

*Death by Technology*  
*Internet Safety, for Our Children's Sake*

By Deb Landry

Computers, cell phones, iPods, oh my, with today's technology everything is a click away. Even email is becoming passé, with social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.

The Internet can be a great resource for our children allowing them instant access to information for homework and communication with parents, teachers and friends. However, things can change in a click of the mouse when technology is used as a means for stocking, bullying or harassment.

If you are thinking, "My child would never do this" or "we monitor our children's computer usage", think again, anyone can fall to peer pressure, become a victim or be exposed to predators.

Debbie Johnston knows first hand what it is like to have a child tormented in cyberspace. "As a parent, I worried about kidnapers, murderers, drugs, alcohol, gangs and all those things outside. I never for an instant considered that I'd lose my son by his own hand," said 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher Johnston.

Debbie son Jeff took his own life on June 29, 2005 when in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade after being tormented by online bullying since the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. "It was not a death that was quick or merciful," said Johnston. "It was calculated with lies, rumors and cruelty portioned out day by day."

Soon after her son's death, Johnston started a three-year battle to protect other children, hoping to pass a law requiring schools to do more to educate teachers, students, parents and the community to stop the teasing and harassment. "Because there was no law, no crime had taken place," Johnston stated. Working with local legislators and with Governor Jeb Bush, Debbie created Florida's Jeffrey Johnston "Stand Up For All Students" Act, which finally passed in 2008.

The growing phenomenon of cyber-bullying has worsen as bullies and predators are hiding behind the anonymity of computers, cruel text messages and posting vile rumors in blogs or on social networking sites.

“Social networks are no longer a thing of the future. Teens and tweens are using them now to create online identities and communicate with their peers,” stated Bill O’Dowd, CEO of Dolphin Digital Media. An internet safety software company whose product Dolphin Secure uses fingerprint identification to provide parents the peace of mind of deciding where their children can go and whom they can talk to online. “We are committed to safeguarding their children from exposure to pornography, unsolicited chat requests from potential predators, and harassment from cyber bullying that comes from identity impersonation online.”

Just like teaching our children to look both ways before crossing the street, talking to your children about internet safety can protect them from heartache, anxiety and possible harm.

With over 80% of households with computers, 22% of which have two and 17% with three or more computers, there are lethal weapons silently lurking in our homes.

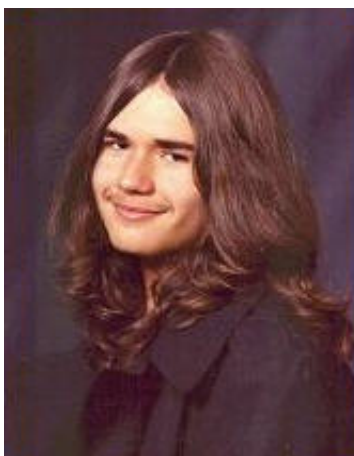
The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), mandates websites to explain and post their privacy policies on their websites and obtain parental consent before obtaining or using a minor’s personal information. The federal law also prohibits sites from requiring a child to provide personal information to play a game or participate in a contest.

Nevertheless, your kids' best online protection is you. Educating your children about potential online dangers is the best way to ensure personal safety from bullies and predators. Some quick and easy steps ensure Internet safety is install online protection software such as web nannies; get involved and pay close attention to your kid’s online activities; set basic ground rules; befriend your child on their social network sites, (you can see what they are doing and also their friends); know the warning signs.



*"A bully doesn't have to be eye to eye to bully someone. Sometimes he or she gets into cyberspace, and then there's no place to hide from their torment."*

**Debbie Johnston**



**Jeffrey Scott Johnston - 12/21/89 - 6/29/05**