



FBI PRESS RELEASE

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PARENTS REMINDED TO KEEP THEIR KIDS SAFE ON INCREASINGLY POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

In recent years, many free online social networking sites have come into existence and have become increasingly popular among minors, especially teenagers. Estimates suggest there are over 200 social networking sites in existence; some of the most popular sites boasting registrants numbering in the tens of millions, with hundreds of thousands of new registrants per day. These sites allow individuals to communicate with each other and to form networks. As a registrant of these sites, a member can create a "profile" which is a unique webpage established so that the member can identify himself/herself to others.

These websites allow its members to customize their profiles with features including a forum for outside viewers to access photographs and details about the member, including physical attributes and personal information, as well as to access comments and thoughts posted by the member. Viewers of the member's profile may also contact the member via e-mail or instant messenger, unless otherwise restricted.

Special Agents and task force officers associated with the FBI's Innocent Images National Initiative, and their counterpart law enforcement officers around the country, have reported the increased use of social networking sites by sex offenders who troll sites in order to locate and communicate with potential victims. The websites' popularity in developing new friendships makes it possible for sex offenders to seek victims by joining the site. Although some of these websites have a specific age requirement in order to join, research has shown that minimally effective or non-existent monitoring by both parents and website operators have made it possible for underage children to join.

The FBI has successfully fostered relationships with willing companies that operate social networking sites in efforts to aid law enforcement in the detection of online sexual predators, in addition to establishing a partnership that will contribute to a safer online environment.

This advisory should serve as a reminder to parents and legal guardians that their vigilance is necessary in monitoring the use of the Internet by minors under their supervision. Some tips for parents or guardians are listed below:

- Monitor your child's use of the Internet at all times. With regard to social networking sites, discuss safeguards with your child and explain the need for your involvement in setting up restrictions for access.
- Ensure your child is not misrepresenting his or her age while on the Internet. Even if a minor does not post personal information on their profile, a predator may track him or her down by perusing the profile of one of his/her friends, on which your child might be featured.
- Read and exercise the safety tips listed on the site of which your child is a member, and report inappropriate behavior directly to the website.
- Place your child's computer in the family room to facilitate monitoring of online activity.
- Restrict your child's profiles and groups on social networking sites to people your child knows personally; do not allow access to individuals your child has met through the Internet. Most sites allow for parents to block questionable individuals from contacting their children by viewing their child's profile.
- Children should be discouraged from posting personal information.
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children operates a CyberTipline at cybertipline.com that allows parents and children to report child pornography and other incidents of sexual exploitation of children by submitting an online form. Complaints received by NCMEC that indicate a violation of federal law are referred to the FBI for appropriate action. Violations of state or local law are referred to the appropriate authorities.

In Los Angeles, the FBI and its partners in local, state and federal law enforcement comprise the S.A.F.E. Team (Sexual Assault Felony Enforcement). The SAFE Team is one of dozens of Crimes Against Children Task Forces in the United States, led by the FBI's Innocent Images National Initiative located in Baltimore, Maryland. SAFE Team members include the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the California Highway Patrol, California Department of Justice, Orange County Sheriff's Department, the United States Attorney's Office and the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, in addition to part-time members including the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Los Angeles Unified School District Police Department and the California State Department of Parole.

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