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A Dangerous Environment

By Richard Lowe, Jr.

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The internet is a dangerous place for your children. Don't even begin to believe that your child is safe. There are more dangers than you can possibly imagine waiting to lure children to their doom. You had better be aware of what's happening and take steps to shield them from the danger ... if you don't, your child's sanity and safety are at serious risk.

Does this sound alarmist? Actually, I cannot stress this fact enough ... you have to be just as careful with your five year old on the internet as you would in the worst red-light district back alley in the darkest part of town. If you would not allow your twelve year old wander around a drug den or visit the sex shops in San Francisco, then why on Earth are you letting him or her loose on the internet without supervision?

Let's look at some of the dangers that exist on the internet. The most obvious issue is pornography. There are dirty pictures, video, sounds, movies and anything else you can imagine available everywhere on the web. In fact, it's often difficult to surf without running into a pornographic site occasionally. Just type "whitehouse.com", expecting to get a page about the white house and you'll see that you get a pornographic site.

Oh, and it's not just your run of the mill pornography, no, there is much worse stuff available to anyone who cares to look. Your child can find pictures which will curl your toes at the sheer perversity of the images. While intelligent people can debate whether or not any of this material should be available, even to adults, at all, no one with any conscience and trace of goodness can say it is okay for children to have access to this stuff.

Not only is pornography a danger, but the cyber world is full of other horrible things (just like the real world). Without much work, your child can easily surf to sites which espouse hatred, nazi values, and page after page of extremely graphic, real violence. I even know of some parents who were horrified to find that what they thought were harmless Anime (a style of Japanese cartons) sites that turned out to

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be hard core, extremely graphic animated sex galleries.

Of course, I'm sure you've all heard of the dangers of unsupervised chat rooms. I have heard that older men hang out in them, waiting for trusting, innocent children. They start up conversations, and before long your child might attempt to travel to meet a nice man – and never come back.

You've got other, more subtle, dangers as well. Your child might surf the internet and find some cool site which asks for personal information. Not knowing any better, he or she might enter your social security number, address, phone number or even your credit card numbers. This could actually put not just your child but your entire family in danger.

I could go on and on about the dangers, but what do you do about it? Is there anything that you can possibly do, short of unplugging the stupid computer, to protect your children?

The first, and most important, thing that you should do is talk to your children. Believe it or not, children are intelligent beings, and they will understand if you use words and concepts that they can comprehend. Explain the dangers, being patient and caring and understanding. It may take a few tries, but they are capable of learning, understanding and obeying. Just be sure you do not portray the dangers as something in any way desirable, and don't forbid them to explore, just explain what's going on.

The second, and equally important, thing to remember is that even if your children do understand and comprehend what you tell them – you should still protect them. Do not let them surf the internet unsupervised if you can help it. Watch them on the web and be sure you know where they are going.

Every once in a while, check over the computer that your child has been using to see what they've been doing. Look at the cookies, the browser history and at images and such stored on the hard drive. I know it sounds like spying, but it's important to know what they are up to before they get into trouble. And oh yes, if you find something, just wait for an opportunity to "discover" what they are doing without giving away that you are looking over their shoulder. Then use this as a means of getting into a discussion with them. You should also take maximum advantage of any and all parental controls that are available to you. Use a product such as NetNanny or Cyber Babysitter to control your child's surfing habits. Set the parental controls of your browser and the major search engines (most of them have a way to filter out adult content).

Does this sound extreme? Any psychiatrist will tell you it is. They will tell you should allow your children to explore at will, along with lots of other, similar garbage. But would you trust your children to the people who funded Adolf Hitler, who give drugs to your children in school and who claim that hardened criminals are really just misunderstood and unloved. (That's a subject for a future article perhaps – how we can improve our civilization and bring peace to the world by lining all of the psychiatrist's up on the nearest wall).

Anyway, digressions aside, the responsible thing to do is to ensure that your children are safe, just like you would if they were wandering around in the mall or in the red light district of a big city. If you don't, you may find yourself taking up a new hobby – looking at milk cartons.

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets. This website includes over 1,000 free articles to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge.

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