

Crime Prevention

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OMG! Your child is doing what on the computer?

The Internet is here to stay. As parents, we cannot realistically hope to rear Internet-free kids. Instead, we must become proactive participants in our kids' online worlds and most importantly, we must learn their language.

One of the most commonly used programs on home computers is instant messaging or "I-M'ing." This is a program that allows your child to instantly communicate with another person by typing messages back and forth. Teens and "Tweens" have perfected the art of the I-M and its secret code, and younger children are catching on. If your kids are typing "PAL" as you approach the computer,

know that they are not referring to their pal, instead they are short handing for "parents are listening." A "PA" is no longer referencing a loud speaker or the state east of Ohio, but a "parent alert" and "P911" is an emergency code for "my parents are coming!" As these codes permeate the lines of communication between kids, parents must stop to wonder why these codes were created. There is only one conclusion: our kids aren't behaving the way we want them to when they are online.

Parents everywhere have watched in horror as news programs portray online predators and the wide accessibility they have to

children. These news programs commonly show the process when it involves undercover law enforcement officers posing as kids, but as the Summit County Prosecutor, I can tell you that these predators are not just connecting with law enforcement, but with local children in our area. So, while you may look over your child's shoulder and see that they are "LOL" or "laughing our loud," make sure they are not telling the "MOTOS" ("members of the opposite sex") "LMIRL," or "let's meet in real life."

While most kids will I-M with friends who are known to them, and seemingly

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friendly strangers, bullying happens online, too. Bullying is rampant in schools all over the community and the anonymity that an online chat room, or I-M'ing, provides may embolden a bully to throw his or her cyber weight around. The cyber and virtual worlds are just that for kids — virtual. They do not understand the consequences of their words when they are not face to face with their bullying victim, or the bully who has a "BEG," a "big evil grin." Kids begin to think they understand emotional relationships based on typing in code and engaging in "KOL," or, "kissing on the

lips" and "OLL" which is "online love."

There has never been a more important time to make yourself a part of your child's life, both on and off line. While the Internet is a wonderful place to learn and explore, it can also be a playground for inappropriate behavior and sadly, far worse. Make yourself become technologically savvy enough to monitor your child's behavior online. Ask other parents what they are doing and think about installing parental controls and monitoring software. A great resource for all parents is getnetwise.org. Be up front with your kids so they

know you will be checking out what they are doing and talk to them about appropriate online behavior. This can allow you to protect your child, while still giving them a feeling of independent thought.

"CYO!" (See you online!)

Are you familiar with these abbreviations?

ILU: I love you

IPN: I'm posting naked

TAW: Teachers are watching

TOY: thinking of you

NIFOC: naked in front of computer

WIBNI: wouldn't it be nice if

WTGP: want to go private?