The Web continues to change daily, to be increasingly multimedia, social and mobile. Opportunities for social Networking are seemingly limitless.
According to an October, 2005 survey by the Polly Klass foundation, 50% of teens, ages 13-18 frequently communicate on the Internet with someone they have never met. Children (aged 8-12) are increasing their online presence, but are still concerned about safety, whereas teens (ages 13-18) are taking more risks. **According to a Justice Department Study, one in seven children using the Internet has been sexually solicited and one in three has been exposed to unwanted sexual Material. One in eleven has been harassed. What can be done to keep children safe" Parents need to be aware of what children are doing online at all times.**

Social Networking Sites – What are they?

According to Jon Gibs, senior director of media at Nielson/Net Ratings "Social networking sites are the reality television of the Internet." Sites such as Facebook allow users to create self-profiles at no cost. Profiles are designed to attract responses. **Anyone can search toe site and contact a member based on the information in the profile.**
Information and pictures contained in the profile may not be accurate representation of the member. For example, members have been known to misrepresent age, physical characteristics, etc. Facebook users are required to be 13 years old, but there is no verification required. As of April 2006 Facebook had a growth rate of 458% from Dec 2005 to Dec 2006. Blogger, another popular site for children and teens, grew 80%. Not only did these social networking sites have tremendous growth in one year, they also have extremely high retention rates due to their interactive nature.

Parents must take an active role in protecting their children if these social networking sites are used.

General Parent Guidelines

1. Learn about the Internet. Ask your children to show you how they use the internet. You will get a sense of their interest by sitting with your children and visiting their favorite sites.

2. Use parental controls. Learn how to check what your children do online. There are several good sites that can teach parents how to track use, such as www.linkupparents.com.

3. Learn how to use monitoring and blocking software. Be aware that even the best software can be circumvented.

4. Learn what resources your computer system offers beyond monitoring software.

5. Talk to you children frequently about online dangers including sexual victimization.

6. Tell your children that what they see online may or may not be true.

For Parents of Children (Ages 8-12)

1. Put any computer with Internet access in a central area of the house, not in a child's bedroom or secluded area.

2. Establish family rules and guidelines to include:
   a. no personal information given.
   b. no school information disclosed.
   c. review of pictures to be posted.

3. Caution Children not to give out personal information such as their full names, address or telephone numbers to anyone on the net without parental permission. Many schools have policies against students posting information about the school, including the school name, teacher names, etc.

4. Prohibit any meeting in person with someone he/she knows online, unless you are present.

5. Inform your children that you will monitor Internet use, IM (instant messaging), and email in order to keep them safe.

For Parents of Teenagers (Ages 13-17)

1. Share stories using real examples of teens that have been tricked or hurt because of unsafe online practices.

2. Meeting someone contacted on line carries considerable risk and is not advised. If a meeting is arranged adhere to the following:
a. do not meet alone
b. go with a trusted adult.
c. meet in a public place.
d. if not what you expected, walk away amd tell a parent or trusted adult.

3. Request to review pictures to be posted.

4. Do not overreact if and when you find out that your teen has done something online of which you do not approve.

5. Reinforce the expectation that parents monitor Internet use and that safety rules must be followed.

6. If teens confide in you about something scary or inappropriate that they encountered online, your first response should not be to take away Internet privileges. Try to be supportive and work with them to help prevent this from happening in the future.

Tips for Older Teens
(Ages 18-19)

1. Protect yourself. Keep your identity private-no name, address, school name, phone number, family of friend information should be given out or posted.

2. Remember when you are online, anyone can see and read what you post. Consider who might see your online profile – friends, teachers, parents, coaches, employers, the police, the FBI, even sex offenders.

3. Meeting someone contacted online carries considerable risk and is not advised.

4. Do not upload personal photos and videos online. Not only are these going to attract online predators but they can be misused in the wrong hands.

.

Tips on Cell Phone Use

1. Be careful about the pictures you take and send with your phone. Pictures taken with a cell phone can be posted on the web.

2. Be aware text messaging reveals your phone number to whomever you send a message.

3. Know that predators can also send messages and call to arrange meetings.

4. If you receive a bullying or threatening text message, report it immediately to a parent or trusted adult.

5. Your phone has caller ID. Do not answer a call from a number that you are not familiar with or not expecting.

6. Parents should review their service plan to learn which features can be blocked to protect children.

Resources for Parents

Internet Safety

www.netsmartz.org

www.netsmartz411.org

www.kidshealth.org

www.safekids.com

www.ikeepsafe.org

Internet Filtering Software

www.kids.getnetwise.org

www.safefamilies.org

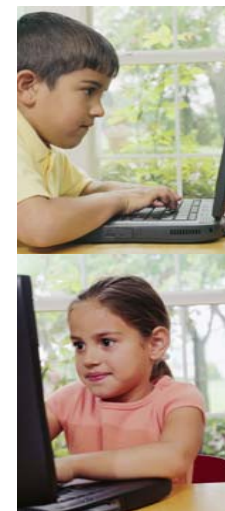### Internet Safety Training

www.cybersmart.org

www.notmykid.org

Reporting Internet Crimes Against Children

If you have information that the Internet or a computer is being used to victimize a child, please call the Task Force at the 24-hour hotline **1-877-474-KIDS** or your nearest police agency.

PARENT GUIDE

INTERNET SAFETY FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

Roman Catholic
Diocese of Brooklyn

www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org