



## **Internet Monitoring and Filtering Software**

In past articles I have discussed the importance of having open dialog with your child about the dangers of cyberspace and how important having an Internet safety contract with your child is (downloadable at [http://www.hightechcops.com/parent\\_info.htm](http://www.hightechcops.com/parent_info.htm)). While all of this is true and nothing can compare to good communication and set expectations about computer use, there is some excellent parental control software available that can assist parents in keeping kids safe.

With the complexity of work and school schedules and after school activities it is very difficult for many parents to supervise their child's online activities 100% of the time. With this in mind several companies have created specialized software that will monitor the activity on a computer and provide detailed reports back to the parents. I'll discuss some basic features that are a must in software such as this, where you can purchase it and where you can find reviews about software like this.

There are many software applications available that do a wide variety of functions from rating the content of websites and filtering websites to actually monitoring computer activity and reporting it. While rating and filtering have their place, I don't recommend relying solely on this to protect your children online. With both filtering and rating the software relies either on a database of known "bad" websites to block from your home computer, or content in the webpage that it identifies as something that shouldn't be displayed. The problem with these methods is that they can be fooled into displaying information that should be blocked from view. Lets face it; our kids are pretty ingenious when it comes to computers and believe me, they have already figured out some simple ways to bypass filters.

I recommend getting software that records the activity on the computer such as Internet history, e-mail communications, chat and instant messenger conversations and screen captures. Some of the best parental control software includes both filtering and rating with activity recording and reporting. This software will take screen captures of exactly what your child is seeing on the monitor at set intervals and e-mail them to you covertly. Imagine being at work while your child is home and having e-mails sent to you showing exactly what they are doing on the computer. In addition to e-mailing information you also have the ability to log into the software using a password and retrieve reports of all computer activity even if your child attempts to delete Internet cache, cookies and temporary files.

To put this into perspective I'll share an actual case the Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force investigated. Several years ago a savvy parent had this type of recording parental software installed on their computer and began receiving e-mail messages showing a sexually explicit conversation between their teenage daughter and an adult male via MySpace.com. The parent was able to intervene and contact law enforcement before the teenage girl met this online sexual predator. Law enforcement setup an undercover meeting with the man and he was arrested and subsequently convicted for sexually

related crimes. Had the parent not intercepted these messages, the scenarios that could have happened to the girl are frightening.

A very important note to keep in mind is some legal issues surrounding recording activity on a computer and intercepting live communications. As a parent you have the ability to surreptitiously record your child's activity, but things change a bit when you are recording activity of another adult without their consent. If adults also use the computer, make sure they are aware their activity may be recorded or turn off the recording feature.

To learn more about parental software and read reviews about different software you can visit this link: <http://www.monitoringsoftwarereviews.org/>

Written by Sergeant Josh Moulin

Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force