

Parents must work to ensure cyber safety of kids



John Deans

someone inquiring personal information from her by sending her the acronym of ASL which stands for Age? Sex? Location?

When she chats back over the Internet that she is a 14-year old female in Texas and the adult continues the conversation,

the game of cat and mouse begins.

The largest risk group of kids online is from 10 to 15 years of age. Padron also told us that one out of every five kids have been sexually solicited while on the Internet.

With over 4.5 million child pornography sites on the Web, this cancer is worldwide and can have poisonous tentacles into any household with an Internet-connected computer.

During the Q&A session I asked her what percentage of these online predators are male vs. female and she told me close to 100 percent are male. My next question was the gender makeup of their intended targets and her answer was 50/50 male and female.

That raised another question in my head that if just 2-5 per-

cent of society is homosexual then why are 50 percent of the online pedophile crimes committed by that group?

Investigator Padron then went on to tell us how she will continue her undercover relationship with these online predators for weeks or even months during the process which is called "grooming." These sexual child hunters verbally groom their prey by getting the kids to reveal additional personal information, tidbits about their home life and start to develop a trust between them.

Over time the kid hunters may give physical gifts and emotional encouragement as well as making threats to maintain and develop the relationship online.

The goal of the predator is to become more important than the child's family or real friends and after a while become emotionally dependent on him as part of the "grooming" process.

The ultimate goal is to set up a physical meeting between the pursuing adult and the vulnerable child. Once that is accomplished bad things happen quickly.

Padron's goal is show up with the cavalry to surprise and arrest the scum ball at that first meet-

ing. I asked her if other convicts in prison still hunt down pedophiles and she told me that still goes on in rough penitentiaries — I smiled. I wanted to tell her my acreage has plenty of remote areas with fire ants.

The basic and most important goal of every parent is to protect their children. Back when I was a kid my Army drill sergeant father told me not to talk to strangers when I was away from the house.

Now parents have to take numerous steps to educate their kids and eliminate circumstances that enable pedophile predators from virtually coming into their child's bedrooms at any time.

The number one preventive measure is to make sure your kid does not post or provide personal information that acts as bait for predators. They should not type in their age, gender, or any hints of where they live or go to school.

These crafty kid hunters are very skilled at taking just one or two factoids about their prey and looking up other critical factors to enable them to develop the relationship or make physical contact in a setting that benefits the predator.

Parents need to monitor their children's computer usage at all times. I have preached for years that kids should have no privacy online from their parents.

This means mom or dad should have full access to their child's desktop, laptop and mobile device. That includes having the passwords to their online accounts such as Myspace, Facebook, Twitter and all other social websites.

Parent needs to watch the kid's cell phones for any improper texting or multimedia messaging like "sexting" which is when teens send exposed pictures of themselves around using cell phone cameras.

That constitutes felony child porn charges just for sending a nude picture of a minor.

One good practice is to have all the kids' computers in a common area like the family room where the parents can monitor what their children are doing over the Internet.

For family's with laptops and wireless networks check out an article I wrote in September of 2007 on OpenDNS for Internet filtering to keep kids off of bad websites with any and all sexual content.

OpenDNS can provide free content filtering for the com-

plete home network and can be monitored by mom or dad.

My hat goes off to law enforcement officials like Sergeant Amy Padron for taking the time to come to small towns like ours to help educate us so we can protect our kids from the insidious evils out there on the web. Copies of the actual Power Point presentation Padron gave are available at NetSmartz.org for download.

Thanks also to Rob Leer, the director of information technology for the Brenham Independent School District, for putting the event together. I was bummed however that out of a county of 30,000 people only 30 were in attendance for the very helpful and informative talk.

Get educated and involved, people — we need to protect our kids!

Bottom line: Technology and the Internet are here to stay but we as parents need to learn how to keep evil away from our children.

Next week's column: Online reputation.

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I had seen some flyers around town about a "Cyber Safety" seminar on Thursday evening, May 13 at Brenham High School. So I swung by there at 6:30 on the way home to check it out.

The speaker was Sgt. Amy Padron of the Criminal Investigations Division within the Texas Attorney's General office. This female investigator is one of our few and very brave state officers that hunt down online sexual predators.

Investigator Padron gave an hour presentation about the seriousness of online threats, how her office battles these criminals and how kids can be safer online.

The primary focus of this informative talk was how prevalent sexual predators are on the internet and how short of a time it takes for kids to be contacted by these child hunters.

Part of Padron's job is to pretend to be a young teenage girl online hanging out in chat rooms and updating her profiles on Myspace.com and FaceBook.com. She told us that usually within minutes she will have