



Online suicide “clubs” and chat rooms have sprung up in Japan

Special Interest Articles

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“It shouldn't be too much of a surprise that the Internet has evolved into a force strong enough to reflect the greatest hopes and fears of those who use it. After all, it was designed to withstand nuclear war, not just the puny huffs and puffs of politicians and religious fanatics.”

--Denise Caruso

What You Can Do about Online Suicide Pacts

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youths 10 to 24 years old according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC). A number of factors contribute to this startling figure: the onset of puberty, which can bring a host of psychological disorders, increased substance abuse, a growing awareness of failure and what it means, and the ability to plan and carry out a suicide attempt. Almost 4000 Americans between the ages of 15 and 24 committed suicide in 2001. It is a very real problem in the U.S.

And now it appears the Internet is being used to coordinate group suicide, including among teens. Japan, which has a devastating suicide rate by American standards (twice the rate), was rocked by the growing trend of online suicide pacts last year. In May a man and two women, apparently complete strangers, poisoned themselves after arranging it online. Two teenage girls executed an online suicide pact by jumping off a five-story building. At least twenty-six Japanese committed Web-icide in the waning months of 2004.

While cultural prohibitions against suicide are stronger in the U.S. than in Japan, recent events suggest that the phenomenon has jumped the Pacific. Newspapers across the country reported on a bizarre mass suicide pact planned for Valentine's Day that involved thirty people. The mastermind, a Colorado man named Gerald Krein, arranged the event through an Internet chat room. Fortunately, a college student solicited by Krein to join in alerted police when he said that one of the attendees would be a mother who planned to kill her five children. Later reports suggest that Krein had tried for years to plot a mass suicide using the Web.

Just how much of a threat online suicide pacts will pose here in the U.S. remains to be seen, but there are steps you can take as a parent to ensure that your child doesn't become a statistic. First and foremost is to watch your child for the



Parent involvement keeps teens from becoming statistics.

red flags associated with suicidal behavior. The following are some of the warning signs (from the American Psychiatric Association website).

- *Depressed mood*
- *Substance abuse*
- *Frequent episodes of running away or being incarcerated*
- *Family loss or instability; significant problems with parents*
- *Expressions of suicidal thoughts, or talk of death or the afterlife during moments of sadness or boredom*
- *Withdrawal from friends and family*
- *Difficulties in dealing with sexual orientation*
- *No longer interested in or enjoying activities that once were pleasurable*
- *Unplanned pregnancy*
- *Impulsive, aggressive behavior; frequent expressions of rage*

If some of these symptoms occur in conjunction with significant changes in your child's Internet use, s/he may be at risk. Significant changes might include being secretive about chat room or instant messaging use, changing typical computer times, and hiding cyber relationships. Should your child exhibit any of the behavioral warning signs along with a drastic change in Internet habits you may want to seek professional guidance.

**By Eric Fairbanks
Editor**

i-SAFE Taps into the X-Block!

i-SAFE America is collaborating with the students of High Tech High School in San Diego, California, to build a better website. The students in High Tech High's X-Block program are working on improving the Kids and Teens [section](#) of www.isafe.org by giving it the necessary pop-culture-idolizing teen influence. The students developed their ideas based on cool websites such as vans.com and mtv.com. The students are also working on the i-SAFE Youth Summit this summer. The event will bring together teens from not only all over the country, but will also digitally link students from all over the world.

By Katie
X-Block Student

Does Your School Have an Acceptable Use Policy?

As schools are increasingly incorporating computers and the Internet into standard classroom instruction, they are having to balance the benefits with the concerns of maintaining a safe, secure, and responsible network. Most schools walk a tightrope where they neither deny technological use nor open it up freely. Educators must deal with the public's concerns, spawned by media reports of abuses, while at the same time introducing important technological and ethical concepts. As a result, many of these schools are investigating and writing Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs).

An AUP is a document outlining the terms and conditions of Internet use. It is designed to inform all interested parties, including students, parents, and teachers, of the acceptable uses, rules regarding use, access privileges, and consequences of abuse. Anyone using the school's computer system should be required to sign one and recognize it as a contract for usage.

A well-written AUP should educate

your students and parents about the kinds of tools they will use on the network and what they can expect from using these tools. In addition it should help define boundaries of behavior for all concerned, and specifying the consequences of violating those boundaries. For example, it should address issues facing networks, such as viruses, inappropriate material, etc. Finally, a good AUP should specify the actions that a system administrator might take to police the network.

Unfortunately, while many schools have an AUP in place, they have not taken into consideration the specifics for their school situation. Nor do they educate users and parents about the AUP. Too often it is a document signed at the beginning of the year and only referred back to when something goes awry. Instead, schools should utilize this important document as an educational tool to foster safe and wise computer usage. For more information on AUPs, please visit our [Educator Resource section](#) at www.isafe.org.

