



Harmless online games...or portal to sexual predators?

Nearly every electronic gaming system sold on the market today has the ability to be connected to the Internet. Having a game system connected to the Internet allows users to download new games and content, do system upgrades, and to play games against people all over the world. In addition to game systems such as the Wii, Nintendo DS, Xbox and Playstation there are many games for computers to be played on the Internet as well.

Most games allow for online communication to occur between players ranging from typed messages to headsets in which the players talk to each other. Being able to communicate with your fellow teammates or to your online enemy can make the game more realistic and help people strategize. It can also introduce your children to people who are playing these games for a far more sinister reason, to find their next victim.

Sexual predators will disguise themselves as teenagers playing these games and begin to create online relationships with children. Over time, these sexual predators will begin asking questions that seem harmless to children and teenagers such as the school they attend, their after school schedule, sports activities, what their parents do for work, etc. Coming from "another kid" your child may not see the harm in answering the questions. The reality is that they just may have provided that information to an online sexual predator.

After establishing a rapport with a child, these sexual predators will get them distracted by playing an intense online game and then ask them more specific and personal questions. They know exactly what they are doing and how to get the information they are looking for. If they don't get it from one child, they'll quickly move onto the next.

In addition to sexual predators, these online gaming areas can expose children to explicit language and other content that may not be suitable for younger children. It is important that parents realize this potential exists and that kids and teens know who to go to when something happens on the Internet or an online game that makes them feel uncomfortable.

An example of how dangerous online games can be is highlighted in a local case I was involved in. On February 24th 2008 a man named David Anthony Faboo from Bend, Oregon is believed to have taken a 16-year-old girl from Wheatland California after meeting her through the Internet

sites MySpace.com and the online game World of Warcraft. Through the use of cell phone tracking the Oregon State Police stopped Faboo in Southern Oregon, arresting him and taking custody of the 16-year-old victim. Faboo's computers and cell phones were sent to our forensics lab for examination.

Also found in Faboo's truck were knives, rope, condoms, sex toys, and a makeshift plywood bed in the back of his truck. The Sacramento FBI handled this case and Faboo was indicted by a Federal Grand Jury on two counts of transporting a minor across state lines for purposes of criminal sexual activity. Faboo is still in custody awaiting trial and should be considered innocent unless and until he is proven guilty. This is a perfect example of what can happen when sexual predators meet kids online and luckily police found the 16-year-old before anything worse happened.

There are several websites with online games available for children that are safe. I have listed them below for your information:

www.disney.com

www.toontown.com

www.neopets.com

www.nick.com

www.pbs.org and www.pbskids.org

www.yahooligans.com (This also has a great kid-safe web search)