

# KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARC KLAAS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

## A MESSAGE FROM MARC

**A**s you know, the KlaasKids Foundation, first and foremost, is about preventing child abduction and abuse. In pursuance of this goal, we run a variety of programs, including our KlaasKids Print-A-Thon. But, as we recently found out in Memphis, Tennessee, the Print-A-Thon program can also be a valuable resource in the recovery of missing children.

This amazing story begins like any other KlaasKids Foundation Print-A-Thon. A Memphis car dealer, Bill Heard Chevrolet, booked a Print-A-Thon event through our program coordinator, Mike Berkes. Like all of our sponsors, the dealership was eager to underwrite our efforts in Memphis, so that together we could facilitate a free Child Safety Day event for young children and their families. However, press publicity for the event quickly changed the dynamic and what began as a typical event quickly veered off on a tangent that put the fate of a young child in the balance.

### The Print-A-Thon Program

Since its inception in 1997, the KlaasKids Print-A-Thon program has served more than 250,000 children and their families throughout the United States. Utilizing a state-of-the-art computer system from Sentry Technology, Print-A-Thon provides families with the basic tools required to educate and

protect children from danger.

Its features include digitized fingerprints without ink; digital photographs without film; blank fields for privacy and identifying information; family-friendly safety tips for kids and parents; how to sample your child's DNA at no cost using household items; and a nine-point plan on how to respond to a predatory kidnapping. Since the KlaasKids Foundation does not maintain a database of children's private or identifying information, it cannot be lost, stolen, or misplaced.

Apparently, we are on the right track, because it was one of these elements that proved so crucial during this fateful weekend in Memphis.

The free press typically generated by a Print-A-Thon benefits our sponsors through image enhancement and higher product sales, as well as allowing them to fulfill their social responsibility. However, in Memphis the usual publicity attracted the attention of and proved to have unique relevance for one local parent.

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## A MESSAGE FROM MARC (CONT.)

### A Call for Help

As is his habit, Mike spent much of the day prior to the Print-A-Thon at Bill Heard Chevrolet. Dividing his time between preparations for the upcoming seven-hour child safety marathon and contacting local media, as he had so many times in the past, Mike was not expecting the call from a desperate mother whose young daughter had already been missing for three days.

Mike could sense the fear and hopelessness in the mother's voice when she told him about the mysterious disappearance of her eleven-year-old daughter. He sympathized with her dissatisfaction over the lack of attention that was being paid to the case by local law enforcement, including the FBI.

Although he spoke in soothing tones, he could almost taste the irony of his words. He said that he would help, but he knew that after three days the trail was cold. He said that the KlaasKids Foundation had experience with missing children, but he had none. He tried to calm her down, as his pulse raced and his mind searched desperately for clues and answers.

After securing as much information as he could, Mike set to work. He understood that he was racing the clock, that a determined predator could remove a child from the scene at the rate of one mile per minute, and that if a child were not recovered within 24 hours the chances of a safe and successful recovery diminished significantly.

He contacted local radio and television stations and forcefully requested that all prescheduled interviews about the Print-A-Thon include information about the missing girl. He secured her photograph. He subordinated the Print-A-Thon, prioritized the child, and used the television cameras to implore the citizens of Memphis to help solve the puzzling and troubling mystery.

When he went to bed that night, it was with the knowledge that he had done all that he could for a mother and her child.



*Child Safety Day events like this one led to the recovery of an 11-year-old girl in Memphis, Tennessee.*

### A Dramatic Rescue

Mike awoke from a troubled sleep the next morning with mixed emotions. Although the child was still missing, the Print-A-Thon needed his undivided attention. From the moment the doors opened, Mike focused on the faces of little kids. But, by the time the doors closed nine hours later, the case of the missing eleven-year-old was resolved and she was at home in the arms of her mother.

A young girlfriend of the little girl saw the television report and informed the authorities that the child had been lured from a telephone chatroom into the home of a 23-year-old man. Although not physically harmed, she had been kept in the house and fed only bread and water for three days. It is theorized that the man was trying to break her will and make her submissive so that she could eventually be forced into prostitution.

Again, society had linked together to become an integral part of the solution. Bill Heard Chevrolet

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# AVOIDING PREDATORS ON THE INTERNET

By TeenAngel Susan

In an age of increasingly sophisticated technology, it is extremely difficult for many people, particularly young children, to differentiate reality from a story posted on a computer connected to the Internet. However, many of the same personal safety rules we follow in our everyday lives also hold true for the online world.

Although there will never be a 100% safety guarantee, by following some simple rules your chances of running into a situation that is threatening or makes you uncomfortable online is less likely. Just as it is common sense as well as good advice to avoid talking to random strangers or to volunteer personal information on the street, you should follow the same policy online. Unsavory people commonly known as "lurkers" spend hours upon hours hanging around in chat-

rooms just waiting for someone to prey on. All they need are a few random facts about location or hobbies, and bingo—they know where you live.

