Security and Privacy - Virtual Visitation: Are you afraid adding a webcam will increase the risk your child will be exposed to predators or your child's access to inappropriate material on the Internet ?

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I have seen and read articles that some people fear that adding a webcam will expose or increase the risk a child will be contacted by a predator. 'Predators' are people who prey on children in-person or using the Internet to exploit them for a variety of reasons. These people present themselves to your children or find your children through chat rooms, IRC chat by far the worst or personal websites like www.myspace.com, www.facebook, www.me.com and other personal information portals.

Children are placing information about themselves on the Internet to websites like '**myspace**', '**facebook**' and others and many parents have no idea what their children are placing on such sites or what their children are actually doing on their computer at any given time. Recently a school in Wisconsin went to myspace.com and collected information about their students and sent the information home to their parents. The information found shocked many and this has caused a lot of discussion to occur on the subject of 'What is my child actually doing on the Internet?' As a father with a child, I am leading the effort at my daughters school PTA on a Program of 'Safe Surfing' and 'Stranger Safety'. I too am concerned and am taking action that I have learned through my career to help other parents do the same, provide information to help protect our children when they use the Internet.

In my business of computer security there is a common saying, 'Trust but Verify'. In computer security this is more than a saying, it is a driving force behind how we do our line of work. Our children should be no different. If you have approved your child using the Internet, you should also accept the parental responsibility to monitor your child's Internet activity. I have been asked a lot recently due to the press around the subject including a recent Dateline NBC show that actually posed as children and invited the predators over and showed them on national television when they arrived to the location. '**What can I do to protect my child?**'

We of course support the use of webcams as a part of Virtual Visitation. adding a webcam to your computer does not add any additional risk to you or your children. It is the un-monitored activity that is the risk. Where your children are surfing on the Internet is the risk. Most of the webcam vendors have lens covers and you can always turn the webcam sideways, away from the living space when not in use, or even unplug it and put it away. Very easy parenting that I call '**Parenting 101**'. Can you think of a better use for a computer than to communicate with your parents, family or friends? In the case of Virtual Visitation, a child with their non-custodial parent? Of course when your children are not using the computer for Virtual Visitation with their non-custodial parent, the child could be doing just about anything with the equipment. On a 2006 Oprah show, it basically said "**unplug the webcam**". This may be good in theory, but not practical for an ever increasing Internet savvy society.

I have a simple word of advice that I give out. "**If you connect your computer to the Internet and let your children use it, you as a parent have an obligation to monitor their activity!**". Again, good in theory, but we all know that we cannot watch our children's Internet activity 24x7... or can we ?

We have three more articles for your reference and education. Consider it a three step program to protecting your children's Internet surfing activity.

Step 1 - "**How to secure your Internet connection**".

Step 2 - "**Monitoring your children's Internet access**".

Step 3 - "**Safe Surfing**".

We provide these three articles to help you understand how to protect your computer and to answer the questions of how to protect your children from Predators and undesirables while using the computer to access the Internet and practice Virtual Visitation. Also, how to monitor your children's Internet access and help teach or guide them how to surf the Internet safely. As good as Dateline NBC, Oprah and articles like those seen in the New York Times were to show you how scary things could be, they failed to tell you there are ways to reduce or virtually eliminate these risks with a few simple additions to your computer and some '**Parenting 101**'.

We also want people to know that with the recommendations we make, you can solve the argument that webcams are bad things and that it is up to you, the parent to monitor your children's computer and Internet use to make sure they do not fall prey to the scary things that can happen just as in life. Exercise good parenting when it comes to the Internet and your children. Monitor your children's Internet access with the information we provide and you can sleep at night knowing your children will be using the Internet for learning and communication and avoiding the issues we have discussed.

We hope the information helped you to understand how to avoid the issues the Internet can bring to your children. If you have any questions or need assistance with your case, feel free to contact us as we are here to help!