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Speaker offers tips on kids' cyber safety

*Posted by **Rich Schwartzman** on January 20th, 2016*

Frigid temperatures might have kept people from attending a talk on cyber safety at Kennett Middle School, but according to one attendee, that was too bad. "This is the exact information that parents need," she said, "I wish more had been here." The one-hour presentation, given by attorney and former Bucks County Deputy District Attorney Mark Walz, was held at Kennett Middle School on Tuesday, Jan. 19. Fewer than two dozen people attended.

Walz said there are five lessons that parents and children need to understand. They need to protect personal information, safely interact with others through technology, manage conflict and danger, avoid risky behavior and manage their digital footprint. Protecting personal information can be as simple as learning what not to share and working with a social media site's privacy settings. He said people should ask themselves a question: What am I sharing and who am I sharing it with?

Walz explained that letting immediate friends know you're going on vacation is fine, but it's not fine when sharing that information with an entire network of "friends" on social media sites. "Sharing too much information with someone who is a relative stranger turns that stranger into someone who seems like a friend," he said. If an 11-year-old shares too much information, where they live, what the dog's name is, then anyone on the Internet can act like they're really close friends. The "friend" who presents himself to be a young teen might actually be a 31-year-old predator. "It's very easy to develop an idea of exactly what a kid is into," Walz said. "From my days as a district attorney, I can tell you that those are the keys to making someone who is a stranger seem like a friend."

He also advises people to check the location settings on their camera phones. Having people know that a photo is from a coffee shop or arcade is one thing, but it's quite another to have a location tag on photos taken at home. He said GPS programs are too highly detailed, making it easy for strangers to find out exactly where a person lives.

He also cautioned about kids "chatting" online with strangers. That's a danger area, he said. Walz also doesn't like the idea youngsters' including their cellphone numbers in their online profiles because it opens up the door for texting that parents don't know about.

Walz said parents should work with their kids to prevent negative interactions, but also to work with them to develop positive ones. If a youngster has a specific talent, such as music or painting, then sharing that talent and enthusiasm with like-minded people online is positive and should be encouraged, but the kids should be careful when it comes to personal information.

Walz also went into legal definitions of bullying and sexual predatory behavior. Basic takeaways from teh presentation were:
• Never give out personal information
• Think about the impact of what's being posted
• Create secure passwords and keep passwords private
• Do not reply to people you do not know
• Avoid unfamiliar websites including pop-ups or ads
• Never open a message from someone you don't know
• Report suspicious or inappropriate behavior
• Parents, use privacy settings in apps and on websites
Walz also recommends that parents read the FBI's A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety at

https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide/parent-guide and Cyber-Safety at
http://ikeepsafe.org/educators_old/more/c3-matrix/cyber-safety/

About Rich Schwartzman
Rich Schwartzman has been reporting on events in the greater Chadds Ford area since September 2001 when he became the founding editor of The Chadds Ford Post. In April 2009 he became managing editor of ChaddsFordLive. He is also an award-winning photographer.