

## **Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens**

### **Preventing and Responding to the Accidental Access of Online Pornography**

In a widely reported case, Connecticut substitute teacher Julie Amero was convicted of impairing the morals of minors because Internet porn appeared on her computer. In fact, what had happened was her computer fell into a “porn trap.” Julie’s conviction was the result of a lack of understanding about the concerns of accidental access to pornography and irrational fear. It appears that the state is on the path to correct this injustice.

This incident provides an important “teachable moment” for parents, teachers, and librarians. A recent Crimes Against Children Research Center study revealed that 34% of young people between the ages of 10 and were exposed to online pornography they did not want to see, primarily through links to pornography sites that came up in response to searches or misspelled Web addresses or through links within Web sites, pop-up advertisements, and spam e-mail.<sup>1</sup>

**Lesson 1.** Filtering software will not provide sufficient protection against porn traps. Porn traps are most likely to be set to go to the newer sites, that are less likely to be on the filter block lists.

**Lesson 2.** Effective computer security can reduce the potential of porn traps. This means security against malware and using or configuring the browser to prevent pop-ups. Also make sure the web browser preferences are set to “safe search.”

**Lesson 3.** Young people need to be taught effective skills to avoid accidentally accessing online pornography:

- *Read, think, then click.* Never click on a link unless there are good indicators that the link will go to appropriate materials.
- *Don't type URLs.* Type the name of the site in a search engine to access a desired site.
- *Watch out for porn spam.* Don't open suspicious email messages and never click on a link in an email message unless all indicators are that it is legitimate.

**Lesson 4.** The technology and strategies will invariably fail. Any child who is left alone for any period of time using the Internet must know that “yucky stuff” might appear and the appropriate response is to turn off the monitor and tell an adult. Teens and adults need to know that the way to get out of a porn trap is to force quit the browser. Then it is necessary to have a security review of the computer.

**Lesson 5.** Accidental access can happen to anyone at any time. Never accused anyone, especially a child or teen, of intentionally accessing online pornography unless a competent investigation reveals that the access was indeed intentional.

Prepared by Nancy E. Willard, Director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (<http://csriu.org>) and author of *Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn to Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly* (Jossey-Bass) (<http://cyber-safe-kids.com>) and *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress* (Research Press). © 2007 Nancy Willard. This document may be reproduced and distributed for non-profit purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D. Unwanted and wanted exposure to online pornography in a national sample of youth Internet users. *Pediatrics*, Volume 119, Number 2, February 2007. <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV153.pdf>.