These tools can help you learn more about Internet safety:

MySpace Unraveled: A Parent's Guide to Teen Social Networking
by Larry Magid and Anne Collier

Cyberangels
(www.cyberangels.org)

GetNetWise
(www.getnetwise.org)

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
(www.missingkids.com)

Wired Safety
(www.wiredsafety.org)

NetSmartz Workshop
(www.netsmartz.org)

SafeKids.com
(www.safekids.com)

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE BUREAU

NEW YORK COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Protecting Your Children from Internet Predators

CYRUS R. VANCE, JR.
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
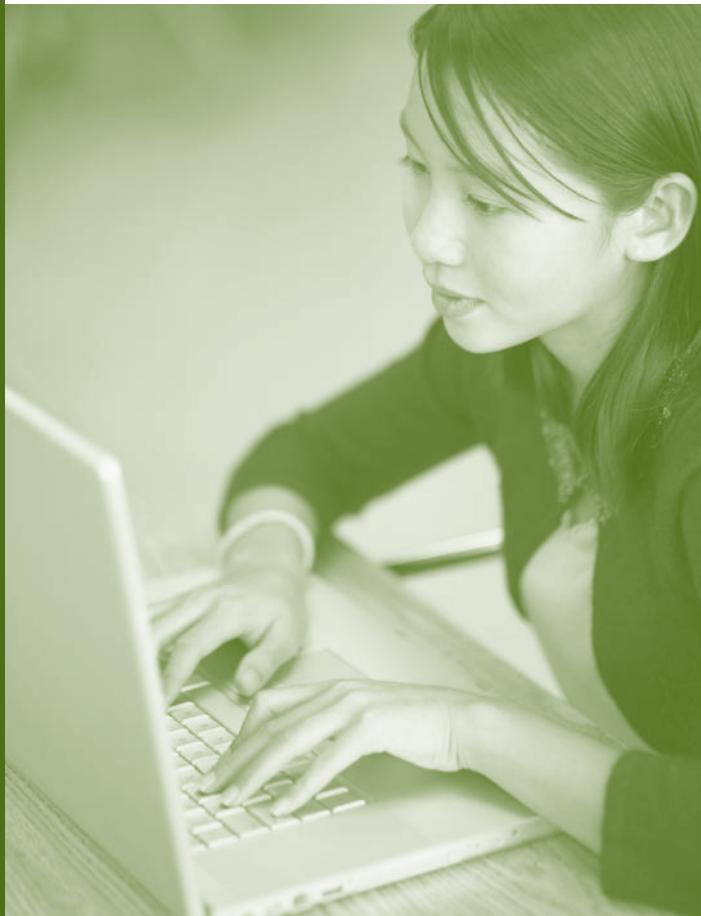
CYRUS R. VANCE, JR.
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Dear Friends,

The Internet can be a great way for children to learn about the world and explore their areas of interest. However, it can also be home to criminals seeking to victimize children. It is important for adults to understand the Internet, the threats it poses, and the ways to protect children from Internet predators. This brochure will give you suggestions about how to protect your children, who to go to for help, and how to stay informed.

Sincerely,

Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.

Why are children vulnerable victims?
With more than 30 million children in the United States using the Internet, today's predators can easily find and exploit them. For predators, the Internet is a new, effective, and more anonymous way to seek out children for criminal purposes.

How do criminals get information from children?
They may participate in chat rooms and bulletin boards to communicate with children. With relatively little information provided by online profiles, criminals can initiate conversations with children and pretend to be someone or something that they are not.

