

Trying to keep kids out of online trouble



JIM FENNEL

Just Checking In

MOST OF OUR KIDS leave us every day to enter a world we know little about. And they usually do it without leaving the house.

Of course, I'm talking about their access to people through the Internet.

I imagine most of it is harmless, but I don't really know. I don't look over my daughter's shoulder every second she is chatting online.

And maybe I'm not savvy enough — or she's just more computer literate — to be able to go through her computer and find everything she's written or everything that she's read. And, at what point do you just have to trust them?

My daughter is 12, but has managed to put up pages on social sites that supposedly require subscribers to be at least 14. If she is able to hide her identity, why can't some predator be hiding his?

I'm told you have to let people into your social circle for them

to chat with you. I hope so.

Law enforcement officials who look for predators told me that it's not the kids chatting up their friends online that you have to worry about. They're too busy yapping to get sucked in. It's the loners, the kids looking for friends who can get tricked.

Well, there might be a site that could ease the concern of most parents.

YourSphere (www.your-sphere.com) was developed by a mother after she found out that one out of every five kids is sexually solicited online and nine out of 10 are exposed to pornography online, and that her daughter was still getting on to social networking sites frequented by registered sex offenders despite her mother's attempts to block access.

YourSphere supposedly requires verified parental consent for a child to log on and is exclusively limited to anyone 18 and under. The site can supposedly filter out fake or anonymous profiles.

"The bottom line is that we're the only place in the online world that has taken extraordinary measures to help ensure the safety of its members and meets or exceeds standards set **See Fennell, Page F2**

by the government," founder Mary Kay Hoal said. "Our opinion is that if it's a behavior that is illegal, immoral or unacceptable offline, then it's unacceptable online."

I usually ignore most of the jokes and videos sent to me by e-mail, but if there is one worth watching, it's the story of 5-year-old golf prodigy Kyle Lograsso. It's an amazing golf story, but it goes way beyond golf.

Thanks to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery for this little tidbit: Breast augmentation is now the number one most-performed cosmetic surgical procedure in the U.S. More than 355,000 breast augmentations were performed last year.

Bumped from the top spot was liposuction.

What does this mean? Women are OK with a little flab on the legs and around the stomach as long as their chest looks good?

Through its nonprofit education foundation, an association of collection agencies, attorneys, creditors, asset buyers and vendors is launching a new Web site Wednesday — Income Tax Day — called "Ask Doctor Debt." It's meant to help people learn how to deal with and avoid debt problems.

Why?

"Simple — an educated consumer who understands his or her rights and responsibilities when it comes to the credit and debt-collection process is far easier to work with than someone who does not," is the answer put out by the Association of Credit and Collection Professionals.

"In addition, dealing with debt and credit issues can be an emotional and sometimes intimidating process. It doesn't need to be. If you know your rights, fully understand the situation you're in and what options are available, you can avoid unnecessary stress while making the best decision for you and your family's financial well-being."

The best decision is just not to go into debt, but that's easier said than done.

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