



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



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Written By Kurt Nyquist

Kurt Nyquist is the Principal at Penns Valley Intermediate School. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County Communities That Care® serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region Communities That Care® serving the State College Area School District.

As a school principal encountering new challenges with the rise in technology use by students, I recognize a need for vigilant parental involvement in ensuring local youth's online safety. Like a lot of teenagers, your child probably spends much of their time online. The Internet is a great tool and technology should be used whenever possible, but there are some simple ways that you can ensure your child's safety while using the Internet. Make sure the computer your child uses is in an open area and not in the privacy of a bedroom. Additionally, monitor the sites your child visits and who your child is "talking" with online. Every once in awhile, you should look over your child's shoulder to see what sites they are visiting. This is not an invasion of privacy – it's being a responsible parent. If a stranger came to your door and said he was going up to your child's bedroom to talk, I am sure you would say "No way!". If your child is visiting chat rooms without your supervision, this is exactly what strangers are doing.

For those of you who have allowed your child to open an account on one of the numerous social-networking sites- ie: Myspace – there are some very specific steps you need to take to ensure safety:

1. Always choose "Private" for your display settings – this is not fool proof. Tech savvy people can find a way around this setting.
2. Never post any personal information – first and last name, address, school, phone number etc. This would enable a stranger to find someone.
3. Never go into a private chat or accept an attachment from anyone unknown. Once a connection is made to your computer, the person on the other end has your IP address (which is a unique number assigned to electronic devices). Once someone has an IP address, a physical address can be found in under five minutes using one of many pieces of available computer software.
4. Make sure any photos that are posted do not contain ways to identify you or give away your location.

Computers and technology are how kids today communicate and spend a lot of their free time. The most important thing you can do as a parent is talk to your child. Ask who they are talking to, what sites they are visiting, and what to do when they encounter something that makes them uncomfortable. Supervising and monitoring this is not easy, but it is extremely important and you do not have to do it alone. Talk to your friends. Talk to someone at your child's school. Visit one of these sites to learn more:

<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm> (FBI Publication)
<http://csriu.org> (Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use)

Care Partnership: Centre Region Communities That Care®
Serving State College Area School District
Dawn Taylor, Community Mobilizer
814-861-7424
dtaylor105@gmail.com
Web address: carecentreregion.org

Centre County Communities That Care®
Serving the School Districts of Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and
Philipsburg-Osceola
Kimberly Cassidy, Community Mobilizer
814-404-9511
centrecountyctc@yahoo.com
Web address: centrecountyctc.org