

Posted on Sat, Dec. 30, 2006

## **Computer-illiterate parents leave their kids at risk**

Dear Abby: I am writing in response to the Nov. 20 letter from the computer-illiterate parents whose sons, 12 and 13, are spending hours "locked in their room" with their computer.

It is time for parents to get educated on the ins and outs of the Internet. I'm a computer tech who has researched Internet safety extensively. Not only do predators stalk the social networking sites and chat rooms, but children can be exposed to cyber-bullying and inappropriate materials as well. Example: One of my friends caught her 15-year-old son watching a 14-year-old girl perform a striptease over a live video chat.

No child should have a computer in the bedroom. It should be located in a common area where there is no privacy. There are numerous organizations like i-Safe ([www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org)) and CyberAngels ([www.cyberangels.org](http://www.cyberangels.org)) available to help out.

-- Aaron in St. Louis

**Dear Aaron:** Thank you for not only lending your expert opinion, but also for mentioning some organizations that can be helpful to parents. The Internet has become a vast hunting ground for predators, and pedophiles frequently find new prey using it. And they are not the only predators out there. As you mentioned regarding the 14-year-old girl, some teens are also looking for sexual conquests. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: The parents who were told their boys "couldn't be looking at pornography" unless they had a credit card -- which they didn't -- were seriously misinformed.

Touch the wrong key on your new computer and disastrous things happen. Many times I have had to call my son to come over and return my screen to normal. Sometimes the computer will not even let me turn it off! I have two friends who complain about the

same problems.

In addition, my brother-in-law says he never heard my sister swear until she got her new computer. It seems that the new generation of MACs and PCs are designed chiefly for the technologically elite -- which most of us are not. -- R.H., PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

DEAR R.H.: If the new generation of MACs and PCs are difficult for intelligent folks to master, then the logical answer is to sign up for computer classes, which are offered by public libraries and some high schools and community colleges. It's either that or instructional CDs, or hiring a computer whiz to give you private lessons.

Children today learn to operate computers from earliest grade school and are completely proficient. If parents are not computer-literate, then they should be sure their computer is in plain view while it's being used by the children.

Computers are wonderful tools, but they can also be "open windows" to -- and from -- the outside of your home. It's only common sense to supervise with whom your child is interacting and who has access to your child.

DEAR ABBY: I am 14 and, trust me, those boys probably are looking at pornography. I'd say the odds are about 8- to-1. You don't need a credit card. Sites offer previews, or "free tours" of the site, and other sites are totally free.

Also, no offense to your advice, but the "history" can easily be cleared. I'm 14, and I can clear every site I have visited in a matter of seconds.

I'd suggest they install something like Net Nanny on their hard drive and not tell the kids. -- HOPEFULLY HELPFUL, GREENE COUNTY, TENN.