachers, where I (we) or other family members and friends work or their telephone numbers without getting my (our) permission. You will never give out your friends' screen names, e-mail addresses, names, addresses and telephone numbers, and you will remind them to keep yours a secret.
3. If anyone online does anything that bothers you, you must tell me (us) immediately. You will never use bad language, say bad things about other people, or send mean messages in an e-mail, text or instant message, blog, or Web site. You will tell me (us) if someone does this to you. If you use "secret" or "code" words online, you will tell me (us) what they mean.
4. When you use instant messaging, e-mail, blogs, or Web sites where people put information about themselves, you will never send or post a picture of yourself, family members, friends, school, home, neighborhood, or city. If you wish to set up a website, blog or an online profile, you will first tell me (us) where it will be and how I (we) can access it.
5. **YOU WILL NEVER, EVER MEET WITH ANYONE YOU'VE TALKED TO ONLINE WITHOUT FIRST TALKING WITH ME (US).**
6. If I (we) ask you for your password, you will give it to me (us). You will NEVER give out your passwords or any of our family's passwords to anyone, not even your friends or other family members.
7. If you want to download any games, movies, music, or programs, you will ask for permission. You know you must pay for most of these things. If you take them, that is stealing.
8. You will not try to win free things or buy things on the Internet without my (our) permission. If you get any e-mail from unknown sources you will not open them until showing them to me (us).
9. You will not open any of my (our) files. You will not change any settings or install any new software without my (our) permission.
10. You must realize and accept that I (we) can and will look on the computer to see where you have been on the Internet. You must realize and accept that I (we) will check to see that your email and text-messaging are following my (our) guidelines. If I (we) installed programs that track what you do on the computer or limit where you go online, you will not turn those programs off.