



## Press Release

**For Immediate Release**  
**Friday, October 16, 2009**  
**4:50 PM**

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### **Internet Safety Presentation Held in DeKalb**

Parents and caregivers from DeKalb County attended an Internet Safety Presentation Thursday night, October 15, 2009, at DeKalb County's Community Outreach Building in DeKalb. They heard Sarah Migas, Internet Safety Specialist, from the Illinois Attorney General's Office Computer Crime's Division speak on internet safety.

This presentation was sponsored jointly by Family Service Agency of DeKalb County's Children's Advocacy Center and DCP/SAFE Community Violence Committee.

Ms. Migas provided a comprehensive overview of the use of technology by young people. She helped the audience understand the risks associated with uncontrolled access to the internet. Her presentation included anecdotal experiences from which the audience learned the vulnerabilities to predators from unbridled messaging and chatting on the internet.

Ms. Migas touched on the topics of:

- Social Networking
- Chat Rooms
- Blogs
- Peer to Peer
- Cell Phones
- Instant Messaging
- Cameras
- Sexting
- Cyber Bullying
- Gaming Websites

Adolescents have much naiveté in understanding the risks associated with indiscriminate sharing of passwords and sending information over the internet. Ms. Migas pointed out sending such information via the internet is like writing with a permanent marker. She cautioned youth should not write or send anything on the internet that they would not say in front of their parents or want them to see.

Social networks encourage truthful information be registered with a user id; however, there is no truth verification that occurs with such sites. Perpetrators can represent themselves as a young person merely wanting to be a friend. Vulnerable young people, anxious to build their social connections, may be too generous in sharing private, personal information over the internet. Boundary issues are very different with/among young people today. The computer is their lifeline to their social life. Much care should be given to accepting friends on social networks. Only known acquaintances should be included. A large number of unknown friends, accepted into one's social network, can be very dangerous to the protection of personal information.

Many times overreaction from adults causes youth to close up and not communicate with the responsible adults in their life, who have the youth's best interest at heart. Adults want to help youth to use computers in a healthy way. Ms. Migas suggests a useful response to turn off predators, who may be disguised as another young person wanting to chat, is to respond, "Just a minute, let me ask my parent."

Problems in computer use stem from unlimited time and unlimited access. Parents or supervising adults should set limits on the available computer use. Placing the computer in a "public" setting can reduce the feeling of anonymity or privacy. It can be helpful for a responsible adult to engage the youth in one's concern for how to deal with the situation. After all, the adult is only interested in protecting the young person.

Precautions in the use of computers included:

- Use of nickname – do not use proper first and last names in user-id's.
- Change your actual zip code. This is not sensitive information and can prevent someone from using it to locate the true location of one's residence.
- Use of cartoons or drawings instead of personal pictures.
- Don't post images that identify your school or hometown.
- Make your profile private and limit access to it.
- Ask permission of a responsible adult before adding any friends to your network.
- Let someone proofread your communication. We all have difficulty finding our own mistakes. This provides a second look at the topic being discussed and the manner of the discussion.

Ms. Migas described, "Sending information over the internet is likened to throwing a handful of feathers into the air. There is no opportunity to retrieve the information after it has been made public information." Further, downloading information from the internet can expose one's computer to any number of viruses.

The internet is not safe expression – whatever is posted is then public information and can be used as evidence. Colleges and employers are on-line and everyone should be sensitive to the public and permanent nature of postings on-line. Much risk comes from the fact that communication via computer is mechanical and there is no human interaction or ability to view face-to-face responses/actions.

The 1½ hour-long presentation by Ms. Migas was followed by questions from the audience, after which local author, Anne Matalonis described her book, *The Fox behind the Chatterbox*, and offered signed copies for purchase by anyone interested.

Ms. Matalonis book tells a story about internet safety and predators. The book is geared toward third through fifth grade readers. It is intended to provide information that will foster dialogue between the child and an adult about care and use of the computer technology in a safe and responsible manner. The story is a family-friendly allegory told through barnyard animals, explaining the danger to kids without scaring them, talking down to them or using a lot of statistics too difficult for them to understand.

Family Service Agency of DeKalb County is a premier social service agency, protecting and developing children and older adults through exceptional service. Family Service Agency is comprised of five distinct departments – Big Brothers Big Sisters, Center for Counseling, Child Life & Family Education, Children’s Advocacy Center and Senior Services Center. A host of programs are available through these departments, and all services are provided by experienced professionals.

Family Service Agency of DeKalb County accepts insurance, and scholarship and reduced fees are available for those who qualify. In some instances, services can be provided at no cost to the client. Family Service Agency’s main office is located at 14 Health Services Drive, and satellite offices are located in DeKalb and Sandwich. Family Service Agency is a Kishwaukee United Way Agency. For more information about the services at Family Service Agency call 815-758-8616, 815-786-7079 in Sandwich, or visit their website at [www.realsolutionstoday.org](http://www.realsolutionstoday.org).

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