

Internet Safety for Scouts

Shannon could hear the footsteps behind him as he walked toward home. The thought of being followed made his heart beat faster. "You're being silly," he told himself, "no one is following you." To be safe, he began to walk faster, but the footsteps kept up with his pace. He was afraid to look back and he was glad he was almost home.

Shannon said a quick prayer, "God please get me home safe." He saw the porch light burning and ran the rest of the way to his house. Once inside, he leaned against the door for a moment, relieved to be in the safety of his home. He glanced out the window to see if anyone was there.

The sidewalk was empty. After tossing his books on the sofa, he decided to grab a snack and get on-line.

He logged on under his screen name **BGone21**.

He checked his Buddy List and saw **GoTo123** was on.

He sent him an instant message:

BGone21: Hi I'm glad you are on! I thought someone was following me home today. It was really weird!

GoTo123: LOL You watch too much TV. Why would someone be following you? Don't you live in a safe neighborhood?

BGone21: Of course I do. LOL I guess it was my imagination cuz' I didn't see anybody when I looked out.

GoTo123: Unless you gave your name out on-line. You haven't done that have you?

BGone21: Of course not. I'm not stupid you know.

GoTo123: Did you have a football game after school today?

BGone21: Yes and we won!!

GoTo123: That's great! Who did you play?

BGone21: We played the Hornets. LOL. Their uniforms are so gross! They look like bees. LOL

GoTo123: What is your team called?

BGone21: We are the Beach Park Eagles. We have Eagle Claws on our uniforms. They are really kewl.

GoTo123: Did you quarterback?

BGone21: No I play Running Back. I got to go. My homework has to be done before my parents get home. I don't want them mad at me. Bye!

GoTo123: Catch you later. Bye

Meanwhile...

GoTo123 went to the member menu and began to search for his profile. When it came up, he highlighted it and printed it out. He took out a pen and began to write down what he knew about BGone so far.

His name: Shannon

Birthday: Jan. 3, 1990

Age:13

State where he lives: Illinois

Hobbies: football, video games, skateboarding and going to the mall.

Besides this information, he knew he lived in Beach Park because he had just told him. He knew he stayed by himself until 6:30 p.m. every afternoon until his parents came home from work. He knew he played football on Thursday afternoons on the school team, and the team was named the Beach Park Eagles. His favorite number 21 was printed on his jersey. He knew he was in the eighth grade at the Beach Park Middle School. He had told him all this in the conversations they had on-line. He had enough information to find him now.

Shannon didn't tell his parents about the incident on the way home from the football field that day. He didn't want them to make a scene and stop him from walking home from the football games. Parents were always overreacting and his were the worst. It made him wish he was not an only child. Maybe if he had brothers and sisters, her parents wouldn't be so overprotective.

By Thursday, Shannon had forgotten about the footsteps following him. His game was in full swing when suddenly he felt someone staring at him. It was then that the memory came back. He glanced up from his running back position to see a man watching him closely. He was leaning against the fence behind the goal post and he smiled when he looked at him. He didn't look scary and he quickly dismissed the fear he had felt.

After the game, he sat on a bleacher while he talked to the coach. He noticed his smile once again as he walked past him. He nodded and he smiled back. He noticed his name on the back of his shirt; he knew he had found him. Quietly, he walked a safe distance behind him. It was only a few blocks to Shannon's home, and once he saw where he lived he quickly returned to the park to get his car. Now he had to wait. He decided to get a bite to eat until the time came to go to Shannon's house. He drove to a fast food restaurant and sat there until time to make his move.

Shannon was in his room later that evening when he heard voices in the living room. "Shannon, come here," his father called. He sounded upset and he couldn't imagine why. He went into the room to see the man from the football field sitting on the sofa.

"Sit down," his father began. "This man has just told us a most interesting story about you."

Shannon moved cautiously to a chair across from the man. How could he tell his parents anything? He had never seen him before today!

"Do you know who I am, Shannon?" The man asked.

"No," Shannon answered.

"I am a Sheriff's Deputy and your online friend, GoTo123."

Shannon was stunned. "That's impossible! GoTo is a kid my age! He's fourteen and he lives in Michigan!"

The man smiled. "I know I told you all that, but it wasn't true. You see, Shannon, there are people on-line who pretend to be kids; I was one of them.

But, while others do it to find kids and hurt them, I belong to a group of parents who do it to protect kids from predators. I came here to find you to teach you how dangerous it is to give out too much information to people on-line. You told me enough about yourself to make it easy for me to find you. Your name, the school you go to, the name of your football team and the position you play. The number and name on your jersey just made finding you a breeze."

Shannon was stunned. "You mean you don't live in Michigan?"

He laughed. "No, I live in Round Lake. It made you feel safe to think I was so far away, didn't it?"

He nodded.

"I had a friend whose son was like you. Only he wasn't as lucky. The guy found him and murdered him while he was home alone. Kids are taught not to tell anyone when they are alone, yet they do it all the time on-line. The wrong people trick you into giving out information a little here and there on-line. Before you know it, you have told them enough for them to find you without even realizing you have done it. I hope you've learned a lesson from this and won't do it again"

"I won't," Shannon promised solemnly.

"Will you tell others about this so they will be safe too?"

"It's a promise!"

Please pass this message to as many people as you can to teach them not to give any information about themselves. This world we live in today is too dangerous to even give out your age, let alone anything else.

EVEN FORWARD THIS TO PEOPLE WITHOUT KIDS SO THEY CAN SEND IT TO FRIENDS