Helping your Child to Avoid Dangerous Situations on the Internet:

Children face a variety of dangers everyday from cuts and scrapes to encounters with strangers both actual and virtual that could threaten their lives. These simple steps can reduce the chance of becoming a target. Knowledge is the key to protecting our children.

On Line Dangers:

The Internet is an area that can pose a very real threat to children. The anonymity of the "Net" offers adults the chance to pose as children, then try to set up a face-to-face meeting. Young teens may also be lured into virtual relationships with older adults that may result in actual encounters.

What Parents Can Do:

- Never give out identifying information -- home address, school name, telephone number - in a public message such as chat or bulletin boards, and be sure you're dealing with someone that both you and your child know and trust before giving it out via E-mail.

- Think carefully before revealing any personal information such as age, marital status, or financial information. Consider using a pseudonym or unlisting your child's name if your service allows it.

- Get to know the services your child uses. If you don't know how to log on, get your child to show you.

- Find out what types of information it offers and whether there are ways for parents to block out objectionable material.

Suggested Parental Rules:
(Ask your child to observe the following rules)

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.

- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.

- **I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother and father along.**

- **I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.**

- **I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the online service.**

- **I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit while online. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.**

- **Never respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable.**

- **Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages.**

- **If your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to your service provider and ask for their assistance.**

- **Should you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while online, immediately report this to the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* by calling 1-800-843-5678, or contact the *Franklin County Sheriff's Office* at 462-3333.**

- **Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person, it would be very easy for someone to misrepresent himself or herself.**

- **Remember, everything you read online may not be true. Any offer that is "too good to be true" probably is. Be very careful about offers that involve your coming to a meeting or having someone visit your house.**

- **Set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer use by your children and monitor often. Discuss these rules and post them near the computer as a reminder.**

- **Remember to monitor their compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time your children spend on the computer. A child or teenager's excessive use of online services or bulletin boards, especially late at night, may be a clue that there is a potential problem.**

- **Remember that personal computers and online services should not be used as electronic baby sitters.**

- **Be sure to make this a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom. Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends.**