

Parents get schooled in social media dangers

By Kathryn Reed

How well do you know your friends?

That was the overriding question this week as FBI Special Agent Scott Schofield spent two days at South Tahoe Middle School talking to students, faculty and parents about the dangers lurking on the Internet.

It's not just Facebook that is a problem. In fact, that is less worrisome these days for kids because they are tuning out as more of their parents are logging in. It's Instagram, which Facebook owns, SnapChat, the app Kick and gaming consoles that are attracting younger people. (Gaming consoles allow for chatting and interactions with strangers.) Then there's always the next unknown social media platform that is on the horizon to be worried about.

Schofield said the basic questions to ask are:

- What information am I giving away about myself and others?
- Who am I giving it to?
- Is that a good idea?

Adults should be asking the same questions, he said. Schofield is with the Child Exploitation Task Force out of the Sacramento office, of which South Lake Tahoe is a part.

He pointed out there are 138 million fake Facebook accounts. He has one where he is a teenage girl. He's never "friended" someone, but has 200 friends. They have sought him out because of things he's posted as his alter ego.

Schofield then proved how easy it is to get tons of personal information about people and then use it to become their "friend", stalk them or steal their identity. The worst cases are when people meet a "friend" in person and it either ends in abuse or a fatality.

And while SnapChat's claim to fame is not to record photos or videos, nothing is ever truly deleted. Plus, if someone takes a screenshot, well, it's in the universe presumably forever.

This can backfire when it comes time to apply for college or a job. Google searches are the norm these days. What is posted at age 13 can be a black mark at 18.

"I learned I have a whole lot to learn and I can't afford not to," Sylvia Kaufman told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Sept. 24 meeting that was targeted to parents.

She has one child who is a freshman at South Tahoe High School and an adult daughter who has a child of her own. Now she is worried about all the information on Facebook about her grandchild.

Kaufman said it's important to be vigilant even when her son says she doesn't trust him. Her response is that she doesn't trust everyone else on the Internet.

The parent presentation Wednesday evening, which drew more than 100 people, followed the daytime talk by Schofield to educators. That was a bit more graphic in nature.

On Thursday, the sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders heard much of the same, but a greater emphasis was put on cyber bullying. That was barely touched on with the parents. But it is of great concern to Willie Shamas because his son, who is 13 and 160 pounds, is getting harassed by kids because of his size.

"I bet none of them could say what the golden rule is," Shamas

told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I'm trying to teach our son respect."

Respect was something Schofield touched on, especially when it comes to sexting. Boys, he said, need to respect girls more and stop asking for explicit pictures. And girls need to respect themselves enough not to provide them. It is illegal to try to obtain what would be deemed pornographic pictures of someone who is younger than 18 – even by someone in the same age group. Naked photos fall under pornography, especially for those under age.

STMS Principal Beth Delacour is trying to bring programs to her school that will show students and parents the dangers that lurk outside the walls of her campus, but can still penetrate them. Students have access to the Internet in classrooms. And while there are firewalls, she is sure some students could penetrate them. Phones are not allowed during school hours. If students are caught with one, it is confiscated and a parent must come retrieve it. She estimates 70 percent of her students have a cell phone.

"We don't have bad kids, just kids who are learning and making mistakes," Delacour said. Schofield and others are trying to limit the damage of those mistakes.

Delacour told *Lake Tahoe News* the problem this year has been more with parents. They just don't believe their child has done what they are being accused of. That in part is why not only are the students getting in on the education, but parents are, too.