

# Commission on Child Online Protection

## Testimony by Monique Nelson Chief Operating Officer, Enough Is Enough

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Enough Is Enough (EIE), headquartered in Santa Ana, California, has been working diligently for several years to help safeguard our most precious and vulnerable resource...our children.

The Internet has exploded on the American scene, changing our way of communicating and providing opportunities to explore vast new worlds of knowledge. Unfortunately, it also has a dark side, which threatens the safety of our children and families.

**Pedophiles call The Internet the "playground of the millenium." In the privacy of their homes they can lure children off the net and into their snare.** At the same time children have easy access to the worst forms of pornography at home, school and in the public library. The May 1999 issue of Time Magazine reports that 42 million children, ages 2-18 are expected to be online within five years. A recent survey reported that the majority of US children over the age of 12 are allowed to surf the Web unsupervised (Apr. 99 Greenfield Online).

*Enough Is Enough believes it is imperative to educate parents, teachers and caregivers how to make the Internet a safe, educational and entertaining environment.* For the last five years we have been dedicated to improving the human condition for all children, by allowing them safe journeys as they discover the future via the Internet. We have a small, but dedicated and motivated staff, and are represented around the country by professionals who donate their time and services. Due to substantial media attention and our status as experts on the issue, EIE enjoys a broad scope of outreach, impacting our nation, our society, our communities and individual lives.

**Enough Is Enough is the only national organization solely dedicated to keeping children safe on the Internet. EIE had the foresight, innovation and creativity to begin educating the public, long before other organizations realized there was a problem. We are one of the leading organizations on the cutting edge of this issue.**

The Board and staff of EIE are passionate about our commitment to the youth of this country. It is our belief that they are our most valuable and precious resource. We look to the future with great anticipation, but we also accept the challenge to make sure this wonderful technology is managed responsibly for the sake of the children.

At Enough Is Enough (EIE) we have for some years promoted a three-part framework for the protection of children online:

- Parents (and other gate-keepers like schools and libraries)
- Technology community
- The legal community

My comments today are directed towards the area of public awareness in each of these categories. Our public awareness programs are not just about teaching safe Internet use, but about keeping a balance between online dangers and promoting solutions. Awareness is about giving the public a choice as to how to protect their own families by making informed decisions. There are still millions of parents who are not aware of the problems online, let alone the solutions. **Enough Is Enough is dedicated to reaching not only the online parent, but also the offline parent.**

## PARENTS

- The starting point must be parents, because parents have the primary responsibility for raising their children, including the area of Internet safety.
- Realistically, most parents are less Internet-savvy than their kids. Therefore, parent education is a priority.
- HOWEVER, the objective of parental education should NOT be an attempt to make parents more Internet-savvy than kids, because:
  - (a) Parents do not need to be experts to safeguard children online.
  - (b) We believe the concept should be: “You don’t have to be a TV repairman to guide your kids on wise TV viewing, and similarly you don’t have to be a hacker to guide your kids on wise Internet use.”
- The objective of parent education should be to raise the consciousness about:
  - a) The existence and extent of the problem
  - b) What parents/caregivers can do about it.
  - c) What supportive organizations/resources are available
- Unfortunately, it is still necessary to communicate the extent of problem. For example, compare:
  - The “Online Victimization” study by David Finkelhor et al for National Center For Missing and Exploited Children:
    - Of the:**
      - 15001500 Internet users aged 10 to 17
      - 19% received sexual approach in the last year
      - 25% had unwanted exposure to nudity or sex
      - 10% (38% Of 25%) had unwanted exposure to hard-core pornography
  - Key point: compare actual experience with whether the parents were aware:
    - 61% didn’t tell parents about encountering unwanted sexual material
    - 75% didn’t tell parents about experiencing sexual approaches
    - Similarly, Yankelovich Partners (September, 1999) found that 62% of parents whose children had accessed objectionable sites were unaware of this.