Although a lifetime of experience tends to make adults discreet, teens and kids have a harder time understanding why someone who may be hiding or lurking behind their computer screen would want to harm them. This leads to another increasingly disturbing problem: the decision to meet offline.

You never know if you can believe everything you are told when speaking to someone online; in fact, it is a good idea not to take anything too seriously. Before you decide to meet that cute 16-year-old guy you met in an Internet chatroom, remember he might not be cute, he might not be 16, and he might not even be a guy.

This article is not meant to scare children from using the Internet, because it brings us many advantages. It is useful when doing homework, research, and keeping in touch with friends and family. If you act responsibly, keep alert and follow a few simple rules, you will be fine. For parents who have younger children, another option would be to purchase filtering software. Although filtering software is not foolproof, it can help to block unwanted materials. Another good idea is to place the family computer in a common area so that parents can monitor online activities.

For more tips, check out TeenAngels at [www.cyberangels.com](http://www.cyberangels.com). ■

## PROJECT HOPE MEETS IN CAPITAL

The parents of children kidnapped by strangers and family members joined the parents of international abductees and runaways in December for the third annual Team HOPE Compassionate Response training in Washington, D.C. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Team HOPE volunteers assist the parents of current cases by offering advice and support through the social, psychological, and emotional obstacles presented when children mysteriously disappear.

"It helps just to connect with someone who has walked in your shoes," said volunteer Marc Klaas.

CBS news magazine *48 Hours* videotaped portions of the Team HOPE training as part of a profile on volunteer Paul Marinkovich, whose son was recovered after an international kidnapping. ■

## MARC: CHILD RESCUED

(cont. from page 2)

provided the opportunity, the media provided the coverage, but the big winners that day were the 950 children and their families who left the Print-A-Thon with the tools of safety, knowledge, and empowerment.

When Mike left Memphis two days later, it was with a sense of accomplishment. The memory of hundreds of fingerprinted and photographed children certainly brought a smile to his face, and he appreciated the acknowledgment of the staff at the Bill Heard Chevrolet dealership.

But the greatest accomplishment resulted from the crossing of

divergent paths. The knowledge that a certain eleven-year-old girl was again sleeping soundly in her own bed ennobled and empowered Mike Berkes to exit Memphis floating on clouds.

The little girl's mother sent the following letter to the KlaasKids Foundation:

"Thank you so much for your help and advice. God must have sent you to Memphis when I needed your help. Keep doing what you do to help the kids. If you just save one, it is all worth it. God bless you all.

Signed,  
A mother who got her child back."

To find the dates of upcoming Child Safety Events near you, check out our website at [www.klaaskids.org](http://www.klaaskids.org). ■

# PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN IN CYBERSPACE

By Parry Aftab

**W**hile many parents watch reports of pedophiles luring children into offline meetings and believe it would never happen to them or their family, a growing number of them are wrong. It is their children, the sheltered ones, the ones who trust others and believe in love and caring, that are targeted and caught in the predator's net.

Below, I've written a few examples of dialogue to show how these predators work. It's up to you to teach your children how to avoid becoming a victim. In November 2000's *Teen People Magazine*, a great article showed the difference between what the predators claimed they were and who they really were. Pick up a copy of this, too, and read that article with your children. Teach them how to protect themselves. Teach them about stranger-danger online. And make sure you let them know they can always come to you when things go wrong.

## A Sample Chatroom Pickup

Here's a mock chatroom discussion that my law enforcement friends and I agree is pretty realistic, called a "bait and switch." Imagine a predatorial pedophile sitting

*It's up to you to teach your children how to avoid becoming a victim.*

*Teach them about stranger-danger online.*

*And make sure they know they can always come to you.*

Every time I need something, she says the same thing: "We can't afford it." When my parents were together, I could buy things. Now I can't.

**Predator:** Me too. I hate that!

**Child:** I waited for six months for the new computer game to come out. My mom promised to buy it for me when it came out. She promised! Now it's out. Can I buy it? Nope.

and taking notes on this child, and using this information to lure them later. Would your child fall for this? Most, unfortunately, would.

**Child:** I hate my mom! I know it's her fault that my parents are getting divorced.

**Predator:** I know. My parents are getting divorced, too.

**Child:** We never have money anymore, either.

"We don't have enough money!" I hate my mom!

**Predator:** Oh! I'm so sorry! I got it! I have this really cool uncle who buys me things all the time. He's really rich.

**Child:** You're sooooo lucky. I wish I had a rich and cool uncle.

**Predator:** Hey! I got an idea! I'll ask my uncle if he'll buy you one too....I told you he's really cool. I bet he'd say yes.

