

Here we go again!!!!

Isn't anyone out there listening – do you realize there are pedophiles on the internet just waiting for the opportunity to strike. Every day we are giving them an ever increasing supply of targets and now we providing them with more bait to lure children.

Over the past years we have read and heard of many cases involving children falling prey to unscrupulous people via on-line "meetings". It started in chat rooms – kids falling prey to these internet fishermen and getting caught by their baited phrases. Kids giving away information about themselves, where they live, what school they attend etc, all the information needed for these stalkers to gather real time facts about the home area of their victim and then disguise themselves as a "local" and begin to lure the target into trusting them. Parents are becoming more aware of these dangers and are taking an active roll in "watching" the on-line habits of their children. OK, so where is the problem? Parents, I feel, now face a newer even greater challenge. This new challenge still has its roots in the stalking of kids but the stalkers now have another arena to attract kids to their lures.

One can't watch TV or listen to the radio without hearing the benefits of **ON-LINE Dating** or **Matchmaking** – find your soul mate...find your partner ... find your true love. Do you really think the younger kids, 12 – 15 year olds especially, are not going to investigate this? Do you really think these ads will affect only the 21 + crowd? Just go back a few years and you will recall the attraction of using AIM to meet people or entering a chat room and talking to others to make friends. These earlier enticements basically caused the current problem we now have with kids entering chat rooms and giving away their life history to anyone on line. Now with this new line of advertising - I can't help but think "HERE WE GO AGAIN". When will the public realize the information highway does not have restricted access - it is an open highway on which all travel. Yes most of the traffic is legal, but there are criminals literally traveling right along with us. Just when parents are beginning to understand the dangers in chatrooms we now blast the airways with the benefits of online dating - just how long do you think it will take for a 14 year old to hook up with a supposed soul mate. Here we go again – enabling the most disgusting of criminals to practice their trade.

Each year I lecture on these internet safety issues to PTOs, schools, and conferences and each time the audience is stunned to know what is going on and the vulnerability their kids have when they "talk" to strangers on the internet. For some reason technology has a habit of pushing away the older population while enticing the younger ones; add advertising on TV & Radio to this and you have now created another venue for the internet pedophiles. If the internet functions as an evolving picture of our civilization, years from now what will society say about our current use of the internet – I trust it will be viewed as a time when we came to realize the inherent dangers faced by those who travel this informational highway.