

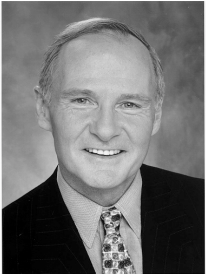


# **INTERNET SAFETY :**

## **Advice from Kids Who Have Faced Danger Online**

**Attorney General  
Tom Reilly**

**This pamphlet is available online at  
[www.ago.state.ma.us](http://www.ago.state.ma.us)**



*The Internet is an exciting and useful tool. However, it can also be dangerous. No one should have to find this out first hand, yet too many young people do every day. In our state, some middle school students in Townsend became the victims of a stranger on the Internet. Fortunately, their situation had a positive ending, with the arrest of the person making threats. I asked Townsend students to help us with our safety tips, so that their experience might help others.*

*The main thing you should remember is that **it is ALWAYS appropriate to call 911 if you believe you are in danger.** If you or someone you know has received hate mail, threatening mail, or child pornography you should tell a trusted adult and contact the police.*

*It is my hope that this pamphlet will inform you about specific threats to your safety and offer suggestions about how to protect yourself online.*

*Tom Reilly  
Attorney General*

## SITES PROMOTING VIOLENCE AND HATRED

It's important to remember that anyone can post information on the Web — no matter how inaccurate or dangerous those views might be. For example, many hate groups have propaganda-filled sites which promote intolerance and violence. These and other sites might make you extremely uncomfortable or upset, and they can easily be accessed by accident. You might type something in for a school project and stumble upon such a site. People may even send you e-mail expressing such views. If you access a Web site promoting hatred or violence or if you receive e-mail espousing these views, you should tell a trusted adult.

The subject of child pornography deserves special attention. Unlike other material posted on the Internet, which may be protected by the constitutional right to free speech, the possession, distribution *and downloading* of child pornography is illegal. If you come across child pornography you should report it to an adult and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children ([www.ncmec.com](http://www.ncmec.com)) at (800) 843-5678. To report it, simply provide the web address of the site.

### Helpful Hint:

If you access a site which makes you uncomfortable, click on the "back" key to return to the prior screen and tell a trusted adult what you saw. If this does not return you to the previous screen, close all open windows or quit out of your browser.

## STRANGERS ONLINE

We all know that it is not safe to talk to strangers on the street. What a lot of people don't know is that it can be even more dangerous to speak to strangers on the Internet. At least when we meet people on the street we can see what they look like. On the Internet, someone who claims to be a fourteen-year-old girl could turn out to be a forty-year-old criminal who preys on children, *and you would never know.* Because it is easy to conceal identity on the Internet, you should be very careful whom you talk to and what you say. Remember that sometimes giving out the smallest piece of information, like your sports team's name or your birthday could mean giving a dangerous stranger directions to your home. Predators can be very patient and methodical about collecting data over time in order to locate a specific person. Additionally, you should never open a file sent by someone you have only met online. Opening such a file might result in others being able to access your personal computer files.

### Helpful Hints:

- NEVER give out identifying information, especially: your pass word, full name, address, phone number, hometown, ethnicity, age, school name, or parents' names or work addresses.
- NEVER post pictures of yourself, family members, or friends on the Internet.
- NEVER agree to meet in person someone whom you have met online.
- NEVER open files sent by someone you have only met online.
- NEVER complete an online profile.
- Leave a chat room or do not respond to e-mail if someone asks you a question similar to one of the following:  
1) Are you home alone? 2) Where is the computer in your home? 3) Who uses the computer?  
These are questions sometimes asked by those who want to hurt others.
- Be aware that an online survey, contest, or free product offer could merely be a scheme to get your personal information. If you have concerns about a contest, survey, or promotion, do not participate.

## FACT VS. FICTION

Not everything posted online is true. You must always consider the source. Remember that online, as in real life, you must evaluate the reliability of a source in determining the accuracy of the information it provides. Just because you are reading it on your computer screen does not mean that it is true.

### Helpful Hint:

- Don't accept everything that you read on the Internet as true. Think about the source of the information when you evaluate its reliability.

# HARASSING or THREATENING MAIL

Unfortunately, there may be times when you encounter someone on the Internet who wants to start trouble. It is just as illegal to threaten someone online as it is to do so in person. In fact, receiving online threats and harassment can be particularly frightening because the sender may be unknown. When harassing or threatening messages are posted on a web site, made in a chat room or sent via e-mail, you should take the message seriously. Never assume that someone is “only joking.” Remember that many serious crimes may be avoided if threats are taken seriously.

You should know that threatening communications motivated by prejudice against a person because of his or her perceived race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability may be considered hate crimes. Hate crimes are punished harshly under Massachusetts law. Remember that what may seem like a joke to one person can reasonably be seen as unlawful prejudice by another.

## Helpful Hints:

- Do not send threatening or harassing e-mail.
- Do not respond to threatening or harassing e-mail.
- If you believe someone’s safety is being threatened, you should tell a trusted adult and contact the police (call 911).

# INTERNET ETIQUETTE

When communicating with other people on the Internet you should always act respectfully. Your identity could be revealed and your actions may come back to haunt you. You don’t want to offend or anger anyone you encounter on the Internet, especially potentially dangerous strangers.

## Helpful Hints:

- Be polite.
- Do not make jokes that could be misinterpreted.
- Do not respond to e-mails which are angry or rude.
- Respect the online privacy of others.

# SAFETY TIPS

- 🔒 NEVER give out personal information.
- 🔒 NEVER arrange an in-person meeting with someone you've met online.
- 🔒 NEVER post pictures of yourself, your family, or friends online.
- 🔒 NEVER open files sent to you by anyone you have met online.
- 🔒 Avoid people who ask too many personal questions.
- 🔒 Treat those you encounter online respectfully.
- 🔒 Remember that you do not have privacy online.
- 🔒 Do not respond to e-mail when you do not know the sender.
- 🔒 Do not open attachments when you do not know the sender.
- 🔒 Do not respond to rude, threatening or harassing e-mail.
- 🔒 Do not open e-mail with subjects you think sound inappropriate for your age.
- 🔒 Trust your instincts!! If something does not feel right, do not respond to e-mail, leave the chat room or exit the Web site.

*You should immediately contact either the police or a trusted adult if:*

- ➔ You are threatened with harm.
- ➔ You are aware of any online threat to another.
- ➔ You are harassed online because of your race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability.
- ➔ You are asked to participate in any kind of sexual activity by someone who knows or should know that you are under eighteen.