

Attorney General Raoul Highlights Safer Internet Day

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CHICAGO –Attorney General Kwame Raoul today recognized 2021 Safer Internet Day by offering advice to help parents and guardians make sure children practice safe online habits, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the amount of time students spend online.

As part of this year’s Safer Internet Day theme, “Together for a Better Internet,” Raoul is urging parents and educators to help children and teens be more aware of their online activity, who they interact with online and what information they share about themselves, including photos and videos. The Illinois Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC) has seen an increase in youths sharing explicit content online, and Raoul is encouraging adults to talk to children and teens about why they should not send, request or share sexually-explicit images or videos. Families and educators can learn more about [safe online habits on Raoul’s website](#).

“The pandemic has increased the amount of time children and teens are spending online, as they rely on technology for school and social interactions. It is important that parents and guardians have ongoing conversations with children that will help them develop responsible online habits,” Raoul said. “Safer Internet Day is a good opportunity to talk to students about the real and serious consequences of posting or sharing explicit images of themselves. I encourage caregivers to visit the Attorney General’s website for information to help youths stay safe online.”

According to the Attorney General, sexting is an issue with elementary and middle school children, as well as teens. Raoul is urging parents and guardians to start talking to children early about the risks of creating and sharing sexually-explicit material – prior to giving children access to technology with a camera. Raoul says caregivers should discuss what they consider to be appropriate pictures and videos for children to produce and share, and clearly explain why it is important that children not send, request or share sexually-explicit images or videos. Conversations should be ongoing throughout a child’s

s development and should include what healthy relationships look like online and offline.

The Attorney General encourages caregivers to support children who have shared an explicit image, and try to learn to whom the image was sent. It may also be helpful to work with a social worker or counselor. Adults should also talk to children who have received a sexually-explicit image to determine whether the sender is someone the child knows. Content that includes child pornography should be reported to law enforcement authorities or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline at cybertipline.com.

Attorney General Raoul encouraged students to ask themselves the following before sharing any photo or video:

- Am I sharing anything that I would not want to be made public?
- Would I want my parents or guardians to see this image or video?
- Do I know the individual with whom I am sharing this video or image offline?
- Do I think they will share the image or video with someone else?
- Will this person continue to talk to me if I don't send them pictures or videos?
- Would this picture or video get me in trouble at home, school or possibly with the police?

Because students are spending more time online for school and social interactions during the pandemic, Raoul also encouraged parents and guardians to take steps to try to reduce children's screen time when possible. Raoul suggests caretakers require youths to disconnect at least an hour before bed by limiting screen access in areas such as bedrooms and bathrooms. Reducing students' screen time before bed can improve sleep quality and academic performance.

Attorney General Raoul's office provides training to students, teachers, parents and law enforcement authorities across the state as part of his work leading the Illinois Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC), which investigates child exploitation crimes and trains local law enforcement agencies statewide to investigate these crimes. The Attorney General's ICAC task force has been involved in more than 1,700 arrests of sexual predators; provided internet safety training and education to more than 950,000 parents, teachers and students; and trained more than 22,000 law enforcement professionals to investigate and prosecute internet crimes.

For more information or to schedule a digital safety presentation for your school or local organization, please visit [Raoul's website](#) or contact the Attorney General's Internet Safety Specialists at e-info@atg.state.il.us.