- Even knowledgeable, on-line parents frequently do not appreciate the reach of hard-core pornography and sexual predators on the Internet. This is not necessarily an indication of lax or negligent parenting. In part, it is simply because today's situation is so far removed from the previous experience of our society (or any other society, for that matter), that the reality can simply defy belief – until people actually see it or experience it for themselves.
  - We at EIE receive numerous “help” e-mails from traumatized parents who thought, “surely the explicit stuff is no worse than Playboy.” They express shock and disbelief as to what either themselves or their children had been exposed to. EIE has designed areas on our website to provide help and support to these parents.
- Secondly, parental education needs to communicate what parents can do – what we call “rules and tools” at Enough Is Enough:
- For example, our “six tips for parents” and “six tips for on-line kids” give safety rules such as: Don't give personal information to strangers on-line; everyone is a stranger on-line; etc., etc
- Our Tools would be to educate about, parental controls, filtered ISPs, etc. – the fact that options exist
- EIE has many educational activities and resources:
- PTA presentations (very well received)
  - “Kids Rule!” mousepad – being distributed to schools and community groups
  - Web site [www.enough.org](http://www.enough.org) – providing “one click away” help for parents.
  - Numerous EIE Resources - distributed to the offline Internet parent as well as the online savvy parents
  - Video in production – to be distributed through various channels to reach parents.
  - Media/public speaking, generally raising awareness of the issue
  - Cyberpartners – Online EIE partners sharing the message of online safety in their sphere of influence.
  - *Kids Online* - the leading book by EIE Advisory Board member, Donna Rice Hughes
- We feel all these efforts are tremendously important! We do recognize, however, that the reach is limited to the parents that already have an interest in technology, or have in some way been affected by online dangers. Therefore they are likely to reach the more proactive parents.
- By comparison, the Internet provides an almost effortless distribution system for pornography into every online household. Other panels have gone through the details (stealth sites; brand names misused in metatags, leading to porn sites that will not let you exit; what you find by simply typing “XXX” into a browser; etc., etc. Ten years ago, or even six years ago, nobody imagined that hard-core pornography - or “chat” with disguised sexual predators – would be so easily encountered on a screen in your own home.

- As a result, educational efforts – ours and everyone else’s – although they are tremendously important, can only ever be a partial solution. That is why it is so important to secure the involvement of parents, community organizations, technology and the legal community.
- Ironically, it is sometimes suggested that child protection online should be left entirely to parents. It is simply unrealistic to believe that parents can do the job alone.
- By way of comparison, look at tobacco and alcohol. Parents have the primary responsibility there too, to teach their children about the dangers of tobacco and alcohol. But no one expects them to do it alone. Parents also have the support of the rest of the community: laws making it illegal for others to provide alcohol or tobacco to their children, and even restrictions on simply advertising such products to minors.
- So when parents are asking for similar help on the Internet (and studies like the Freedom Forum’s *State of the First Amendment* consistently find 75% or more support for some restrictions on Internet pornography) – such help is hardly out of line!

## TECHNOLOGY COMMUNITY

- We have devoted a great deal of effort to assist the technology community with public awareness efforts.
  - a) Long before Netwise or anyone else developed a comparison chart of filtered ISPs and software products, EIE had created it and had posted it on our site.
  - b) We also sent them with every information packet sent to interested persons and still continue to do so.
  - c) Every media interview EIE does promotes technical solutions (however, we have not, and will not endorse one particular product)
- Enough Is Enough is not a Technology Company. Due to limited resources and personnel, we are not able to test every product or service that comes on the market. Over 120 companies who wish us to endorse their products have contacted us. We strongly believe that a 3<sup>rd</sup> party rating is necessary in order to serve parents/caregivers more effectively.

## LEGAL COMMUNITY

- EIE has educated members of Congress and law enforcement and continues to be a bridge builder between these entities, who see us seeking reasonable solutions that protect children and our Constitutional freedoms.
- What can be done without passing more laws? **Simply - enforce the laws we already have!**
- It seemed that every challenger to the CDA or COPA (such as the ACLU) stressed that “we don’t need these laws – obscenity is already illegal, even online.” But the obscenity laws are not being enforced.

- On May 23, 2000, at a hearing of the Telecom Sub-Committee of the House Commerce Committee in D.C., Alan Gershel, Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division at the Department of Justice, was unable to name a single Internet obscenity prosecution in recent years, or who the major online obscenity vendors are. <http://www.techlawjournal.com/crime/20000524.htm>
- The reason for this is very simple – in the last five years, as Internet pornography has grown from nothing to a billion-dollar plus industry, there have been essentially NO prosecutions of Internet obscenity.
- This is the problem in the legal sphere. Regular comments in the pornography industry magazine, “Adult Video News” (AVN), make it very clear that the absence of any obscenity prosecutions has sent a message to the commercial pornographers that it is open season and they can act with impunity.
- If the ACLU is going to keep telling us that we do not need COPA (or CDA before it) because there already are obscenity laws that apply online, then it is time for those obscenity laws to be enforced!

## CONCLUSION

The Internet has much to offer to education, research and as a source of all types of information, and we applaud its presence in schools and libraries. It does, however, have a dark side that must realistically be addressed in public awareness programs, lest schools and libraries become the home of government-funded peep shows for children.