

About Teenangels

by Parry Aftab, their Founder & Chief

The Teenangels were born as a result of a TV special I did in April 1999 with ABC News, in New York. The special was about teen girl safety, & I was asked to be the Internet safety guru for the special. Part of the special involved me speaking to teenage girls at a school in New Jersey.

When the computer connection predictably broke down, the girls just lined up at microphones & fired off questions. That was when I first realized that teenagers were concerned about their younger siblings, cousins, young neighbors, & kids they baby-sit for when it came to online safety. I was also thrilled to be teaching online safety pointers to people who really understood the risks, & how to tell the real dangers from the merely annoying things online.

Five of these girls were selected by their school to work with me in developing the first teenager online safety ambassador program for the **WiredKids** project. The girls range in age from fifteen to seventeen & named themselves Teenangels after a program started by **WiredPatrol**.

Then they began training. Over their summer vacation, giving up hot days at the beach & summer jobs to devote their time to this mission, they worked closely with me to learn about online safety. Sitting in my conference room, they had online safety drilled into them, & gave me the challenge of my career - questioning why things were dangerous, & wanting to know how dangerous they were.

The teens were solution-based & very concerned about making sure that all children have access to the computer. When asked why they are devoting so much volunteer time to this effort, they unanimously respond that it's so parents aren't afraid to allow their children online. One of the Teenangels said that having access to the Internet used to be a benefit, but now if a child doesn't have access, he or she is at a serious disadvantage.

They have met & worked with the **FBI's Innocent Images Unit** operatives, a New Jersey State Police Cybercrime Task Force detective who was instrumental in finding the person charged as the **Melissa virus** creator & the **Net Nanny** creator, Gordon Ross.

They will be training with other key experts in this area, as well, like **Net Nanny's** creator, Gordon Ross, the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children**, US Attorney Lynne Battaglia (District of Maryland), the **Department of Justice**, the **Federal Trade Commission**, the **US Customs Cybersmuggling Unit**, the

New York Attorney General's Office, top local cyberlaw enforcement agents, like Leanne Shirey at the Seattle Police Vice Squad, executives of the **American Library Association**, & B. Keith Fulton, Director of Technology Policy of the **National Urban League**, among others.

Following their initial training they wrote several safety tip lists on their own, one for kids ten & under, one for teens, & one for parents. I would grill them & encourage them to think about things, but the tips were their own. And every time they learned more, the tips were refined.

Finally, the Teenangels had a list of tips that they were happy with, & I agreed. The Teenangels tip lists will become the first of many off-line projects designed to teach parents, teens, & younger children about the benefits & risks of the Internet, & how to manage those risks, & will be printed & distributed to schools & sponsored events, as well as be made available at computer retailers & children's retailers, at no charge.

Their second project will be a video, produced by the FBI at their Quantico television studios, where we will teach other kids & teens about online safety & how to avoid the real dangers (cyberpredators) in cyberspace. They take their show "on the road" by teaching other teenagers how to teach others about online risks. As online safety ambassadors, these girls will help other local school online safety guides build a huge network of cyber-savvy kids who will, in turn, teach others. They will also develop an online program, where children & teenagers who want to join them in the **WiredKids** online safety initiative can take an online safety class right from the site, using streaming video & entertaining media interactions. We'll encourage schools across the country to join forces by developing online safety programs & web sites Like the Energizer Bunny, we hope this program will keep going . . . And going . . . And going!