



National Child Abuse Expert Available To Discuss MySpace Agreement Designed To Protect Children

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DURHAM, N.H. – David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, is available to discuss new policies adopted by MySpace designed to protect children from Internet predators.

Finkelhor can be reached at 207-883-4979 (home) or 603-767-1010 (cell).

On Monday, MySpace reached an agreement with nearly all of the nation's attorneys general to implement changes designed to protect children from Internet predators. Among the changes, MySpace will create an e-mail registry for parents that allows them to restrict their child's access to the site by submitting their child's e-mail addresses to registry. MySpace also plans to investigate better ways to verify ages of subscribers. MySpace has 110 million registered users and is the nation's largest social-networking site.

According to Finkelhor, this is an important agreement for a number of reasons:

"A majority of online teens use social networking sites, and the overwhelming number use MySpace, partly because of its openness. Unlike many other current child safety initiatives, such as sex offender residency restrictions, this one is nuanced and complex in its approach -- for example, thinking about the different needs and risks for different aged youth."

"However, some very important caveats exist. The parties have not solved some of the most important problems, such as how to verify the ages of participants. The technology and social networking environment is changing so fast, much of this initiative could be obsolete in a year or two."

"The attorneys general should be congratulated for showing what can be done. But ultimately, this is not the best arrangement for 'watchdogging' the safety of kids online. We need more agencies with a national scope, both in the federal government, equivalent to the Federal Trade Commission, and in the private sector, equivalent to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, with the resources and leverage to be doing this study and negotiation on an ongoing basis."

Links of Interest

One in 25 Online Youth Asked To Send Sexual Pictures of Themselves
http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2007/july/lw17youth.cfm

Survey Identifies Teen Online Behaviors Associated With Online Interpersonal Victimization
http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2007/feb/lw07teen.cfm

