

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Internet – an immense, global network that connects computers via telephone lines and/or fiber networks to storehouses of electronic information. With only a computer, a modem, a telephone line and a service provider, people from all over the world can communicate and share information with little more than a few keystrokes.

Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) – electronic networks of computers that are connected by a central computer setup and operated by a system administrator or operator and are distinguishable from the internet by their “dial up” accessibility. BBS users link their individual computers to the central BBS computer by a modem which allows them to post messages, read messages left by others, trade information, or hold direct conversations. Access to a BBS can, and often is, privileged and limited to those users who have access privileges granted by the systems operator.

Commercial Online Service (COS) – examples of COSs are America Online, Prodigy, CompuServe and Microsoft Network, which provide access to their service for a fee. COSs generally offer limited access to the internet as part of their total service package.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) – These services offer direct, full access to the internet at a flat, monthly rate and often provide electronic mail service for their customers. ISPs often provide space on their servers for their customers to maintain World Wide Web (WWW) sites. Not all ISPs are commercial enterprises. Educational, governmental and nonprofit organizations also provide internet access to their members.

Public Chat Rooms – created, maintained, listed and monitored by the COS and other public domain systems such as Internet Relay Chat. A number of customers can be in the public chat rooms at any given time, which are monitored for illegal activity and even appropriate language by systems operators (SYSOP). Some public chat rooms are monitored more frequently than others, depending on the COS and the type of chat room. Violators can be reported to the administrators of the system (at American Online they are referred to as terms of service (TOS)), which can revoke user privileges. The public chat rooms usually cover a broad range of topics such as entertainment, sports, game rooms, children only, etc.

Electronic Mail (Email) – a function of BBSs, COSs and ISPs which provides for the transmission of messages and files between computers over a communications network similar to mailing a letter via the postal service. Email is stored on a server, where it will remain until the addressee retrieves it. Anonymity can be maintained by the

sender by predetermining what the receiver will see as the “from” address. Another way to conceal one’s identity is to use an “anonymous remailer”, which is a service that allows the user to send an email message repackaged under the remailer’s own header, stripping off the originator’s name completely.

Chat – real-time text conversation between users in a chat room with no expectation of privacy. All chat conversation is accessible by all individuals in the chat room while the conversation is taking place.

Instant Messages (IM) – private, real-time text conversation between two users in a chat room.

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) – real-time text conversation similar to public and/or private chat rooms on COS.

Usenet (Newsgroups) – like a giant, cork bulletin board where users post messages and information. Each posting is like an open letter and is capable of having attachments, such as graphic image files (GIFs). Anyone accessing the newsgroup can read the postings, take copies of posted items, or post responses. Each newsgroup can hold thousands of postings. Currently, there are over 29,000 public newsgroups and that number is growing daily. Newsgroups are both public and/or private. There is no listing of private newsgroups. A user of private newsgroups has to be invited into the newsgroup and be provided with the newsgroup’s address.

Grooming – actions deliberately undertaken with the goal of befriending a child in order to lower a child’s sexual inhibitions or establish an intimate friendship in preparation for the eventual act of sexual intercourse with the child.