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EPISODE NAME: Sexting, Cyber-bullying and Hacking: Internet Safety for Your Children and Family

Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. Today's technologies offer things that were unimaginable even just a few years ago. There is social networks instant uploads mass file sharing and lightning fast Internet search is available at the click of a button. Yes there are many benefits to new technologies and devices but for children and teenagers in particular technology can mean some big trouble. We've seen some examples here in Vermont from teenage sexting cases to cyber bullying and gaming addictions. A new book sheds some light on the most common side and traps confronting children today it offers strategies to parents on how best to discuss the safe and ethical use of technology with their children. The book is entitled cider traps for the young and is written by a former chairman of the Burlington school board who is also an Atty. and computer forensics expert. He is our guess this afternoon I want to welcome Fred lane thanks so much for being here. No shortage of things talk about on this subject. Let's start out with what is a cyber-trap?

Fred.: The basic definition of a cyber-trap is a real world legal issue that kids can get into through the use of electronics.

Judy.: One of the things you make clear in the book is that kids face some serious personal but also legal consequences as a result of their online behavior.

Fred.: That's right. One of the things that I wanted to set out to do with this book is to really educate parents about the different kinds of legal trouble that their kids can get into that they might not be aware of. Everything from hacking cyber bullying up to sexting even child pornography.

Judy.: How can parents best educate themselves about the different cyber traps?
Fred.: Obviously the first thing I would point them to is my book because I think it's a unique look at these kinds of issues. That's the starting point to understand what the legal issues are then I point two people to some of the other resources on the web to educate themselves about technology. About some of the different applications that are out there that might be problematic. That kind of thing.

Judy.: I think most of us had conversations with our kids about staying safe online and some of the personal issues you can run into once you put that information out there it's out there.

Fred.: Right exactly.

Judy.: Which is still hard for many kids to get that connection why is that?

Fred.: I think it the reason it's hard for kids to get that connection. We're both parents we know the grasp of consequences is pretty thin and the teenage years so that's a big piece of it but I think the problem is the addictive quality for kids and it's so compelling that reduces rational thought at some level they just act without necessarily thinking things through. A lot of the things that we talk about in the book can result from a single push of a button. That's bad enough when we're talking about kids as victims which has been the primary focus. So far the idea that people would be attacked stopped or what have you. What I'm hoping to help people understand is that kids can actually be perpetrators as well and then you're starting to get into the prosecution's and civil suits that are quite threatening.

Judy.: Can you give me an example of that?

Fred.: Sure a couple examples. Sexting is the high profile example right now.

Judy.: And for folks who don't know what that is?

Fred.: Very simply it's the use of the cell phone camera to take nude photos of children who are under age and then distribute them. Under both Federal and state law that constitutes child pornography. And there are very strict laws about the production distribution and receiving child pornography. All of which are implicated by this activity. You do see kids being prosecuted around the country for this.

Judy.: Thinking it's just a funny joke to send this stuff around?
Fred.: It's a funny joke or they're in a relationship and they want to perpetuate the relationship or they want to get a relationship or they think the cool kids are doing it. All of the typical teen things that happen. We have to remember that this is a hormone crazed period of their lives so on top of everything else it motivates them to do this. That's one and another set a trap I think people are becoming more aware of is copyright infringement. A lot of parents now are starting to get demand letters from the record and movie industry because their children have been downloading songs movies or what have you. Because the record and movie companies are getting much better tracking the movement of files they can now make specific demand letters to parents. Those are often in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Judy.: And the parents are going to be on the hook for that?

Fred.: Yes because parents are paying for the IP access that allows the downloading to happen so the answer to that is yes.

Judy.: Oh my goodness that spree scary.

Fred.: It is.

Judy.: When you talk about the Sexting I think it's interesting to note that back in our day if you wanted to reach a mass audience at school you have to do that at a school assembly. Who would stand up in front of everybody and say the kinds of things that kids are putting out there on the Internet to all their friends online.

Fred.: The Sexting is a perfect example for starters who's going to walk into a school assembly half on dressed. Even today although was some of the customs today you wonder but in our day no one was going to do that and actually the other mass media you have available to you as to run an underground newspaper which I did that even that has its own issues. You certainly wouldn't publish something like kids are putting online. The standards for children have changed in and talk a lot about that in the book in terms of the Internet what that stunned the kids perceptions. Celebrities when we have people like Vanessa Hudgeons and Miley Cyrus engaging in Sexting that sends a really difficult message and then you have congressmen doing it on top of everything else. So yes I think kids have a lot of influences. Puts a premium on communication between parents and kids and that sad thing is and I know this is difficult for parents because I am one myself but it has to start sooner than we can imagine. The average age of cell phone use is now below 10.
Judy.: That's unbelievable I was going to ask you when should parents start talking to their children?

Fred.: About three years before they think they really need to honestly because the way to look at it is there's tremendous peer pressure for kids this is their social media so we have to respect that. This is how kids communicate by the same time we need to make sure they're doing it safely. With that idea in mind maybe are 10 or 11 year old is going to want a cell phone these are conversations that really should start at six or seven or eight. The decision to buy any technology for kids depends on your assessment of the maturity of the child but also your willingness to talk through what can happen if things go bad.

Judy.: There should the rules connected to activity.

Fred.: That's right. One of the things I think is really useful when we're on the school board we were constantly looking at our acceptable use policy for the school district. That's one of the things I recommend for the home is that parents develop an acceptable use policy for the devices in their home so that everybody knows what the rules are. The kids can say this is important to me this is how I want to use it and the parents can respond and that way you have an agreement amongst everybody. The other thing I like to refer to is good night cell phone. Making sure the cell phone goes to sleep at some time.

