

Every day parents are sending their children into the violent world of the Internet unprepared. Our focus on all of the good that comes from the Internet has to be sidetracked. We watch the news' broadcasts about sexual predators meeting teens online and then arranging to meet them in person—and not to chat!

As our children approach the age to get their driver's license, we start to teach them how to drive safely. They are required by law to take driver's education as a part of their school curriculum. We sit at home and worry when they make that first trip out alone at night. We set rules about where they can go and what time they have to be home. Too many parents forget or don't realize that there is a place we allow our children to go where they are in constant danger. We neglect setting guidelines and teaching them rules that may save their life one day. That place is the Internet.

The key to protecting our children from online predators is education. Never assume your child knows how to stay safe. It takes time and patience to sit with our children to be sure they know the rules about Internet safety, and to be sure they are only talking to friends they know in person when they are in Chat Rooms or in any other form of Instant Messaging. Predators are experts at deceiving their prey. They have tremendous patience and will spend hours or perhaps even months "grooming" a child to gain their confidence. Children may never think of this person as a stranger. After all, they have been talking online for months. At this point, it would not be hard to arrange a face-face meeting.

Please learn all you can about Safety On The Internet. I have made available at my website, <http://www.protecteverychild.org>, documents you can download, print and distribute. Click on the "Tools" button on the left side of the Home Page and go to the "Chat Room Dangers" page. Teach your kids to stay safe before letting them operate on the Internet highway just as you would the highways leading from your town. Chat Rooms, MySpace.com; all forms of instant messaging are virtual playgrounds for online predators.

How sad that we are forced to concentrate on the violence that is more and more a part of the wonderful world of the Internet. Don't let your child become a statistic! Teach them safety on the Internet.

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