

Network Notes

Safe Kids, Smart Parents Panel
Wednesday, October 2, 2013
Deerfield Public Library

Panelists:

Marci Landy, Deerfield Police Department
John Fillipi, Assistant Principal, Caruso Middle School and Co-Chair DPS109 Safety Committee
Scott Schwartz, Principal Walden School and Co-Chair DPS109 Safety Committee
Diane Whittaker, DPS109 Psychologist and member of Safety Committee

Questions:

What new safety policies and procedures have been implemented at the schools since Sandy Hook?

After Sandy Hook, and as co-chairs of the DPS109 Safety Committee, John and Scott met with the Deerfield Chief of Police. No major changes were made to current policies and procedures as the ones already in place were determined to be best practices and should continue as such. Specifics could not be divulged as they might help an individual defeat what is in place. Future security enhancements under consideration include a second level of locked doors in order to gain access to school buildings, silent alarms to alert police, and security cameras.

How does the school district and police department work together to focus on student safety?

The school district and police department are in constant communication. The Safety Committee meets on a regular basis, completes exercises, and runs scenarios. There is a comfortable connection between the two institutions and there is no hesitation to ask for advice and support when it is needed.

If there is an incident at school, what is the pick-up procedure? Would the emergency alert system be used? What else should we know?

In a worst-case scenario situation, the police control security once they arrive and would establish any and all procedures moving forward – including pickup procedures. This is a good thing as they are the experts. The emergency alert system could be used so it is very important that families have this information updated on Family Access and the District has stressed this numerous times.

What is important for families to know is that often during lock downs or other less crucial incidents, they are receiving A LOT of misinformation. This can come directly from texted information via students inside the school or other families. Misinformation can cause a lot

of unnecessary stress and concern or make situations seem unsafe when in fact all students are safe and **the situation is** under control. Parents must consider the source of the information they are receiving.

What resources are in place if an incident occurs to manage anxiety amongst children?

There are counselors, social workers, and psychologists in each school within the District and the staff can be moved around as needed if an incident were to occur. Students can be seen individually or in groups and counseling stations can be established as needed. This is done for incidents involving safety but other occurrences as well. A staff member died at a school recently and stations were established at that school.

What procedures do you suggest if your child appears to be missing particularly after school?

Law enforcement can and will get involved at any time in the case of a child and if you are concerned, contact the police immediately. Always feel that you can contact the police department. There are different procedures in place (abduction, the child left, etc.) to help, and they are there to relieve any anxiety you may have. In addition, every school has a phone that will connect to a bus dispatcher if you have concerns regarding your child being on a school bus. The District can usually find a **student's** bus location within 5 minutes if there has been any confusion regarding pickup or going home with friends, etc. Call the school any time as well. They too are there to help.

How can parents and children form positive relationships with law enforcement?

Parents can get fewer traffic violations and look past them when they do – just kidding! Generally, the community and police department have a very good relationship in Deerfield. Additional officers are working in the schools and have always worked with our students in positive ways.

How and when should children/parents make incident reports?

Parents are encouraged to teach their children not only to learn how to call 911 but sometimes or often to call 911 BEFORE they call parents. This gives the police a chance to apprehend a “bad guy” or offender. If parents are called and then police, this opportunity can slip away and did slip away per an incident at the Deerfield Public Library. Parents should not be concerned their children will annoy the police or call in something inappropriate. The dispatcher can sort it out during the call or the officers can after they arrive. Calling police first feels hard to do and that you are letting go of control, but it is important to teach.

What are the top 3 things I can teach my child if a stranger approaches him? At what age is it safe for kids to walk alone? Go to the playground? Be left at home unsupervised? When my child is home alone, should he answer the door or phone?

We often don't like to teach children about strangers because most often when children are abducted, someone they know takes them. The bad guy can be someone you know! So, it's better to teach them to pay attention to their feeling and instincts – the butterflies in their

stomach. When something feels wrong, go with your gut instincts. Children and adults know this and it's the most important thing to listen to when around anyone – known or unknown. As far as the playground or being alone in the house, it truly depends on the nature and maturity level of the particular child and what parents have taught their kids. Does the child know what to do in an emergency? Is the child more anxious and therefore likely to seize up in unexpected situations? Is the child confident about going places alone and being alone? Parents should test their kids with different scenarios and see if they know what to do. This should determine which children go places alone or are in the house unattended. You could have a 15 year old who shouldn't be left home alone and a 9 year old who is more than prepared. It's really not about the age. It's about how they handle themselves.

As far as answering the front door --- NEVER, EVER should children answer the front door if they are home alone in our town. There are gypsies/scam artists out every day! They should also not answer the phone unless the caller ID says it's mom or dad or someone else they have specific permission to talk to.

Isn't there a law regarding the legal age at which children can be left home alone?

There is a law, but it is referring to working parents and daily child care and not parents who need to run out for an hour and leave their kids for a short time every once in a while. The neglect law does cover children 14 and under, but again, it's meant to make sure parents who work full-time get child care and don't neglect their children by leaving them home alone all day, every day. Even if you do work and your children come home and spend 30-60 minutes alone before you are back for the evening, it is not the same. They have been somewhere else and cared for earlier in the day.

