



Internet Safety for Children

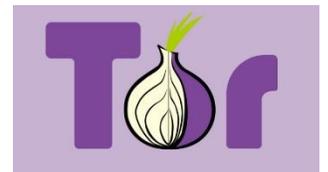
A presentation by Detective Jeff Cummins

On January 31, Detective Cummins of the New Britain Police Department gave a sobering but educational presentation to about 50 parents and other concerned adults at St. Jude Church in Chalfont. Det. Cummins explained some of the issues children face on the internet, including cyberbullying, sexting, predators, and the dark web, then followed with suggestions for parents to help protect their children.

Internet Dangers

Det. Cummins was introduced by Deacon Tim Lynch, who stated that many parishioners had asked him if the presentation was going to discuss pornography. Deacon Tim, who in October had organized a panel to discuss Opioid Addiction, shared a video clip that described how the brain is affected by pornography – and it eerily mirrored many of the same effects of opioids on the brain. This video, which is Session 1 of [Hope Undimmed](#) and is available on our parish [FORMED](#) page, went on to show a young, devout, Catholic couple whose world had been rocked by porn. The husband clearly admitted that all it took was an internet connection and free time alone. Det. Cummins' presentation demonstrated that these two conditions are what fuel the other dangers on the internet, as well.

Det. Cummins first described the “dark web.” This is the section of the internet only accessible by the TOR browser, which is a free software that allows anonymous browsing and thus is used for criminal activity: terrorism, malware, fraud, and the sale of guns, pornography, drugs, and identities. Your kids can download the TOR browser easily. If you see an onion icon, or see the .onion extension, they're using it.



He then went on to discuss dangerous behaviors such as cyberbullying and sexting, which are often connected. Images or messages last forever on the internet. Kids sometimes send inappropriate pictures to the boyfriend/girlfriend, but when they break up, those images often get shared. He told heartbreaking stories of local kids who are still haunted by something they did years ago.

Cyberbullying doesn't have to be in the form of sharing embarrassing images, however. It can be tearing a kid down, talking trash, trying to crush him. If your child seems afraid or startled when a message comes in, is avoiding the cell phone or social media, or doesn't want to go to school, he or she is probably experiencing cyberbullying.

Online solicitation of children happens frequently on game sites with multiple online players. The children can sit and play while talking to or typing messages to players they don't know. Predators can use a simple research engine like [appcrawlr.com](#) to find out where the children are. An offender specifies his audience (kids), the age he likes (8-10), then chooses a web game (ponies). He then goes to the site, often pretending to be young, and develops a rapport with a player. The goal is to communicate off the game (“Hey! I have a picture of a pony you would like. Connect with me on Kik and I'll send it to you.”). Kik isn't the only tool they use, but it is a real problem

because its messaging is untraceable. Once the offender has the child off the game, he uses the same grooming methods that perpetrators use for victims in person.

How to Protect Our Children

The attendants at the presentation were clearly sobered by all this disturbing information and anxious to learn what to do. Det. Cummins gave us some important advice, starting with the words, "There's no easy answer. Communication is the key. And it has to be ongoing."



Educate yourself first, he said, then create a plan of discussion. He spoke very highly of the website NetSmartz.org (and NetSmartzKids.org) which offers videos, tip sheets, and lesson plans to help you learn how to talk to your kids. Some specific recommendations he made:

- Discuss the issues in age-appropriate language. With young children the issue isn't "sexting," it's "pictures or words that make you feel uncomfortable or afraid." Talk about not trusting everyone they meet online, but talk to older children about NOT meeting in person with people they meet online.
- Set restrictions, both in time usage and location. He strongly encouraged us: No phones or other internet in the bedrooms. This advice seems particularly valuable, considering that the two conditions needed for addiction to porn were a connection to the internet and free time alone and unsupervised. Det. Cummins said he knew parents who instituted this policy, and although the children balked at first, they later thanked their parents.
- Establish clear expectations for online behavior and set consequences for inappropriate posts.
- Have access to your children's online accounts; monitor them and discuss with your children their friends' posts and images.
- With cyberbullying, there's a victim, a bully, and bystanders. Teach your children to NOT be bystanders. They SHOULD tell authorities if they see someone being bullied, and never pass on unkind posts or embarrassing images. Encourage them to discuss these things with you.
- Install filtering/monitoring software on devices. However, they have to be constantly upgraded since all the app developers have to do is tweak the program a little so that the filters no longer work.
- Read the agreement before accepting an app's policies. Some apps actually include the right to turn on your microphone, look at your pictures, and monitor your usage.

After the presentation, parents expressed great concern, but now felt they had information to help them protect their children. Many were very interested in our follow-up presentations in April that will be directed to the students themselves.

We are very grateful to Detective Cummins for this important information.

Jeannette Williams
St. Jude Communications

Follow-up Event: **Cyber Safety for Students**

St. Jude School Cafeteria
323 West Butler Avenue, Chalfont

6:30 to 7:30 on the following days:

- Monday, April 15: Elementary School children and their parents
- Tuesday, April 16: Middle School children and their parents
- Wednesday, April 17: High School children and their parents

For more information, contact Lori Rawski, Director of Parish Faith Formation, lrawski@stjudechalfont.org