



Project Protect, Part II

Providing practical ways to keep your family safe in today's culture.

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Sixty-one percent of teens 13 to 17 have a personal profile on Web sites like MySpace and Xanga and half have posted pictures of themselves online. Seventy-one percent have received messages online from someone they don't know and forty percent say they'll usually reply and chat. Just 18 percent will tell an adult (Teen Internet Safety Survey, 2006).

Understand the Danger

Social networking sites are the cool new place to meet people and set up your own space, but they're also a veritable minefield of pornography and predators. Although, due to increasingly negative publicity, MySpace is trying to clean up its environment, it's simply impossible to adequately police this huge jumble of text, music, photographs, videos and off-site links used by 52 million participants, with or without "policies" prohibiting nudity and other offensive material.

Many MySpace users are under 14, the minimum age for participants, based on its stated policy. Kids simply lie about their age and join to hang out in a place shared by the likes of porn stars and porn producers – producers like Eon McKai who works for an "adult" film company owned by *Hustler*. McKai's page welcomes all aspiring young porn stars who "wanna be in some smut." He says, "I'm the guy that can make that happen for real." And aspire they do. Young women post provocative pictures and videos all around MySpace to tempt and taunt, succumbing to the sexualized messages of the culture and not realizing that they're not just presenting themselves to other teens, but to adult predators. The danger is real. A 16-year-old New York girl was molested by a 37-year-old man who had posed as a peer on MySpace and showed up at her workplace. A 15-year-old California girl whose MySpace page included contact information was abducted last December and found murdered in January. A 14-year-old New Jersey girl was murdered by a man she met on MySpace. Law enforcement reports over 6,000 cases annually involving teens who are victimized across the country as a result of online activity.

Take Charge of the Technology

Parents, it's time to wise up and take control of the technology in our homes. Over half of parents either don't have, or don't know if they have, software to allow them to block objectionable sites. And that's just the beginning. Having a good Internet filter is absolutely essential. If you decide not to block all access to environments like MySpace, which is the only certain safeguard against the inappropriate material and participants, set strict no browsing rules and be sure children don't post any personal information or photos. Check it yourself – daily if you have to – and consider using monitoring software, like eBlaster or CyberSnoop, that can watch what they're doing when you're not there. This allows you to track instant messages, chat, e-mail and even every keystroke, based on the software used.

Check your computer's history and temporary Internet files for activity. Don't forget to monitor even sites that appear to be harmless, like the online marketplace at Craigslist. The site provides links to "erotic services," pornographic personal ads and much more offensive material with no protections for children at all.

Think that Webcam looks like a really cool addition to your system? Think again. Where do you think those provocative online videos come from? Justin Berry, now 19, offered testimony before a congressional committee about how, at 13 and in a broken home with a Webcam and unsupervised Internet access, he was seduced by men online to provide sexually explicit photos, eventually leading to sexual abuse.

Mind the Media

Of course, the Internet isn't the only place kids can find a sexually-charged environment. Seventy percent of all television shows include some sexual content, and those shows average five sexual scenes per hour. Switch over to MTV and that average goes right out the window. The raunchy reality shows and sexually-charged music videos deserve serious parental attention, because over 73 percent of boys and 78 percent girls between 12 and 19 are tuned in. Children who have greater exposure to sex on TV are almost twice as likely as those with lower exposure to initiate sexual intercourse (according to a RAND study).

Be aware of what your kids are watching and set rules. For a useful "Family Guide to Prime Time Television," visit Parents Television Council at www.parentstv.org. Consider blocking access to music channels and other inappropriate viewing through your cable box or by asking your cable company to place a trap on your incoming cable line as a tamperproof solution to television sewage. Report indecent programming to the Federal Communications Commission (www.fcc.gov). The Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act was passed on June 7 and will increase fines for filthy content from \$32,500 per offense to \$325,000 – a major victory for America's families.

When it comes to movies, it's best not to trust the MPAA ratings when deciding if your kids can head off to the latest blockbuster (or to Blockbuster to rent a film for that matter). Check out the content first on sites like Screenit.com or Pluggedinonline.com (See the resource list on our Web site for more suggestions.).

Be sure you know the content of those video games being played, too. Aside from the gratuitous violence in many games, themes are becoming more sexual in nature. In "Grand Theft Auto," for example, players have sex with prostitutes throughout the game. Pluggedinonline.com and Christiananswers.net are among the sites offering game reviews.

Cell phones, many now with Internet capabilities, are also a cause for concern. Have a cell phone policy, view the downloads regularly and check the cell phone bill carefully. Pornographers are always the first to capitalize on new technology and cell phones are no exception. Mobile phone porn is expected to be a billion dollar business.

More and more, music is flaunting offensive language and sexually-charged lyrics. Parents need to establish rules with their children on what can and can't be listened to and downloaded to iPods and other devices. Have an "open playlist" policy and periodically check out what's stored to ensure that your child is staying away from inappropriate material. There are great Christian artists in every genre, so look into these options at your local Christian bookstore or thorough online vendors. iPods were targeted by pornographers as soon as the video versions appeared, so music isn't the only concern. Playboy Enterprises offers free teaser audio and video programs that draw users into coarser content for a fee.

Above all, talk to your children. Spend time with them. Keep the lines of communication open, but be a parent, not a pal. Help your kids know how to withstand the temptations around them from a practical and Biblical standpoint. Next, we'll discuss how to help protect our children in the marketplace and in our schools.

Looking for resources? For information on Internet filtering and more resources to help you as a parent, visit our Web site at <http://ca.cwfa.org> and click the “Protect Your Family” link. Download the Project Protect Resource list and CWA’s “14 Ways to Protect Your Children Online” brochure. Consider purchasing a copy of the valuable book *Protecting Your Child in an X-Rated World* by Frank York and Jan LaRue at <http://shop.cwfa.org/cwfa/>.

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