Talking to Other Parents about Parental Controls

So you've taken every precaution at your house – you've installed parental controls on all your computers, blocked Internet access on the game systems, and made sure the Pay-per-view on your cable TV is password protected. Everything is as secure as you can make it. Now all you have to worry about is every other house your child might go to…

As we discuss in *Avoiding Sexual Dangers*, it can be a daunting prospect to talk to other parents about precautions they have (or have not) taken in their own home. You may resist having such a discussion because:

You don't want to imply they are a bad parent.

You don't want to imply they have bad kids.

You don't want to come across like a paranoid busybody.

These are all perfectly understandable reasons. However, given the effort you've taken to secure your own home, it makes sense to take steps to protect your child outside the home as well. Here are two different approaches you can take:

Indirect Approach:

With this approach, you simply ask the other parent not to let your child use the Internet while they are there. You can explain that you are worried they might see something inappropriate online, and that you would rather them spend time playing with each other than online. This approach allows you to avoid questioning the parents about whether or not they have parental controls, while gently letting them know you are concerned about online safety. It will probably work best when younger children are involved.

Direct Approach:

With this approach, you ask the parents if they have parental controls in place on their TVs, gaming systems, and computers. If they say no, then you may decide to not let your child go to their home. Or you may want to help the other parent understand why parental controls are important so that the other parent can take action. Here are some points you may wish to make:

- It's very easy to access pornography on the Internet, including hard-core pornography

- Internet pornography is a lot more explicit than anything you or they probably saw when they were younger

- It's normal for kids to be curious about sex, and without parental controls that natural curiosity can lead them to being exposed to very explicit material

- Plenty of kids have accidentally come across pornography on the Internet

- Exposure to pornography can have a strong negative effect on a child's development

In order to minimize the risk of offending the other parent, it may be helpful to explain to the other parent that:

- You did not know about these things yourself until fairly recently and have installed parental controls in your own home

- You routinely ask this of other parents whose home your child plans to visit. This may help them see that you are not singling out them or their child

- You are happy to share with them your own experience in terms of which parental control programs are easiest to use, how to use them, etc.

- If you have a copy of *Avoiding Sexual Dangers*, offer to loan it to them so they can learn more about these issues

If you have younger children, it's not critical that other parents implement parental controls as long as they are willing to prohibit Internet access while you child is there. If you have older children – and especially if your child already has problems with pornography use – you may wish to prohibit them from visiting a particular home if the parents there decline to put controls in place.