The internet is a great tool for learning and communicating. Unfortunately it can also be used as a tool to commit crimes. Web sites that attract you and your friends can and will attract predators.

Predators pose as teens or young adults and communicate through chat rooms and instant messaging. They look for many clues to figure out what you like, where you live and what your routine is. Predators are not interested in being a friend and could potentially commit a crime against you or your family.

Carefully consider what information you post on the web. The first clues that may attract a predator can be your user name or screen name. For example, if you choose a user name like dancingqueen15 you are telling a predator that you are most likely a fifteen-year-old female who enjoys dancing. Make sure your username is not an identifier. Avoid using your age, school, clues indicating where you may live, or your personal interests.

Predators use the information they learn about you in profiles and chats to gain your trust and find ways to manipulate you or to even arrange a face-to-face meeting. Consider profiles that allow you to control who has access to your information.

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Always remember that once you post your photo on the internet, it can not be removed as if it was posted on your school bulletin board. Your photo can be used and manipulated by anyone with internet access anywhere in the world. This can result in long-lasting embarrassment or even a serious crime committed against you or your family.

You may meet people you would like to talk to via e-mail. Providing your e-mail address can lead predators to your profile which then can be used against you by a predator. Make it your mission to not give out your e-mail address to people you meet in a chat room. If you feel the need to establish a profile, always set your chat profile to not display your profile information. LMIIRL or FTF text messages should be an alarm! Never agree to meet anyone who asks to meet you in person while on-line. If anyone makes such a request, it is very important to discuss this with your parents, teachers, counselors or a police officer before even thinking about making plans to meet someone you met on-line.

Enjoy the internet, but play it safe. Always remember that unsafe use of the internet can result in a lifetime of regrets and hardship.

For more information, go to www.connectwithyourkids.org/ and check out the NH Attorney General’s Internet Safety Brochure for Teens.

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