

Teach your children about the dangers of cyber crimes



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With every new generation comes a new generation of crimes; ones that have to be fended off by wiser parents and, truth be told, wiser students. We are all aware it is not easy being a kid in today's society due to modern technology and the incredible amount of information readily available on television, social media and the Internet. A kid with a smart device at his or her fingertips in 2014 is the equivalent of giving a 13 year-old kid a cherry-red Lamborghini in 1994. It has the potential to be extremely dangerous and even deadly in the wrong hands.

However, many parents give these smart phones and other smart devices to their teens as a means of communication and entertainment without teaching them safety precautions. Eventually, students arm themselves with these devices at home and at school without knowing how much damage they can cause and how easily they can be victimized. This is oftentimes where the trouble begins. The answer to preventing children from committing or falling victim to cyber crimes is not to forbid them from using the technology unless exigent circumstances are present. The answer is to educate and make them highly aware about the dangers and consequences of cybercrimes. What is a Cyber Crime?

The very definition of a cybercrime is; an offense committed against an individual and/or groups of individuals with a criminal motive to intentionally harm the reputation of the victim or to cause physical or mental harm to the victim directly or indirectly, using modern technology such as the Internet (chat rooms, emails) as well as smart devices.

During our time here at the Miami-Dade Schools Police Department, which spans nearly 14 years, both Officer Gutierrez and I have encountered many different cases involving cyber crimes. While most cases have ended favorably some have not and many could have been avoided through more awareness.

Over the last decade, many states in the U.S. have had the amount of cyber crimes rise to an extreme, leading to the victimization or deaths of many teenagers and young adults. There are dozens of juvenile deaths linked to cyber crimes every year in the United States. Our police department has placed the utmost emphasis on thoroughly training our personnel to allow each officer to have a complete understanding of how these crimes transpire, how to eliminate the threat to the victim, and how to nab the perpetrator as quickly as possible. This is in conjunction with utilizing the C.I.T. (Crisis Intervention Training) certification the officers have acquired which plays a large part in responding to these calls with empathy and understanding as well as the awareness of how healing and rebuilding of the victim's life needs to take place. This is also something that can be far more effective when every involved person in the school's district buys into how extreme and serious these crimes are and more importantly, how quickly we must render aid to, and counsel each victim.

The most common cybercrimes affecting children are 1) Cyberbullying - children occasionally young adults leaving them feeling angry, sad, embarrassed, or frustrated. 2) Cyberstalking - when these types of electronic communication threats are willful, malicious and repeated and cause a victim substantial emotional distress while serving no legitimate purpose, it becomes a case of cyberstalking (first-degree misdemeanor in FL). Add to that a credible threat and it becomes a third-degree felony. Children also commonly use text messages to make an isolated threat which may not meet the criteria for being a crime; these cases can oftentimes be handled by school administration with the help of police intervention and counseling. 3) Online predators - these offenders actively seek minors through the Internet and trick them into thinking they are the same approximate age. They also make arrangements to meet these minors in person to carry out their sick schemes.

How can we prevent Cyber Crimes against children?

1. Talk to your children about the dangers and consequences of cyber crimes in detail.
2. Use the parental controls provided by your Internet provider to monitor their activity and address concerns quickly if they arise. Don't keep it a secret; tell them you are monitoring their activity for their safety.
3. Randomly check your child's emails and posts on social media sites.
4. Instruct your children to never give out personal information on the Internet such as their real name, address, the school they attend, or phone number.
5. Instruct them to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with a stranger they have met over the Internet.
6. Tell them to never upload their photos to people they don't know over the Internet. Remind them that anything they upload is permanently out of their control and available to anyone on the Internet.