

Cyber Crimes and Your Children

ISPs, parents, software companies, and schools have been doing their best to protect children from risks online, but there is still a need to protect the Internet from children who may wish to find ways to abuse and exploit it. To prevent children from participating in these cyber crimes, it is important to define cyber crime and examine the losses from cyber crime, as well as the ways to keep your children from becoming perpetrators in these crimes.

The US Department of Justice categorizes cyber crime in three ways:

The Computer as a Target (using a computer to attack other computers):

Did you know that the majority of cybercrimes in this category are committed by children? As recently as September, 2003, a teenager was arrested for creating a devastating computer virus. How did he learn to do this? A simple Internet search will reveal all the tools necessary to create viruses and hack into others' computers. Hacking can take a variety of forms, ranging from stealing passwords and classified information to vandalizing Web sites. Unauthorized entry into an information system through hacking or viruses has serious legal consequences. Talk with your child about the ethical and legal implications of hacking.

The computer as a weapon (using a computer to commit real world crimes)

Take, for instance, email. Children believe email is harmless because they don't see the impact on the person who receives it. A growing trend with the use of email and chat programs is harassment; children are saying things to other children—both at school and in other communities—that they would never say face-to face. Parents need to teach their children about appropriate communication through email and chat programs.

The computer as an accessory (using a computer to store illegal files or information):

The Internet is a useful tool for finding information in a quick and convenient way. Even though much of this information is available for everyone to use, many products and services found online are not permissible to be reproduced or downloaded, especially music and purchasable programs. Popular peer-to-peer software programs make it easy to share copyrighted material and actually encourage downloading, but it is a violation of copyright law to take music or software from the Internet without the permission of the owner. It is easy for children understand why the theft in the real world is wrong, but it is difficult for them to understand theft of intellectual property. Teach your children not to download pirated or counterfeit material.

Summary

Although it may not seem real, cyber crime has actual victims and very concrete consequences. Whether it's loss of money, time, pride, or life, someone or something is always a victim. The best way to prevent cyber crime is to educate children about the types of cyber crimes, the cost of cyber crime to the victims, and the consequences for committing such crimes.