

Summary of Presentation by Katie Koestner
The Cyber World of Trouble
November 27, 2006
By Janet Maurer, Ph.D.

Enticed by advertising that promised to offer a glimpse into our children's' cyber world, GA parents, faculty, and staff overflowed the Middle School Commons to hear Katie Koestner speak about the dangers of the internet. Ms. Koestner delivered on that promise and more. This was her third visit to GA, having previously spoken to students about relationship violence. She is a national expert on current risk issues for children and has appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show and Good Morning America, is a guest lecturer at Penn and Harvard, is preparing to meet with Condoleezza Rice and other governmental officials, and has appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine*.

Ms. Koestner began her presentation with questions to assess the audience's level of internet knowledge. On a scale of 1-10 (1= you have heard of email; 10=you invented the internet), most of the audience fell in the 4-6 range. Our children, on the other hand, would undoubtedly fall in the 7-9 range, and this disparity is the crux of today's generational communication gap. While adults are foreigners in this electronic world, our children are native speakers. They speak the language of myspace, facebook, skype, and instant messenger. Ms. Koestner gave a quick 'secret chat' vocabulary test which most adults failed. Do you know what asl, ctn, lma, pm, pop, pos, ta, p911, ygm, 5, 55, and lol mean? Age, sex, location (predators want this information), can't talk now, leave me alone, private message, parents on the prowl, parents over shoulder, teacher alert, parents coming, you've got mail, give me 5 minutes, coast is clear, laugh out loud. Your children certainly know these and many other codes which they use to communicate online at lightening speed while multitasking.

While many young people believe that their online chats, postings, photos, and communications are private, nothing on the internet is private! In fact, some colleges and employers have begun to monitor internet sites to gather information about prospective candidates. Digital dossiers have begun to trump paper resumes. Recently, both Harvard and Princeton reportedly withdrew early admission acceptances for students who posted inappropriate verbiage on social networking sites after they got into these prestigious institutions. Further, 71% of large companies and 48% of small companies claim to monitor web usage. The message here is that what one posts today could surface at anytime in the future, so the mistakes of adolescence, for example, could follow one around forever. This caution applies to the ubiquitous cell phone and camera as well. Ms. Koestner also warned the audience about the risk of having their pictures taken without their knowledge, posted on the internet, used to locate, identify or blackmail them, or at the very least embarrass them.

Even scarier was the knowledge that the internet creates a quick and easy bridge between children and pornography. 30,000 predators are online at any moment, and hate groups also look for vulnerable targets on the internet. Even such seemingly tame web sites as those related to hygiene products (such as Tag and Axe) or teen magazines (Seventeen) offer sexually provocative materials that do not appear in the print versions of these items. Parents beware!

Parents, you should also be aware of the financial ramifications of certain common online behaviors popular with kids, namely file sharing. This illegal practice of downloading music may be punishable by a \$250,000.00 fine. Sure, kids think that they will never get caught, but they are unaware that if they are caught their future wages could be garnished. Further, parents may also be held accountable and responsible for the debt.

To make matters worse, did you know that any information, music, poetry, etc. on myspace is the property of myspace? That means that if your budding rock musician son shares his latest song with friends via myspace and then hits it big, myspace owns the song and all the royalties that follow.

The news is not all bad, however. Parents can purchase monitoring and filtering software to block inappropriate material from their children's' computers. There are also several kid-friendly search engines that limit a child's exposure to provocative or inappropriate ads and pop-ups: www.ajkids.com, www.kidsclick.com, www.netnanny.com, www.yahooligans.com.

What else can parents do to protect their children from the dangers of the internet?

- Make sure that your computer's 'administrator' is an adult. Your child is the 'user.'
- Delete myspace accounts....but make sure to update them first with non-identifying information.
- Keep the computer in a central location in your house.
- Take cell phones, ipods, blackberrys out of bedrooms at night.
- Make sure your child includes NO identifying information of any kind in any online postings (this includes photos, school name, phone number, address, birthday.....).
- Remind your child that technology is a privilege, not a right.
- Also remind your child that NOTHING IS PRIVATE ONLINE.
- **And above all, discuss all of this with your child!**

Additional information about Katie Koestner and internet safety can be found at www.campusoutreachservices.com.