

Parents can help protect against online dangers

Online predators most often victimize children in their mid teens by targeting them through chat rooms, social networking sites, online games, virtual worlds and through instant messaging, texting and e-mails.

How does a family prevent online offenders and predators from entering the home?

- **Discussion:** Talk about how kids can provide too much personal information online. Offenders and predators can review these Internet profiles to find their next victims.
- **Watch the computer:** Move it to a common area and frequently check your child's online activity. Cases have been reported where offenders and predators contact teens right under their parents' noses because parents thought moving the computer was enough.
- **Monitoring software:** Look into content screening and monitoring software, as well as programs offered online or by your Internet service provider.
- **Be vigilant:** Check the child's online contacts and buddy lists, as well as pictures posted and sent by logging into the child's e-mail and social networking accounts.
- **Set limits:** Restrict the child's time online, especially after school or when you are not home, and during school vacation days, such as the upcoming spring break.

Also remember that the Internet is accessible via cellular phones and portable devices.

The Pinellas Sheriff's Office and many other local law enforcement agencies maintain Crimes Against Children Units that track down sex offenders and predators on the Internet.