

PARENTAL TIPS FOR INTERNET FILE-SHARING PROGRAMS
REPS. TOM DAVIS AND HENRY A. WAXMAN
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
March 13, 2003

Popular Internet file-sharing programs like Kazaa, Morpheus, and Grokster make millions of pornographic images and videos available to teenagers at the click of a mouse. Here are some guidelines to help concerned parents address this serious problem:

- **Recognize the Danger.** Two of every five children between the ages of 12 and 18 have used file-sharing programs to download music, but their parents may not realize that these programs also operate like a vast free library of digital pornography. One way to learn more -- and to open a dialogue -- is to ask your child what he or she knows about the programs and whether he or she has encountered pornographic content.
- **Communicate.** Research indicates that children who discuss issues with their parents are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Look for opportunities raised in the news media, movies, or school events to discuss Internet use and file-sharing programs.
- **Reduce Opportunities for Misuse.** Consider strategies such as locating the computer in a common area and having regular shared Internet sessions. Many teenagers will understand that reasonable parental oversight helps reduce the temptation to use the computer to explore inappropriate content.
- **Don't Rely Too Much on Parental Filters.** There is no fool-proof technological "fix" to the parental issues raised by the Internet. In fact, the current versions of many of the most popular filters don't filter pornography on file-sharing programs. While some programs do allow parents to block file sharing altogether, these options generally are not automatic. Parents wishing to use these products should be sure they are properly configured.
- **Recognize Early Signs of Trouble.** If parents are concerned about their children's use of the Internet, they should immediately increase supervision and, if necessary, seek assistance from professionals.

For more information, here are some web sites that may be of help: SafeKids.com (<http://www.safekids.com>); GetNetWise (www.getnetwise.org); NetSmartz (www.netsmartz.org).