Internet Safety News Hot off the Wire**The Camera Never Blinks**

One of the most chilling images from the classic *2001: A Space Odyssey* was the unblinking red camera eye of the HAL 9000. While your home webcam may not have a psychotic AI attached to the other end, recent efforts by hackers raise the question of who is exactly controlling it. And who is watching.

In January, Spanish authorities arrested a Madrid hacker for creating a Trojan horse virus that could be used to steal personal files from a home computer and record through its microphone and webcam. When he was captured the 37-year-old man was in the act of spying on his victims using their own webcams. The virus propagated through files exchanged over file-sharing networks. Some of more popular anti-virus programs may not be able to detect the W32/Rbot – 32 virus.

While the odds are slim to none that your webcam is a Peeping Tom, it's a good idea to unplug it and your microphone when not in use.

New Device Assesses Age Through Finger
A company has developed a prototype of

a device that would enable a website to verify the age of a user. Using the ultrasound waves, the device assesses the bone density of a finger in the user's hand to determine approximate age. The technology, called Age-Group Recognition, could be used to limit access to chat rooms and adult content.

Study Reveals Students Ignorant About Personal Rights

A recent study of more than 100,000 high school students by the University of Connecticut found that almost half thought the government could restrict indecent material on the Internet. About 75 percent said flag-burning is illegal. Both are not true.

Spammer Sues Spammed

In a bizarre Man-Bites-Dog story, a company said to be responsible for sending bulk spam is suing an Ohio man for reporting them to his Internet Service Provider (ISP). As a result of the complaint, the company lost its ISP contract. It is now suing Jay Stuler for business lost as a result of the disruption.



i-SAFE's Yvonne Pipkin delivered the message of Internet safety to the Lone Star state in February. Here she meets with William Ball, Technology Coordinator for the Calallen School District in Corpus Christi.

News Flash!**Software Enables Parents to Track Child's School Performance On the Internet**

Some schools are adopting software that allows parents to go online and check their child's test scores, attendance, homework, class grades, ongoing GPA, and disciplinary matters on a daily basis.

SchoolNotes.com even offers an automatic e-mail feature that alerts parents to absences and low test scores. That sigh you hear is school kids across the nation raising the white flag.

**We welcome your input!**

If you would like to submit an article for the newsletter or tell us your story, please contact us at:

i-SAFE Times Editor
5963 La Place Court
Suite # 309
Carlsbad, CA 92008
(760) 603-7911
Editor@isafe.org

We're on the Web! See us at:

www.isafe.org

i-SAFE AMERICA

Educator's Corner: Junk E-Mail

Depending on how tight your school's spam filters are set, your inbox might be relatively free of junk e-mail. Lucky you. Spam or junk e-mail accounts for more than half of the e-mail sent worldwide by some estimates. The unsolicited come-ons range from discounts on Viagra to get-rich scams. The most recent fraud uses the tsunami disaster relief as its bait.

What do you do with spam? Ignore it—don't open or respond to it. Can the spam—delete the message. Make sure to make good use of your spam filter, and designate any junk e-mail that does make it through as spam. (Be careful: Sometimes spam filters will discard legitimate e-mails with the bad ones. Check your filter every so often to ensure that all the messages are indeed spam.) If you suspect an e-mail is fraudulent or a scam, use a search engine to verify its authenticity on one of the many anti-"phishing" or Internet scam websites. Common sense is the best defense.

i-SAFE Resources

Educators! If you are interested in bringing the i-SAFE Curriculum to your school, contact us at education@isafe.org or call us at (760) 603-7911.

Parents and Community Leaders! If you are interested in bringing the i-SAFE program to your community, contact us at outreach@isafe.org or call us at (760) 603-7911.

Students! If you are interested in becoming an i-SAFE Student Mentor, contact us at mentors@isafe.org or call us at (760) 603-7911.

Interested in attending an i-SAFE event? Click [here](#) for a full calendar of events coming to a location near you soon!

About Our Organization...

MISSION: i-SAFE is a non-profit foundation whose mission is to educate and empower youth to safely and responsibly take control of their Internet experience.

GOAL: The i-SAFE program provides students with the awareness and knowledge they need in order to recognize and avoid dangerous, destructive, or unlawful online behavior and to respond appropriately.

i-SAFE is dedicated to: 1) implementing a standardized Internet safety education program throughout the nation that provides kids and teens with essential tools to reduce the risk of their being victimized while engaged in activities via the Internet; and 2) launching an Outreach Campaign that empowers students to take control of their online experiences and make educated, informed, and knowledgeable decisions as they actively engage in cyber activities.

A Special Thanks from The i-SAFE Times Staff

Kevin Storr, Editor-in-chief; Eric Fairbanks, Editor; Teri Schroeder, i-SAFE President; Jonathan King, Outreach Director; Lee Taylor, Education Director; Paul Olson, Graphic Design, and contributing writers: Katie, Kristie Lamon.