How can the Internet be dangerous?
In order to understand what risks exist on the Internet, parents should familiarize themselves with the computer and attempt to become more computer literate and Internet savvy. The risks include:
- Exposure to inappropriate material
- Sexual solicitation
- Harassment and bullying
- Theft of personal information

What have studies shown about the risk to children?
Studies have shown that of children between the ages of 10 and 17:
- 1 in 4 had an unwanted exposure to sexually explicit pictures
- 1 in 5 received a sexual solicitation or approach
- 1 in 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation (from someone who asked them to meet somewhere; called them from a telephone; or sent them regular mail, money, or gifts)
- Only 25% of youth who encountered a sexual solicitation or approach told a parent

Discuss Internet Usage and Establish Rules for Internet Use

- Ask children what sites they visit and whom they "talk" to online, and set rules for what sites they can go to and whom they can chat with.
- Discuss how long they will be online when not doing school-related work. This is the same as discussing how much TV they can watch. Emphasize having a balance between interests and activities.
- Keep the computer in a "public" area in your house to monitor your child's Internet use, and set rules for where they can use the computer outside of the home.
- Use parental controls provided by your online service to block adult chat rooms and instant messages from people you do not know.
- See what Internet sites have been visited recently on your computer by pressing the Ctrl (control) and H keys at the same time—be aware that children may know how to delete these Internet history files.
- Tell your children to let you know if anything seems strange to them, for example, if they are asked personal questions or if their online friend invites them somewhere.
- Be mindful of changes in your child's behavior including references to people you do not know, secretiveness, or sleeping problems.

Teach Your Children to Safeguard Their Personal Information

- Forbid your children from creating online profiles that will list them in directories; this will make them less likely to be approached in children's chat rooms, where pedophiles often search for prey. On MySpace, setting one's profile to "private" keeps strangers from viewing the profile.
- Make sure your child strips their online profile of identifying details, such as last name, suggestive screen name, hometown, and school name. Ask them if you can see their Internet profile tomorrow, giving them time to clean up anything they know is offensive and unsafe.
- Warn your children about "private" chat rooms and talk to them about not giving out personal information such as their name, address, school they attend, teachers' names, parents' names, etc.
- Teach your children not to provide any personal information over the Internet. They should assume that everything they do over the Internet is public.
- Communicate the importance of never telling anyone they meet online where they will be or what they will be doing.
- Make sure that you are present whenever your children meet Internet friends in person.
- Keep in mind that identity theft is a growing problem with more and more people having their personal information stolen through the Internet. Be wary of sharing the computer you pay bills on with your children, who may download games containing viruses or botnet programs.
- Check your credit card statements each month for unusual charges that may indicate that a stranger or your child is making unauthorized purchases.

Blocking Software

Computer programs that block access to web sites or other services available over the Internet.

Blog

An online journal. You can post stories or thoughts about yourself or others just like you would in a personal journal. The Internet is a very public place and teens need to be reminded of the dangers of posting personal thoughts and information for anyone else to see.

Botnet

Created by programs that secretly install themselves onto thousands or millions of personal computers, botnets are networks of computers banded together collectively for the purpose of committing fraud and data theft.

Chatroom

An interactive forum where you can talk in real-time. Many chatrooms are established so that people can discuss a common interest like music or movies.

Instant Messaging (IM)

A service that allows people to send and get messages almost instantly. To send messages using instant messaging you need to download a program and know the instant messaging address of another person who uses the same program.

MP3

A digital music file. MP3s allow you to play music on your computer.

For a more comprehensive list of Internet terms and their definitions visit, www.netsmartz.org/safety/definitions.htm.

To Report a Crime or Get Help:

New York City Police Department

If you believe that you have been a victim of a crime committed on the Internet, you should report the incident to your local precinct. Your local precinct will refer the matter to the appropriate investigative unit.

New York State Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force

(www.troopers.state.ny.us)
To report incidents of child-sexual exploitation on the Internet, call the Tipline, 1-877-474-KIDS (5437).

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

(www.cybertipline.com)
To report messages that are harassing, sexual in nature, or threatening, call the Tipline, 1-800-843-5678 or access the website.

Department of Justice

(www.cybercrime.gov)
This website provides information on how to report Internet-related crime at the local, state, federal, or international levels.

New York County District Attorney's Office Identity Theft Unit Hotline

212-335-9600. The hotline is staffed by Investigative Analysts who have expertise in prosecuting identity theft crimes and counseling victims.