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Cybertraps for the Young

Frederick S. Lane
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This book focuses on a fear so profound that most parents dread to acknowledge it. Thousands of books and articles warn of online predators who victimize children, but the notion that one's own child might become a cyber-bully, hacker, or identity thief remains relatively new terrain. Some children do commit these crimes, however, incurring costly legal representation and even, in some cases, felony convictions and jail time. In an increasingly instantaneous world, childish impetuousness and immaturity can wreak more damage than ever before, especially because it occurs in a virtual universe that seems abstract and devoid of consequences.

Attorney Frederick S. Lane's trenchant sixth book analyzes the myriad new ways that children can become criminals: "You may have purchased a device with the idea that it would help your daughter do X, and now may be startled to learn that within minutes, she's figured how to make it do Y, Z, and occasionally even *a* and *w.*"

The best recourse for concerned parents remains the least technological: good role modeling and frequent "dinner table" discussions about morals, ethics, and the importance of respecting both the law and other people's privacy. However, it is also possible to use phone bills and contact lists to keep tabs on a child's activities, and some parents require their children to "friend" them on all social networks. For those whose children require more draconian measures, sophisticated surveillance software continues to stream into the marketplace.

Honest children are infinitely easier to monitor than those bent on deception. Long unsupervised hours provide determined youngsters with the privacy to transform grudges or criminal impulses into deeds. Tell-tale warning signs include withdrawal, secretiveness, costly new possessions, and inexplicably large sums of cash. Parents must safeguard their financial information rigorously now that bank accounts can be decimated by a child who discovers bank passwords and account numbers.

Cybertraps is organized according to specific misdemeanors and felonies so parents can easily reference concise information about their concerns. Each chapter reviews specific case law and precedents as well as potential legal costs and consequences that a given crime might incur. Although this strategy may become repetitious for a cover-to-cover reader, it simplifies research for those suddenly confronted with a particular problem.

Lane provides an invaluable guide for parents concerned about a set of techno-pitfalls unprecedented in human history. That he does so with wit, candor, and grace is fortunate for all who must confront the twenty-first century dangers waiting to ensnare unmoored children.

ELIZABETH BREAU (September / October 2011)

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