**Child:** Really!? Thanks!!

**Predator:** BRB [cybertalk for "be right back"] . . . I'll go and call him.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Predator:** Guess what? He said okay. He's gonna buy you the game!

**Child:** Wow, really? Thanks. I can't believe it!!!

**Predator:** Where do you live?

**Child:** I live in NJ. What about you?

**Predator:** I live in New York. So does my uncle. New Jersey isn't far.

**Child:** Great!

**Predator:** Is there a mall near you? We can meet there.

**Child:** Okay. I live near the GSP Mall.

**Predator:** I've heard of that. No prob. What about Saturday?

**Child:** Cool.

**Predator:** We can go to McDonald's too if you want. We'll meet you there at noon.

**Child:** Okay. Where?

**Predator:** In front of the computer game store. Oh! My uncle's name is George. He's really cool.

**Child:** Great . . . thanks, I really appreciate it. You're so lucky to have a rich and cool uncle.

## What Happens Next

Saturday arrives, and the child goes to the mall and meets an adult outside the computer game store. He identifies himself as "Uncle George" and explains that his nephew is already at the McDonald's waiting for them. The child is uncomfortable, but the uncle walks into the store and buys the \$100 game. He comes out and hands it to the child, who is immediately neutralized and delighted.

Stranger-danger warnings are not applicable in this situation. This isn't a stranger—he's "Uncle George," and if any proof was needed, the computer game is it. He gets

into Uncle George's car without hesitation to meet his friend at McDonald's. The rest is reported on the six o'clock news.

It's disgusting. It makes us sick to our stomachs, but it happens. Not very often, but often enough that you need to be forewarned. Even once is too much if it's your child. Knowing how they operate and the tricks of the trade will help you teach your child how to avoid being victimized. Several hundred cyber-predators are caught and arrested each year.

### How Predators Operate Online

Each case differs, but pedophiles tend to use the same general tactics. Aside from the "bait and switch" scam discussed above, they often attempt to seduce a child. They want the child to "want" them.

They begin by striking up a conversation with the child, trying to create a relationship of trust and friendship. They often masquerade as another child or teenager, typically of the opposite sex, unless the child has indicated homosexual interests. (The child may or may not know the "seducer's" real age by the time they meet face-to-face.) Phone calls usually start at this point. Sometimes gifts are sent to the child as well, which may include a Polaroid camera and film.

Once they have broken down barriers of caution, they begin introducing sexual topics gradually, often with the use of child pornography to give the child the impression that other children are regularly involved in sexual activities. Then they begin to approach the child's own sexuality and curiosity, by asking questions and giving them "assignments," like wearing special underwear, sending sexually suggestive photos of themselves to the pedophile, or performing certain sexual acts.

These assignments eventually broaden to the exchange of sexually explicit photographs (using the Polaroid) or videos of the child. Finally, the pedophile attempts to arrange a face-to-face meeting. He may also have divulged his true age or an age closer to his actual age at this point.

### Why It Works

All the lectures we have given our children from the time they are very young about not talking to strangers aren't applicable online, where everyone is a stranger. A large

part of the fun online is talking to people you've never met.

In addition, our children's stranger-danger defenses are not triggered when other kids are involved. The warnings apply only to adult strangers, not to other children. If any of us walked up to a child in a playground and tried to strike up a conversation, they would ignore us and probably run away. But if an unknown eleven-year-old came up to another eleven-year-old in the same playground, they'd be playing in ten seconds flat! That's how pedophiles get in under our kids' stranger-danger radar—they pretend to be other kids.

*Our children's stranger-danger defenses are not triggered when other kids are involved. Your warnings apply to adult strangers, not to other children, or those pretending to be children.*

And children often believe what they read and hear. They "know" things about the predator because they believe what he told them. They also believe what they read about him in his "staged" profile, which supports what he told them. So it's not just true, it's confirmed.

There are many stages at which the pedophile can be thwarted by an observant parent. In addition, children with healthy friendships and a strong, open, and trusting relationship with their parents are less likely to fall victim to pedophiles online. Pedophiles typically prey on a child's loneliness. They feed the child's complaints about their home life, creating an "us-versus-them" atmosphere. "Your mom is so mean to you! I don't know why she won't let you \_\_\_\_." (Fill in the blank with whatever we regulate: makeup, malls, concerts, etc.)

This atmosphere does two things: It creates a distance between the child and his or her parents, at the same time bringing the child into a special secret alliance with the pedophile. Remember that boys are almost as often the victims of molestation as girls are. ■

*This article is excerpted with permission from: The Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Children in Cyberspace (McGraw-Hill, 2000, in US, Spanish, UK, and Singapore editions).*

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