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## **Chiefs of Police Offer Safety Tips For Parents/Children When Surfing The Internet**

Agawam, Massachusetts - The Internet and the invention of the personal computer are perhaps the most significant creations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, offering unprecedented communication tools that link families and friends around the world. It provides users access to an incredible volume of information and is an invaluable tool of the academic and business world.

The Internet can also be a seedy and dangerous place for people of all ages, especially children and teens.

"Internet users enjoy anonymity and that is something that predators crave," says Chief Robert D. Campbell, of Agawam and President of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association. "A child doesn't always know with whom he or she is interacting and that is why it can be so dangerous. Unless it's a school friend or a relative, they really can't be sure."

Considering that 25 percent of kids online participate in real time chat and 13 million use instant messaging (IM), the risks of such children interacting, either knowingly or unknowingly, with a predator is alarming.

According to the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), 89 percent of sexual solicitations were made in either chat rooms or instant messages, and 1 in 5 youth (ages 10-17 years) has been sexually solicited online.

"It's easy to think of pedophiles as loitering in playgrounds and other places where children play," says Chief Campbell, "but because of the way the Internet works, children can easily be interacting on their home computers with predators posing as **Chickhl.**"

The Police Chiefs of Massachusetts wish to offer these safety tips to parents and children and urges parents to report any suspicious activities:

### **Tips for Children and Teens:**

- Never give out personal information (such as name, age, address, phone number, school, town password, schedule, your picture) or fill out questionnaires or any forms online. This includes chat rooms, instant

messages, email, surfing the Net and even entering contests or registering for clubs online.

- Never meet in person with anyone you have met online without Mom and/or Dad's presence
- Do not enter a chat room without Mom and/or Dad's presence or supervision. Some "kids" you meet in chat rooms may not really be kids; they may be adults with bad intentions. Remember people may not be who they say they are.
- Be suspicious of anyone who tries to turn you against your parents, teachers or friends.
- Don't give out your password to anyone except your parents - not even to your friends.
- Follow your family's rules for online safety at home, at school, at the library or at a friend or relative's house.
- Do not engage in an online conversation that makes you feel uncomfortable. Log off and tell your parents. If you get such a message, DO NOT respond. Instead, show it to your parents and let them handle it.
- Never respond to or send an e-mail or instant message to a stranger, or accept emails, enclosures, links, URLs or other things online from people you don't know. Talk to your parents first so they can check it out.

### **Tips for Adults**

- Place your computer in an area of your home where you can easily monitor your child's Internet activity.
- Teach your children not to give out personal information to anyone they do not know in the physical world.
- Teach them never to give out any personal information while they are in a chat room with friends, because there may also be others in the chat room that they do not know.
- Supervise your child's chat-room activity and only allow your children in monitored chat rooms.
- Block instant/.personal messages from people you and your child don't know. (Check to see-which IM services have this feature.)
- Set time limits and monitor the amount of time your child spends on the Internet, and at what times of day. Excessive time online, especially at night, may indicate a problem.
- Regularly ask your kids about their online friends and activities.
- Be present in room so you can monitor the screen and your child's IM.
- Do not permit your child to have an online profile, which serves as a lightning rod for predators. With this restriction, he or she will not be listed in directories and is less likely to be approached in chat rooms where pedophiles often search for prey.
- Be aware that when anyone enters a chat room, their email can end up on a spammer's list. This means that participating in chat rooms can increase the likelihood that you will begin receiving unsolicited pornographic e-mail.

- Consider investing in protective software. As your Internet service provider or local software retailer for suggestions or visit an Internet search engine and conduct a keyword search for “blocking and filtering software.”

The following websites provide useful information to aid parents in educating themselves and their children in safe Internet practices: [www.nrotectkids.com](http://www.nrotectkids.com), [www.safekids.com](http://www.safekids.com), [www.missinnkids.com/cybertin](http://www.missinnkids.com/cybertin), and [www.aetnetwise.org](http://www.aetnetwise.org).

### **About the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police**

Founded in November 1887, the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association is a professional and educational organization dedicated to the preservation of peace and protection of the lives and property of the citizens of Massachusetts. Chief George J. DiBlasi (Ret.) serves as Executive Director.