

Warning To Parents With Kids Online: **MySpace Has Become A Hunting Ground For** **Criminals and Pedophiles**

Over the last few months there has been a lot of news coverage and controversy over a social network website called MySpace.com, and rightfully so. I decided to include a front page article about this in my newsletter to warn my clients of the dangers this website poses to their children and families.

For those not familiar with MySpace, it is a phenomenally successful online network that enables users to post and exchange gossip, messages, pictures, personal information, and pretty much anything else that comes into their minds. With 60 million members, MySpace is the biggest and fastest growing of all social network sites.

Although users are supposed to be at least 14 to register, it is easy to bypass this restriction. An estimated 10 million of those members are under the age of 17 and many more are under the age of 14. What makes this site so dangerous is that many children are posting pictures of themselves along with other confidential information such as the school they go to, where they live, personal schedules, who their parents are, and other contact information. It is this information that is placing them in danger, as online predators may use it to find and harm these children. Just look at these horror stories:

14 Year Old Girl Found Dead

In January, a 14 year old girl in New Jersey was found naked and strangled in a garbage bin. Friends said she had been in contact with an older man through one of the social network sites.

15 Year Old Sexually Assaulted

A 26 year old Houston man was charged with sexual assault, accused of luring a 15 year old girl into a relationship through MySpace.

37 Year Old Man Attacks 16-Year Old Girl

A 37 year old man solicited a 16 year old girl by visiting MySpace.com. The man misrepresented himself as being younger, then tracked her down. Lafayette Sheriff Lt. Craig Stansbury said the man showed up at the victim's after-school job and followed her to the parking lot, where he forced her into his car and attacked her. The assailant knew where she worked because she posted it on her MySpace profile.

Firefighter Solicits 16 Year Old Boy

A Hughson firefighter was sentenced Thursday to a year in jail for engaging in sexual activity with a 16-year-old Lodi-area boy he met online. He was arrested, and investigators soon learned that the two had met on MySpace.com.

How To Protect Your Kids Online

- Keep the computer in the family room so you can monitor what happens online.
- Review the websites your children visit. If they have a webpage on MySpace, make sure they are not posting pictures or other confidential information such as phone numbers and addresses.
- Educate your children about the dangers online and provide them with clear instructions about what they can and can't post or share online.
- Set time limits on surfing and restrict most computer use for specific purposes, such as school homework.