



What every parent should know about Peer to Peer file sharing...

If you have a computer savvy music lover in your home, you may also have a peer to peer (or P2P for short) file sharing user too. By downloading a free client application users can connect to a special network that allows them to search for files and share files with the rest of the world. In a nutshell these applications allow the user to define what files (if any) on the hard drive can be shared on the Internet. The application also allows user to search the contents of other users connected to the file sharing network for documents, videos, pictures, music, etc.

Along with music and videos the P2P file sharing network provides access to adult pornography, child pornography, and copyrighted material. In addition to this are Trojan Horses, spyware, viruses and all other types of malware that can make your computer vulnerable to multiple attacks.

Some common file sharing applications include LimeWire, eDonkey, Bearshare, BitTorrent, Morpheus, and Kazaa to name a few. All of these have a slightly different look and feel, but function similarly and take users to basically the same area of the Internet.

There are many dangers on P2P networks for children (and adults for that matter), and I will list some things that should strongly be considered before allowing anyone in your home to access a file sharing network. These dangers include:

- It is possible to inadvertently share contents of your hard drive. Imagine having your tax returns, financial documents, or family photos shared with anyone, anywhere at any time. We have actually investigated these cases locally.
- It is possible for your computer to download malware from a file sharing network that can do everything from trapping your online passwords and sending them to someone, or using your computer to launch SPAM or denial of service attacks.
- Your child can download copyrighted materials such as music or movies. As the parent or guardian you can be sued by agencies such as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) or the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). These agencies subpoena records from Internet Service Providers (ISP's) to find out who is responsible for downloading copyrighted music or movies. In addition to civil penalties this is also a crime and can be prosecuted at the state or federal level.

The reality is there are very few things that can be done legally and ethically with a peer to peer file sharing network, so the risks normally far out weight the benefits with this type of program. I would strongly suggest checking your computer for evidence of P2P software and consider removing it. At the very least make sure what you do have installed is configured correctly if you plan on keeping it, therefore minimizing the risk of sharing your personal information unknowingly.

If you would like to learn more information about P2P safety, visit <http://onguardonline.gov/p2p.html>.

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