SOCIAL NETWORKING

Staying Safe Online

It is important to remember that the rules of behavior that apply in person apply online, too.

- Think about how your e-mail message will be read by others. Do not say anything online that is cruel or may damage someone's reputation. Doing so puts you at risk of being accused of slander or defamation or may cause a dangerous escalation of hostilities.
- Do not share personal information about another individual.
- Do not forward another individual's e-mail without permission.
- Never post anything that you would regret later or cause you embarrassment or shame. The Internet is the most public of forums. Once you have posted a comment, a photograph or a video, it cannot be erased or taken back. You cannot control its duplication and it may be used against you.
- Once posted, the information can be seen by anyone online including family and friends, employers or potential employers, admissions officers at colleges you want to attend, police and other law enforcement authorities.

Know When to Log Off

Conversations that take place over the Internet can be safe. After all, you can log off if a discussion makes you uncomfortable.

The problem begins when you share too much personal information or an online friendship turns into an in-person meeting. The media is full of stories about teens whose meetings with Internet "friends" turned scary, violent or even deadly.

How can you avoid becoming a victim? First, trusts your parents. They have your best interests at heart. If you are considering meeting someone you know only through the Internet, tell them. Never arrange an in-person meeting with someone unless:

- Your parents say it is OK.
- Your parents speak to the other individual's parents by phone.
- Both sets of parents go with you to the first meeting.
- The first meeting is in a public location.

When Should You Speak Up?

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, you should not respond to e-mail, chat comments, instant messages or news group messages that are inappropriate or make you feel scared, uncomfortable or confused. Show the message to your parents or a trusted adult and report it to your Internet service provider (ISP). Additionally, report the following to the CYBERTIPLINE at www.cybertipline.com.

- Anyone you do not know who asks for personal information, photographs or videos.
- Obscene material from individuals or companies you do not know.
- Misleading Internet URLs that point you to sites containing harmful materials, instead of what you were looking for.
- Anyone who wants to send you obscene photographs or videos of minors (18 years of age and younger). The possession, manufacturing or distributing of child pornography is illegal.
- Online enticements for offline sexual activities. No one should be making sexual invitations to you online – and it is an especially serious crime for adults.
- Threats to your life or safety.
- Threats to others.