

Expert: Nothing on the Internet is private

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DANVILLE — Nothing on the Internet is private, and few know that better than pedophiles and sexual predators, says Chuck Favata.

Posting even seemingly innocent comments in chat rooms and on social-networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace can be risky for teens, he said.

Favata talks around the country about Internet safety, and he gave his presentation to some Danville students Tuesday afternoon and to about a dozen parents Tuesday night.

He said children don't realize when they are being duped by adults online.

"Teens are tech savvy, but they're not relationship savvy," he said.

That's why parents must step in, said Favata, and they don't need to be computer experts to help. They just need to make sure children understand that everything they post online or send via their cell phone is out there for good, and there are predators who are experts at gaining their trust.

Teens targeted

All children know not to talk to strangers, said Favata, and that should not stop when they get on the computer.

If a parent considers a child too young to roam the streets of a major city, then they shouldn't be allowed to roam the Internet freely, he said.

"Would you allow a 40-year-old into your daughter's room to talk to her?" he asked.

He presented some alarming numbers to parents:

- There are 686,000 registered sex offenders in the U.S.

- There are more than 100,000 Web sites devoted to child pornography, and they are visited by 350,000 people each day

- MySpace recently purged 90,000



Press Enterprise/Jimmy May

CHUCK FAVATA talks Tuesday night to about a dozen parents in the Danville High School cafeteria about Internet safety.

sex offenders from its site

- Up to 50,000 pedophiles are online at any given time

'Whole World is Watching'

Most parents stop monitoring Internet usage when children reach age 12 or 13, Favata said, but that's when they need the most guidance.

At that age, he said, they are more willing to take chances but still don't realize the dangers.

Parents should ensure that privacy levels for messaging and social-networking programs are set so information is shared only with friends, said Favata.

If a child claims a site is "private," that's just not true.

"Nothing on the Internet is private," he said.

He says "www" also stands for the "Whole World is Watching."

If teens are using chat rooms, he said, "They are going to be approached. No doubt."

Predators can use posted information to find people rather easily, Favata said.

Even seemingly harmless statements

such as, "We play Selinsgrove tomorrow," can lead to trouble.

A predator can look up the school, find the sports schedule, get the location and time of the game, then find a student after the game.

The predator can then follow a student's ride home, get the address and case out the house later.

'It's out there'

Bullying over the Internet, called cyber bullying, is increasing, but laws are not keeping up with technology.

Teens who get threatening or harassing messages should tell an adult, but they almost never do, Favata said.

But there are some ways to combat bullying.

Favata says no one should reply to a threatening or harassing message. Chances are they will then stop.

However, the messages should be saved as evidence.

Teens should also think twice about posting provocative photos.

"If you post something online you are not getting it back," Favata said. "It's out there, even if you delete it."

The same goes for cell photos.

Resume ramifications

Many employers now enter applicants' names into Internet search engines to learn more about them, and that has led to many being knocked out of consideration, Favata said.

That happened at Danville High School, said Principal Craig Burger.

An applicant for assistant principal looked good on paper and in interviews, but a Google search showed he had been charged with beating his wife, he said.

Burger said without the search, school officials would have never known