

Watch Talk Wednesdays
Wednesday, August 25, 2010
Social Networking

Cheryl Shaffer, Victim Specialist, Federal Bureau of Investigation and **Dorcy Riddle**, Task Force Officer, Federal Bureau of Investigation gave a presentation on **Social Networking** for about 80 residents at the August 25, 2010 *Watch Talk Wednesdays* program presented by the Neighborhood Services Department of The Woodlands Township.

Although there are several social media sites, Ms. Shaffer and Ms Riddle focused on the two most popular with teenagers – Facefook and My Space. Dorcy Riddle compared using social media to bleach. She suggested not banning use of it, but teaching them what’s appropriate and what’s not. She said to watch out for your children and take care of them.

Ms. Shaffer and Ms. Riddle provided facts about social networking sites; discussed statistics about the use of these sites by young people; explained “sexting”, “sextortion” and “cyberbullying”; and provided basic safety tips for youth and parents.

Here are staff notes as interpreted from the program:

Basic Social Networking Facts:

- Regulations are not established yet in many social networking situations.
- Impact is greater face to face than in a social networking situation.
- Social barriers are sometimes ignored online. People will often provide information about themselves online that they would hesitate to do in person. This includes revealing photos.
- Predators troll the internet.

Statistics:

- 55% of online youth have profiles – majority of parents are not online friends with them.
- 49% of youth go online to make new friends.
- 43% of youth are contacted by strangers.
- 31% of youth have online friends that they never met.
- 23% of teens have been scared by something they have seen online.
- 1 in 7 will be sexually enticed or solicited.

Sexting is sending sexually explicit images via email or phone.

- 1 in 5 youth report having sent sexual suggestive images or messages
- 49% report seeing sexual images of students in their school

- 15% of teenage boys report sending out images of their former girlfriends after breaking up with her.
- Of 12080 teens surveyed, 20% sent out nude or semi-nude photos.

Criminal Consequences of sexting:

- Sexting is against the law. If they send, receive or distribute, both parties may go to jail, no matter their age.
- Kids are getting prosecuted for production, distribution and possession of child pornography.
- Sexting can result in criminal charges, even jail.
- May have to register as a sex offender.

Social consequences of sexting:

- Judged or excluded by peers or family.
- Targets of mean comments, rumors and harassment.
- Image may follow person forever, damaging academic, social and employment opportunities.

Safety tips provided by Cheryl Shaffer and Dorcy Riddle:

- Employers and schools are checking online.
- Even photos set to private may show up in the public, since systems are not glitch-free.
- Once a picture is taken and sent, you can't get rid of it – someone else's picture of you may not be set to private.

Sextortion is online blackmail.

- Teens text nude cell phone photos and show off their bodies on the Internet.
- Pornographers threaten to expose them unless they pose for explicit pornography, creating a vicious cycle of exploitation.
- Kids don't want to be embarrassed so they may go along.
- Call local law enforcement to report.
- If a child receives a nude photo, Dorcy Riddle said that they should tell a parent and delete the picture, so that they don't possess it.

Cyberbullying:

- Includes bullying and making threats online. It is affecting good kids too.

What kids can do to be safer:

- Don't be (online) friends with people you don't know.
- Don't give out personal information.
- Don't post plans or whereabouts online – including mentioning or showing team sports.
- Never meet in person with anyone you first met online.
- Think about the real life consequences of what you post.

- Alter your own pictures before you post them to remove identifying information.
- Set your pages and blogs to private.
- Learn to use phones in a responsible manner.
- Use caution in chat rooms. **One of Dorcy Riddle's responsibilities is to go online portraying herself as a teenager. She reported that it takes her only about 1 ½ minutes to find predators online in some chat rooms.**
- Cheryl Shaffer suggested that if it's something that you don't want everyone else to see, don't put it on the internet.

Cheryl Shaffer relayed a report about victim Ashleigh Hall, 17, who accepted an online friend who presented a photo of himself that depicted a handsome teenage boy. With her parents' knowledge, she agreed to meet this person. Unfortunately, the actual person she met was a 33 year old serial rapist. He murdered her.

Illegal activity on the internet can happen anywhere. Six months ago a man was arrested in this area.

Tips for parents:

- Know your kids' passwords.
- Check their emails.
- Get filters - buy software to prevent harm to your child. Get software that sends email alerts to parents. You may want to set time limits too.
- Teach your kids responsibility.
- No computer in their bedroom.
- No computer if they don't share password and screen name with parents.
- Check history.
- Encourage children to tell you if something happens. "Don't freak out" if they do.

Dorcy Riddle said, "Be their friend on facebook, but be their parent in real life."

Report to:

- 1-800-843-5678 Cyber Tip Line
- www.cybertipline.com
- Local law enforcement

In response to questions :

- Boys as well as girls are targeted.
- Contact your cell phone company about restriction features that you can place on your phone.
- Check your child's phone regularly.
- Cheryl Shaffer noted that don't have anything on your phone if it is inappropriate. Be responsible with your words.

- They will come to speak to groups if they are available.
- Tell your child that if anyone contacts them that they don't know, they should tell their parent.
- Regarding what's appropriate, start with what they can understand. If something scares them they should let you know.
- If kids are victims of sextortion, it is looked on differently than if they are continuing to post illegal materials themselves.
- Before, kids could go home to their safe haven to be away from bullies, but now they can't get away from the internet.
- Kids are not supposed to be using their phones at school. Some schools are seeing it as a parent problem, since they shouldn't be using their phones during school.
- Parents can check bills to see if they are using their phones during school.
- Parents aren't working together with other parents to protect kids and they should.

Websites for information –

www.netsmartz.org

www.fbi.gov – safety tips for kids

Recap:

- Make sure kids know that there are consequences.
- Install safety software.
- Tell your kids you will monitor them.
- Build their facebook or other page with them.
- Show them how to properly use the phone.
- Sit down and talk to your kids.
- Gradually give them more responsibility with computer and phone service. Take that responsibility back if your child can't be responsible with it.
- Many kids who have problems with social media have parents who are not involved, so keep talking with them.

Cheryl Shaffer and Dorcy Riddle may be contacted at the Conroe FBI office at 281-367-9433.