

Dear GMS Parents/Guardians,

As parents, we do everything we can do to ensure our children are safe. We teach them about strangers, crossing the road safely, wearing protective equipment. We encourage them to make good choices which coincidentally turn out to be safe choices with positive consequences. But, do we talk about online dangers, the use of Facebook, texting, sending photographs, and online postings?

Over the past 10 years, technology has made great strides, yet it has become a unique challenge for parents of minors. Keeping children safe from online predators and those seeking information to steal an identity takes vigilance. With a simple click of the mouse or touch of a keypad, our children can go from a safe educational site or game, into an inappropriate world of intrigue and danger. As parents, we need to monitor where our youth go and what they see online just as we monitor where they go in person.

As technology use becomes more prevalent, it is important that we:

- Communicate with our children about victimization and potential online dangers.
- Spend time with our children online. Have them show you their favorite online destinations.
- Keep computers in a common, public room of the house, not in your child's bedroom.
- Utilize the parental controls provided by your Internet service provider and/or blocking software. While electronic chat can be a great place to make friends and discuss interests, it is also prowled by sex offenders. The use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored.
- Maintain access to your child's online accounts and randomly check his/her social media and e-mail accounts. Be up-front with your child about your access and the reasoning behind it.
- Teach your children to use online resources responsibly.
- Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places, outside your normal supervision, where your child could encounter an online predator.

- Understand that even if your child was a willing participant in some form of sexual exploitation, he/she is not at fault. He/she is the victim. The adult offender always bears complete responsibility for his or her actions.
- Instruct your children:
 - to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online;
 - to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet or via text messaging to people they do not know;
 - to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number;
 - to never download pictures from an unknown source;
 - to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing;
 - that what they are told/what they read online may or may not be true.

Together we can keep your children safe.

Sincerely,

Trooper Campbell
Michigan State Police