Judy.: That is really important because at all hours of the night he you hear the heaping and clicking.

Fred.: Actually pediatricians are starting to report now there are serious issues the sleep deprivation on the part of kids and they really worried about the long-term impact of that. I can think of anything that that's more helpful just from the start and saying at 930-10 o'clock at night it done read a book listen to the radio do something but that's gone the interactivity. Get up to 7:00 AM or six of course of teenagers as nine or 10.

Judy.: How can parents make a hands on inspection of e-mail and text messages and know what their children are really up to because as many rules as there are there ways to get around those rules.

Fred.: I want anyone to think that a mime eve about this as I said I have two teenage boys so I've been through some of this. The cell phones are more difficult because there's no good monitoring tools right now to watch activity so
that does require physical inspection to go through. It's not a perfect system but periodically taking a look and seeing what's going on or asking your child what apps have you installed. How do you use that kind of thing. There a more software tools for personal computers in terms of monitoring web activity monitoring emails in that kind of thing. Again a lot of that depends on the parents assessment of how the communications going because if you're able to have conversations with the child and feel like they're truthful and actually getting you the information you need you might not have to do this but if you have concerns you should think about doing it. The other piece I would add is that I cannot stress enough the importance of networking with friend's parents teachers and school administrators to really create a backdrop of support for your efforts to keep your child safe.

Judy.: Is it a good idea for kids to know that this is going on?

Fred.: Absolutely I think they should be partners in this and I think if you can communicate with children about why this is important at an age appropriate level offering them examples of other kids who run into trouble I think you can really help educate them about being safe in the long term because remember this is an educational process. We're not trying to limit and destroy their social lives although that's what they'll say what we're really trying to do is educate them to have a safe and productive life and they'll be dealing with these electronic issues throughout their entire lifetimes so if we're teaching children at 12 and 13 not to put a stupid picture online of themselves half-dressed or something like that we're teaching the 22 year old not to do that that they will be eventually.

Judy.: Also who knows what technology will be coming down the pike.

Fred.: Absolutely. A lot of parents come up to me what I'm doing my lectures and they're worried about that about how technology changes. It's like I have a fulltime job I don't really have time. I think the bottom line here is what we're talking about is not all that much more complicated than the golden rule. Teaching kids how to treat others the way they would want to be treated and really to be cyber ethical people. I don't think that's a technology issue that the behavior issue.

Judy.: I've always said that about e-mail which is one thing I don't like. People say things in emails that they would never say your face. They will zip something off press send that they would never call you up and say those things.
Fred.: It puts me squarely in the old foe be category that I still use business letters structure for my emails with very few exceptions. Because it's a representation of who you are of how you trying to percent are self and that as much as anything else is the challenge of teaching kids. What they don't realize is that because of search engines technology is effectively creating a personal brand for each of us. Much in the same way there's an apple logo or Dulche Gabano or whatever. When people search for them they're going to see all of these aspects of their lives and how they put themselves out in the world is going to have a lot of impact on what their prospects are.

Judy.: Why don't kids still get that?

Fred.: Because their kids and that's a whole different book it really is. That's a Dr. Spock level book and I'm not a psychologist per say but I have some practical experience. The simple answer is that things happen so fast and kids are not reflective. That's the big thing. Kids know technology and they use incredibly well and they're adapted to it. They do not have wisdom and experience so the challenge is to find common ground so that parental experience can be informed by teen technology and vice versa.

Judy.: As a former school board chairman what role do you think schools should play? Is there more emphasis on schools to be doing more to watch kids?

Fred.: I don't want to say schools should be doing more in a sense that they're not doing enough per say because they do a huge amount. I have amazing admiration.

Judy.: It's a lot a responsibility.

Fred.: It really is. The point of cyber traps is that it's primarily parental responsibility. These are our kids they're the ones who need to be safe. But I really firmly believe that schools can be affective partners for parents. In particular I'd love to see more cyber ethical training in the curriculum all together from kindergarten on up because it's part of raising 21st century citizens.

Judy.: Are there schools considering doing that do you think?

Fred.: Absolutely. A number of schools in Vermont are considering doing that. I've had some conversation with former colleagues in Burlington. I know that CVU has done some of this and there are a couple of others. I think there's an awareness that the world that kids are growing up in is far more global and far
more technologically connected than anything you and I experienced and we do need to prepare our kids for that.

Judy.: How about legislative leaders? Are states doing things?

Fred.: Yes states are active in two different areas. You may remember that Vermont changed its child pornography laws about two years ago to incorporate what's being referred to as of Romeo and Juliet exception for teens who staff photos of each other that are half dressed and send them back and forth. The point is that you don't necessarily want to apply a law that was written for adults preying on children two a situation where you have two kids involved. Because they could wind up in the sex offender registry they can go to prison it's really heavy handed so I admire the fact that the Vermont legislature he provided for that exception. Florida has followed suit New Jersey. Another area legislatures are going in the opposite direction though is cyber bullying and cyber harassment. Because there have been a number of high profile suicides around the country legislatures have responded by trying to strengthen the penalties and actually give schools more responsibility to step in and deal with things. That's another area where parents need to be aware of.

Judy.: Excellent Fred of course has a web site. If you'd like to learn more about his book cyber traps for the young or you want more information for kids and emerging technologies you can go to the web site on your screen it's Frederick lane.com. Fred thank you so much.

Fred.: Thank you so much I appreciate it.

Judy.: Nice to meet you. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

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