Many kids hang out in downtown Deerfield after school and on half days. Are there any incidents there or at Northbrook Court that parents should be aware of? What is the recommended age for allowing your child to do either of these things in groups?

Again, there are no age ranges. It's all about how specific children handle themselves and their maturity levels. They should have phones with them if they are alone, and they should call 911, not mom and dad first, if an incident occurs or they are approached.

The best way to determine if you want your child to hang out at a place at a certain time of day or night is for you yourself to go to that place during that same timeframe and see if you would want your kid to be there **unsupervised**. Check out the environment and decide if your child can handle that environment.

Northbrook Court has criminal activity and kids behaving inappropriately and kids engaged in criminal activity. All have been reported. Again, the best thing to do is check out the environment for yourself and decide if your kid can handle it or if you want them in the environment you are experiencing.

What should children do if approached by an adult asking to join their game at a park or public space?

Tell them to listen to the butterflies in their stomachs. If the situation feels weird and makes them feel uncomfortable, they should say no and get away if need be. If they are

asked to do anything inappropriate (like be in a picture), they should say no, get away, call the police, and then call mom and dad. If a teenager asks your child, it's a bit tougher to judge danger because teens are still considered kids and are part of the same world. You just have to set specific rules with your child on what is ok with you and what is not before he/she heads out to the park. You also have to go over the rules with your child repeatedly.

Is it safer for a child to bike on a busy street in Deerfield or go a back way that is more remote?

There are no unsafe, remote areas in Deerfield. Kids just need to be careful and follow traffic laws on the busy streets. We need to make sure they know the rules of the road when they are on their bikes. Drivers of course need to be cautious as well.

How do you teach little kids (5 year olds) to be alert about strangers without scaring them?

Be very factual and not too negative with them. Strangers might become friends or need help so we don't want to be aggressive with this idea. It's good to role play and run through simple scenarios with your child (what would you do if ...). This provides practice that will lead to good habits and skills.

At what age do you recommend giving a child a phone? Do you see it as a safety tool? Do you recommend monitoring your child via FIND IPHONE or other APP?

Yes, a phone is a safety tool. Young children do not need a Smart Phone. A flip phone is more than enough. Yes, monitor them. That is the reason you are a parent. The key with all technology is to monitor, monitor, and monitor. Monitor it all!

Again, you need to know your child to determine when to give him a phone, but it is best not to provide all privileges all at once. Start with a flip phone and no texting. See if your child is able to follow rules. Once he has proven that he can, then allow texting. Then move into a Smart Phone as he gets older. Take small steps. Let your child show you that he can handle the technology and follow your rules.

What are the school policies about phone use during the school day? On the bus?

When students bring their phones to school, policy dictates that they power them off and keep them in their lockers or school bags during the day. **If allowed by the teacher**, middle school students may take them out and use them for music during gym class. All students can use phones on the school bus as long as they are not using them inappropriately. Any inappropriate usage should be reported and will be handled by either the District or the police department.

What other phone information can you give us?

John does not know a middle school student without a Smart Phone. By 5th grade, almost every student has a phone. The District and police are seeing students as young as 2nd and 3rd grade with Smart Phones and using social media on them. There is a lot of reported technology related misbehavior and use of phones during the day when students should not

have their phones on or with them. Case in point – the misinformation during lockdown situations.

What are the latest alarming trends in cell phone and Internet use amongst kids? Is the school district seeing the same trends?

Kick Messenger, Snap Chat, and Ask.fm. One of the biggest problems is that a lot more sites and apps originate in foreign countries and there isn't anything the police department can do if problems arise. These companies and countries are out of reach and will not help. The best thing parents can do is find out where apps originate before allowing their children to buy them or sign up.

What are your suggestions for parental monitoring of phone/internet?

Check out any apps or sites yourself before you allow your children to use them or buy them– see how others are using them, not how it was intended to be used. Teach your kids responsibility before they start using the technology.

Remember that you own the phone and/or the computer (and today's phones are computers), and you can take them away from your child and monitor it all that you want. It does not belong to your child. You pay for it.

Ask your child to name all his "friends" on a site or page. If he doesn't know who they are, ask that they be deleted. Establish the rules regarding friends and privacy before your child goes online or creates a page. Follow your child on Facebook and/or Instagram.

Use all of the monitoring systems your phone company offers you. You can also buy complete monitoring software, but it is very expensive.

Contact Officer Landy at the Deerfield Police Department if you are interested in a joint effort with the police to help keep parents informed regarding technology and our kids.

What do you think is the social/emotional impact on children of this technology?

They are all competing and desirous of friends and followers, and they don't always see the dangers involved in this. It exposes them to unknown people and opens pathways to cyber bullying. This is more common with girls and is often not reported because the children are afraid their computers will be taken away. They also don't realize they won't be in trouble if someone is bullying them.

Cyber bullying is anonymous and covert. It often involves the manipulation of peer groups, rumors, and people talking behind each other's backs. Fake pages can be created or texts can be shared. A great way to combat cyber bullying is early intervention. When parents and other adults are monitoring their children's technology a lot of this behavior can be prevented. Both the District and police department are available as resources.